GEORGIAN WOMEN IN GERMANY - EMPOWERMENT THROUGH MIGRATION?

By
Tamta Melashvili

Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Gender Studies

Supervisor: Professor Francisca de Haan
Second Reader: Professor Andrea Peto

Budapest, Hungary
2008

For Khatia

Abstract

The thesis focuses on young Georgian women's migration experience to Germany. Specifically, its aim is to discover whether young Georgian migrant women feel themselves empowered as a result of migration and what they see as the constitutive elements of the empowerment. The study is placed into a theoretical framework of the integrative approach to feminized migration. My research showed that Georgian migrant women's opportunities to have access to a higher western type education in Germany, the possibility to lead an independent life, to have a stable income, to finance their studies and organize their lives were perceived as empowering aspects of migration.

Table of Contents

Introduction

A couple of years ago, for ten months I lived in Germany as an au pair. I migrated there like many other young Georgian women, being a participant in the process I have called *the German pattern of Georgian female migration* in my research. The experience of living in Germany brought something new and valuable for me. It was a feeling of agency and autonomy I did not experience before, in spite of the fact that even in Georgia, unlike my peers, I did not live with my parents and led a more or less financially independent way of life. Due to migration, I noticed this change in myself and wondered whether this was the case with other women as well. When living in Germany, I got to know other young Georgian migrant women. Before my own migration, I also had acquaintances and friends who left for Germany. When we met, during our conversations I always paid attention to how they constructed their self-perceptions of migration, and tried to discover how much they had changed because of it.

Thus, the idea for my research derives from my past experience and the experience of many other young migrant women I know. Due to the fact that many of them, including myself, perceived migration positively, I decided to look at migration from the perspective of empowerment.

During my research I was given the possibility to explore the questions I was always interested in. My aim was to understand if young Georgian migrant women feel empowered as a result of their migration and if so, what they see as the constitutive elements of that empowerment. I was given the possibility to make a research field trip to Germany in order to conduct interviews with young Georgian migrant women. In addition to acquired data for my research, I thought about its theoretical framework. I chose Nana Oishi's integrative approach as the basis because it seems the most applicable one to the patterns of Georgian women's migration to Germany.

The integrative approach consists of multiple levels of analysis such as the state (macro), individual (micro) and society (meso) in both migrant sending and receiving countries. The integrative approach also gives the possibility to explore the reasons, and not only the economic ones, of female migration which over the last decades has become increasingly complex. The trends of modern international female migration I discuss in the first chapter of my thesis. I make an overview of migration policies of Georgia and Germany as those of sending and receiving countries in the same chapter.

The integrative approach to female migration is discussed in the second chapter. Oishi's research about international female flows within Asia showed that women's migration can not be properly explained through conventional theories of migration, that it is not only economic reasons, unequal distribution of international labor or household decisions that make women migrate. Giving the examples of Asian states, the starting point of her theory was that states with the highest number of women migrants are not necessarily low-income or poor.

I present the methodological framework of my research in the third chapter where I also introduce the empirical data which I obtained during my research field trip and describe the research process and my position as a researcher. In the fourth chapter I use the concept of *social legitimacy* introduced by Oishi to understand the set of norms that are conducive to Georgian women's migration. Based on my data I present "solo migration projects" of young Georgian women describing their life histories and the social, economic and cultural contexts they live in. I discuss these from perspectives of the both, Georgian and German societies.

On the micro level I analyze migrant women's self-perceptions of their migration experience in the fifth chapter. Based on the analysis of the interviews with my respondents, I came to the conclusion that the challenges and opportunities they encounter in Germany, give them the possibility to perceive their migration experience as empowering. It is their newly

acquired status, western type higher education, stable income, sense of independence and the ability to plan the future that serve as determinants for young Georgian women's feeling of empowerment.

Chapter 1: General Background

In this chapter I discuss general trends of feminization of migration. (1.1) Further, I analyze domestic work of migrant women as the phenomenon that has mostly contributed to the increasing international flows of women. Then I examine au pair work as a mixture of domestic work and a cultural exchange program through which many young Georgian women migrated to Germany. (1.2.) In the end I give an overview of migration policies of Georgia and Germany as that of the receiving and sending states of young Georgian migrant women. (1.3.-1.4.)

1.1. Feminization of Migration

The contemporary era is widely recognized as the "age of migration". Legacies of colonialism, neo-colonialism, imperialism and uneven development around the globe have laid the structure for contemporary global migration. (Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, 195) Most countries are no longer categorized as destinations, origins or points of transit only, but as a combination of those three. (Oishi 2005, 1)

Over the last decades migration trends have grown increasingly complex and the number of female migrants has also risen. Women migrate not only from less developed countries to the developed world, but among less developed states as well. (Oishi 2005, 2) Women make up an estimated 95 million of the 191 million people living outside their countries of origin and constitute 49.6 per cent of global migratory flows, though the proportion varies significantly by country and could be as high as 70 to 80 per cent in some cases. (UNFPA-IOM Expert Group 2006)

Though female migration still occurs due to family reunification, forced migration or trafficking, today more women than ever migrate independently to meet their own economic

needs. (UNFPA-IOM Expert Group 2006) More and more women are becoming breadwinners, migrating abroad on their own in order to support a family from far away (Oishi 2005, 2) or, as happens mostly with young migrant women, migrate on the basis of "solo migration projects" to fulfill their individual purposes.

Global restructuring of the economy plays a crucial role in changing global migration trends. In the developed world, the combination of women's increased participation in the workforce and the failure to develop family-friendly labor policies and childcare options has led to a strong demand for the labor of migrant women. (Oishi 2005, 3) Besides, the increased number of aging population in the industrialized world also increases the demand for domestic workers. Thus, migrant women typically find themselves in certain employment sectors, having jobs as care givers in the widest sense, such as domestic service, care of the elderly, the sick and children that led to the emergence of global care chain. The global care chain is "a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid or unpaid work of caring" (Yeates 2005, 3)

Migrant women are also in high demand in the global manufacturing sector. In the world of rapid globalization, countries around the world are now competing to provide corporations with the cheapest and most docile workforce. This kind of global competition has also created a large niche for female migrant labor. Many corporations – especially those which can not relocate themselves overseas – have found migrant women to be the most "qualified "workers in this regard. (Oishi 2005, 3)

Women migrants make significant economic contributions through remittances to their countries of origin. Remittances are a source of survival for many people; however, in most cases, they are not the tool to alleviate poverty. (UNFPA-IOM Expert Group 2006) In 2005, migrants are estimated to have sent home more than $233 billion worldwide, of which $167 billion went to developing countries. There are gender differences in remittance patterns.

Overall, men remit more than women do because they earn more, though women tend to remit a larger portion of their earnings. (Yinger 2006)

In the post Cold War era, many of newly emerged post socialist states like many other countries have begun to implement the policy of International Monetary Fund. This kind of policy forces indebted governments to repay their outstanding loans at a high interest rate. At the same time they are obliged to cut social-service budgets, which along with other economic hardships further deteriorates the living conditions of the population. In order to improve living conditions, people are encouraged to migrate. IMF policy has different implications for men and women because they have dissimilar relationships to family maintenance, waged employment, public services and public policy making. (Enloe 1989, 184) The restructuration processes in post socialist states are not gender neutral. The spread of the capitalist system led to an extensive declassification of women who began to find second and third jobs when the first was not sufficient for a secure living any more. Usually it is mostly women who invent all sorts of income-generating projects. (Hess 2005, 232) The socialist gender regime made women responsible for work participation and social reproduction. The capitalist logic of the restructuration processes also has taken the same form of gender regime into account. Highly gendered models of sharing burdens, in turn, resulted in a "feminization" of work and responsibility. Some authors describe this worldwide logic of the effects of economic globalization as a "feminization of survival" (Hess 2005, 232)

1.2. Domestic Work and Au Pair Work

The industrial revolution helped to promote a demand for domestic servants. From then on, domestic work has become an international business. (Enloe 1989, 177) After the collapse of socialism a lot more countries joined the lines of domestic work "suppliers" which

6

already existed on the international market. The new, post Cold War migration movements from Eastern Europe and former Soviet republics, to Western Europe became intensive.

There is an influx of private paid domestic service not only in the developed north but in the newly industrialized and oil rich nations as well. (Ozyegin and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2007, 195) The employers of domestic workers are elite families, the middle class, dual income families, the elderly living on a fixed income and single parents. Domestic service does not operate only on the basis of the market relationship created by "supply and demand" balance. One of its specific aspects is the intimate character of the social sphere where the work is performed. The work is socially constructed as a female gendered area, where a special dependency between employer and employee exists. This kind of relationship is highly personalized and characterized by mutual dependency. These factors contribute to the view that domestic work can not just be analyzed by the global push-pull model according to which demand in one part of the world leads to supply from less developed areas with surplus labor. (Lutz 2007, 2) Migrant domestic work has characteristics distinguishing it from other transnational services because it is performed in the private sphere and migrants have to be able to integrate in the households of their employers.

Household work comprises of a wide range of tasks known as the three Cs: cooking, cleaning, and caring. As far as the domestic work is performed inside the private sphere, those who are accepted in the private sphere are expected to share, respect and honor the values and emotions of the household. (Lutz 2007,50) Lutz argues that domestic work can not be performed as an ordinary job due to the reasons mentioned above that is the nature of its privacy.

The German feminist Marriane Friese argues that the failed re-distribution of reproductive labor between the genders has induced a "new gender arrangement" in which the traditional woman's role still remains in female hands. But these hands are now those of

another woman, of different ethnic and social background. This new arrangement of domestic labor resembles the old one, though the differences nowadays are marked by ethnic rather than class differences. (Lutz 2007,48)

Outsourcing household and care work to another woman follows and perpetuates the logic of traditional gender roles in accordance with institutionalized patterns. Because household work is allocated on one side of the gender dichotomy, traditional gender identities are not questioned and traditional images or self-images of women are maintained by reactivating traditional patterns of care. Thus, the asymmetry between the genders does not disappear by outsourcing the "female work" to migrant women; rather it helps the traditional gender roles to continue existing. (Lutz 2007, 49)

The au-pair system is a special kind of live in arrangement. Like domestic work it is also performed within the private sphere. Some European countries have formalized the agreement on au-pair work as cultural and educational exchange, intended especially for young women who want to learn a foreign language. Au pairs find a position with a western family through an au pair agency. Their duties include helping with childcare and household work, and in exchange they are given accommodation, food and pocket money. Au-pair status is not conceptualized as work status, au pairs work only a certain number of hours a week, and can stay with their host family for maximum one year. (Hrzenjak 2007, 45)

Only young women (in most cases between the ages 17-25) and in rare cases men are eligible to migrate under the au-pair status. Thus, an au pair is a foreign-national domestic assistant working for, and living as part of, a host family. Au pairs are able to attend language courses and have a right to four weeks of paid vacation. In case of having difficulty to adapt to a host family, an au pair is allowed to change the host family up to three times.

For many young women from different states but mostly from Eastern and Central Europe, Balkans and post Soviet states an au-pair job became the first possibility to enter

western European countries such as Germany, France or UK legally, which widely practice the institute of au pairing. Young women use the job as a stepping stone for something better. It gives them possibility to change their position from au pairs to students and gain residence permit as students. (Williams and Gavanas 2007, 19) Thus, au pairing is an assistance in domestic work which gives the possibility to use this kind of a job as the "gate" through which one can successfully change an au-pair status to a higher one and legally reside in a foreign country.

1.3. Georgian Migration Policy

Since the breakdown of the Soviet Union the succeeding political and economic processes activated large-scale migration flows from Georgia. Intensive labor migration has been equally determined by the economic collapse of the country and the newly emerging trends of labor force demand on the international labor market. (IOM Georgia 2003, 6)

Estimates of the number of Georgians who left the country since the 1990s are considered to be approximately 1,5 million. The World Bank's Global Economic Prospects Report states that Georgia is one of the largest emigration countries in the world[*]. (WB GEPR 2006) For Georgian migrants the most popular destination states have been and still are Russia, Germany, France, Greece, Turkey and the US. The "Popularity" of the receiving states largely depends on changes in immigration policies of these countries and the existing networks of Georgian migrants in destination states. (Migration Policy Institute 2005)

The transformation process of Georgia from a command economy to a market economy was accompanied by hardships in all spheres of life. Growing inequality, growing

---

[*] According to the official statistics the current population number is approximately four million.

political insecurity and increasingly flexible labor market as well as massive decline in employment encouraged large scale migration form the state.

As mentioned, unemployment and economic hardship are seen as the main reasons for migration. The number of unemployed Georgians have acceded more than one million people of the population in 1990-2000. (IOM Georgia 2003) Georgians mostly migrate as workforce but the number of Georgians who apply for asylum in different and mostly in EU countries is also high, the reason for migration in such cases is still economic rather than political one. (Migration Information Source, 2005)

While writing about migration policy of Georgia, the problem I encountered derived from the non availability of statistics. Due to this fact I had to find other sources rather than Georgian ones and on their basis make an overview of Georgian migration policy. I understand that due to very limited sources this kind of the state policy analysis cannot be much effective. Besides, the most problematic issue is that Georgia has no legislative basis to provide the regularization of migration processes. (IOM Georgia 2007) Because of the lack of effective control mechanisms to regulate the external flow of the population, undocumented migration and trafficking are further encouraged.

Approximate statistics done on different small-scale surveys made by IOM office in Tbilisi are in most cases completely gender-blind. It is not clear if Georgian migrant women's number exceeds the number of the men. But one can assume the trends. Increasing demand for domestic workers on the European market can shape the pattern of Georgian feminized migration. In Greece for example, according to 2001 data, 5.3% of domestic workers were Georgian women. (Hantzaroula 2007, 61) The outflow of Georgian domestic workers to several states such as Greece, Turkey or Italy is mostly undocumented.

In comparison to the above mentioned states, migration to Germany is more regulated. In the next sub-chapters I discuss Germany as a destination state and its specific attractive migration patterns for young Georgian women.

1.4 German Migration Policy

Germany has been one of the main receiving countries of immigration flows in recent decades. (Prumm and Alscher 2007, 74) It takes the third place within the top ten countries with the largest number of international migrants in the world. (Migration Policy Information Data 2005)

The groundwork of migration processes was the massive recruitment of guest workers (Gastarbeiter) in the 1950s and 1960s. It led to the influx of several millions of foreign workers from the Mediterranean states, Turkey and Yugoslavia. The recruitments were halted in 1973. Even though the guest work program was foreseen to encourage only temporary immigration, many of the foreign workers remained in Germany, especially after the recruitment program was brought to the end. Migration in the following years was characterized mainly by family reunifications. (Prumm and Alscher 2007, 76)

Economic growth during the late 1980s, the short economic boom afterwards, resulting from the unification of eastern and western Germany and emigration incentives in the sending countries led to the recruitment of new foreign workers to Germany. Most of them came from Central and Easters European states. (Weiss 2002, 25) In early 2000 the number of foreigners was already 7,3 million in Germany. According to current data now migrants constitute 8.9% of the German population which is over 82 million inhabitants. (Migration Policy Institute Data 2008)

As Inowlocki and Lutz state, there is very little known about gender dimensions of the recruited Gastarbeiter generation. Gastarbeiter recruitments were dominated by male workers and most women migrated for family reunification. However, the cases of single female migration still occurred. (Inowlocki and Lutz 2000, 306)

Like to many other receiving states, comparatively more women began to migrate to Germany over the last twenty years, during which an extensive market of domestic work has developed. (Lutz 2007, 43) By 2005 the number of female migrants residing in Germany constituted 48% of all international migrants of teh country. (UN World Migrant Stock 2005)

Exact data on the scale and type of the feminized domestic labor market in Germany is not available. Despite the lack of statistical evidence, there is a consensus concerning the trend towards increased employment in this area. Moreover, employees are increasingly from migrant backgrounds. The German migration system does not provide options for the legalization and regularization of irregular migrant workers. There are only two exceptions: care workers for the elderly and au pairs. The care worker recruitments scheme was implemented in 2002 as a legal mechanism – similar to the former guest worker model – for hiring care workers of elderly on a temporary basis (not more than three years) from Eastern European countries. As for au pairs, country origins are not limited. (Hrzenjak 2007, 55)

Germany has partial state subsidy for the child care system. The problem of many German households is the care for children up to three years of age. The reason is that public kindergartens do not provide this service or the number of places in nurseries is limited. Hence, most double-income families in Germany resolve the problem by recruiting au pairs. (Hrzenjak 2007, 56)

The positive migration balance compensates for Germany's low fertility rate and the declining number of births. Had it not been for immigration, specialists argue, Germany's population would already have been in decline since the mid-1970s. The impact of

immigration on the size and structure of the population will only become stronger in the coming decades. (Weiss 2005, 31) As experts state, Germany would need a net immigration of twenty three million people in the first half of the twenty first century in order to stabilize its population size. It is unclear from where to recruit immigrants who would fit western European labor market requirements in such large numbers. At least, for now it is also unclear whether German society will be able and willing to accept immigrants on such a large scale. A legal basis to regulate immigration will certainly not be able completely change this reluctance. But it might serve as a framework for Germany's native population to come to terms with the fact that this country will be in need of immigrants during almost the whole twenty first century. (Weiss 2005, 31)

Since the 1990s German migration policy has been focused mainly on two objectives: maintaining the already long established policy of reducing the inflow of unwanted migration (asylum seekers, refugees and undocumented migrants) while at the same time entering the global competition in attracting highly skilled workers and specialists. While the first objective is also strongly reflected in German migration policy on the EU level, the second remains attached to the nation state, as the German position is to maintain labor migration as a field of exclusively national competence. (Prumm and Alscher 2007, 74)

Thus, discussing the general trends of international feminized migration, domestic work and au-pair work, as well as the migration policies of Georgia and Germany, I provided the general background for my research.

13

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter I provide a brief overview of existing theories about migration and present Oishi's criticism of these theories. (2.1.) Further, I discuss the integrative approach to female migration and explain why I chose it as the basic theoretical framework for my research and as the most applicable one to the patterns of Georgian women's migration to Germany. (2.2.)

2.1. Theories about Migration

For a long time migration theories did not address the gender aspects of international migration, partly because of the assumption that most migrants were men and women were their dependents. (Kofman 2000, 22) In spite of the fact that now more attention is paid to the gender aspects of international and transnational migration, not many attempts are made to theorize international female migration in a comprehensive manner.

Generally, migration has been theorized from different perspectives. The main approaches tried to discover the reasons of migration and the factors influencing it, however most of these theories have been gender blind. In order to discuss classical theories of migration from gendered perspectives, I include Oishi's criticism of these theories in order to point to the "gender gaps" they contain.

Through *neo classical economic theory* the patterns of international migration are explained by economic factors such as labor demand and supply, wage differentials, etc. From this perspective, migration is seen as caused by a combination of push and pull factors. (Lutz 1998, 24) Economic hardship, low wages, unemployment are pushing people in migration while employment, high wages etc. draw them to certain migration destinations. International female migration cannot be explained only by push and pull factors. Oishi proves this by

giving examples of Asian states, where more women emigrate from better-of countries with higher GDP (Philippines, Sri Lanka, Indonesia), than from low income countries like Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. Thus, neo classical economic theory and push and pull factors seem to be more applicable to male migration than to international female flows. (Oishi 2005, 5)

Structuralist theory examines the patterns of migration in relation to the country's position in the international division of labor. International migration is viewed as a form of exploitation of the peripheral nations by the "core" countries in the international system. (Sassen 1988) According to Oishi this approach also does not explain Asian women's migration "puzzle" which means that most women in low–income and middle income developing Asian states are pulled into the middle income countries within the region and not to the developed states. (Oishi 2005, 6)

Household strategy theorists argue that migration decisions are made by households, not by individuals. According to the advocates of this theory people act collectively not only to maximize expected income but also to minimize the risks for the members of the kinship unit. Households control risks to their economic well being by diversifying the allocation of household resources such as family labor. However, the household can not be considered as a satisfactory unit of analysis because it takes many different forms and reflects the whole range of power relationships among the family members as well. (Kofman 2000, 27) For Oishi the household can represent not only a space for collective well being but also a place within which the members' interests may clash. Moreover, different life stages of women are missing from the household strategy approach. Degrees of patriarchy and sexual division of labor within the households are not static; they can change over time along with women's life stages. Oishi argues that her research and also other case studies indicate that young single

15

women tend to migrate for their individual self-fulfillment and independence whereas older and married women in most cases migrate to support their families. (Oishi 2005, 9-10)

Network theory attributes migration process to personal, cultural and other social ties. In migrant sending states information about foreign countries is most effectively transmitted through personal networks of those people who have already migrated. In receiving states immigrant communities often help others to migrate, find a job and adjust to new environments. (Kofman 1998, 29) However, network theory also fails to provide the gendered implication of social networks. Besides, it can only explain how certain migration flows expanded in a certain state but not how they originally started. (Oishi 2005, 8)

Thus, due to the lack of a comprehensive analysis of these conventional theories about female migration, I chose the integrative approach as the most effective and applicable one to make the in-depth analysis of the patterns of Georgian women's migration to Germany.

2.2. Integrative Approach

In her book *Women in Motion; Globalization, State Policies, and Labor Migration in Asia,* Nana Oishi effectively explains the patterns of international female migration. Through the analysis of differential impacts of globalization, state policies, individual autonomy and other social factors, she provides an integrative approach to female migration flows from different countries.

The integrative approach consists of multiple levels such as the state (macro), individual (micro) and society (meso) in both migrant sending and receiving countries. The goal of Oishi's integrative approach is to identify the factors that encourage and discourage female international migration. On the macro level she emphasizes the importance of the state and the major role it plays in determining the patterns of international female migration. Discussing the policies of destination states, Oishi focuses on development processes,

16

demographic changes and socio-cultural factors (including prejudices and stereotypes). She illustrates the differences and similarities of state policies to female migration through which the international gender division of the labor has been structured. Oishi discusses how and why migrant women are "chosen" by destination states. For example, in many countries Filipina domestic workers are preferred to women from other nationalities. According to her, the policy of the receiving state for political and social selection of migrants plays an important role. Political selectivity of migrants reflects political relationship of the countries especially with regard to economic agreements, while social selectivity is based on existing racial and national stereotypes. (Oishi 2005, 55-56)

In her analysis of sending states, Oishi claims that migration policies of these countries bear a gender-specific character; for men they are shaped exclusively by economic considerations, while for women emigration policies reflect a tension between economic interests and social values. Social values with respect to women and migration are only partially related to religion. Oishi discusses Islam as hindrance for female migration from certain Asian states. However, she argues, it is nationalism that works as an important ideology, which places symbolic values on women as bearers of a nation's dignity and the foundation of national identity. (Oishi 2005, 60)

Oishi proposes the concept of social legitimacy to define the embodiment of the norms in a given society, which endorses particular behavioral patterns. For international female migration social legitimacy means a set of the norms that are conducive to female migration. Social legitimacy for women's international flows is deeply rooted in factors such as the historical legacy of women's wage employment, the country's integration into the global economy which results in the feminization of the labor force and women's rural-urban mobility. The historical legacy of women's employment refers to the tradition in which women were engaged in economic activities outside their home. Besides, the degree to which

17

a society accepts and legitimizes international female migration significantly influences the decisions women make. (Oishi 2005, 145)

The author also looks at the factors of female emigration at the individual level – the autonomy of migrant women in their decision making process to migrate. According to her, this autonomy is mediated by cultural values. A large-scale female migration takes place in those countries where women have more autonomy and decision-making power within the households. (Oishi 2005, 105-106)

Oishi briefly deals with the concept of empowerment. In spite of the fact that empowerment is not within the scope of her research, she acknowledges its great importance and the necessity of its in depth examination and analysis. (Oishi 2005, 187) Empowerment is a "broader dimension of migration" – it is important to understand what migration and its consequences mean to women.

International migration of women has often been associated with negative aspects such as abuse and exploitation. Hence, more studies have discussed its disempowering effects. Undocumented migration and trafficking are the main source of women's disempowerment. (Oishi 2005, 187)

Oishi recognizes the need for a careful examination of migrant women's empowerment which is a multi-dimensional and a complex process. (Oishi 2005, 188) She indicates the positive changes migrant women pointed out themselves. Increased self-confidence and independence and greater decision-making power are the factors that enable them to perceive their migration experience positively (Oishi 2005, 191)

Empowerment has subjective dimensions as well as structural ones. The sense of agency is an important part of women's subjective empowerment. Oishi emphasizes the importance of subjective empowerment but at the same time recognizes the urgency of bringing about structural empowerment for migrant women. (Oishi 2005, 191)

In the previous chapter I have already analyzed German and Georgian migration policy as that of the sending and receiving states. Further, in the fourth chapter I apply the concept of social legitimacy to Georgian migrant women's "case" and analyze meso-society and micro levels. The latter is closely interconnected with the issue of Georgian migrant women's empowerment. In my thesis more focus will be put on subjective empowerment of Georgian migrant women. Structural empowerment is also a complex phenomenon and needs careful examination but from different perspective. The scope of my research does not give the possibility to cover this topic.

To conclude, the mechanism of female international migration is extremely complex and requires an integrative approach with multiple levels of analysis.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I present the methodological framework for my research. I introduce empirical data which I obtained during my research field trip. After I formulate the theoretical basis of the methodology, I describe the research process (3.1) and my position as a researcher. (3.2)

3.1 Research Design and Methods

In order to obtain empirical data for my research I arranged a 5-day fieldwork trip to Stuttgart, Germany. I decided to locate my research in Stuttgart because I have personal connections there through which I was able to find my respondents. I conducted 10 interviews with Georgian migrant women. (see appendix 1.) Being a guest of an acquaintance of mine, who at the same time was my main informant, I also had a chance to observe the every-day life of Georgian migrant women. My acquaintance has lived for more than 5 years in Stuttgart and works and studies there. Through her assistance I found four out of the ten respondents. Additionally, I used the so-called snowball method to find more respondents.

Conducting interviews when doing research about migration carries special importance. Personal testimonies of migrants allow a researcher to better understand migration processes and their outcomes. Additionally, interviews can reveal unknown events or unknown aspects of known facts; they give the possibility to explore the lives of non-hegemonic groups. (Denzin 2003, 9) Through describing their experience, previously silenced groups are given a voice.

My research is the first attempt to make "visible" the lives of young Georgian women who migrate to Germany. Interviews conducted with them serve as the possibility to explore their life experiences through both German and Georgian contexts, to find out how women's perceptions of their immigrant experience are shaped and developed in relationship to different economic, cultural or social environments. Thus, the use of interviews, especially in research aimed to identify women's empowerment, seems to be the most effective way to study the issue profoundly.

For the interviews I used semi-structured, open-ended questions (see appendix II). The purpose of this kind of questions is to explore the experience of those who are interviewed and discover how they understand and make meaning of their experience. (Seidman 1998, 17) Through open-ended questions it is also possible to get to know to details of the interviewees' past. Open-ended questions enable participants to reconstruct a significant segment of their past while for the researcher it becomes possible to deeply explore the respondent's views, feelings and perspectives. (Seidman 1998, 69) This type of interviewing technique allowed me to concentrate on the main issues of my research but at the same time gave me the possibility to cover some additional and related topics when they arose during the conversation. Apart from the questions I had prepared for semi-structured interviews which mainly dealt with young Georgian migrant women's experience, the respondents also expressed their readiness to talk about other topics they themselves linked to the answers of my questions during the conversation. The interviewees for example discussed the issues of cultural differences in German and Georgian contexts and talked about stereotypes in both societies. In some cases I also used so called follow up questions – I asked more in order to discover more and clarify concrete examples of the details.

The target group for my research consisted of Georgian migrant women who have lived, worked and studied in Stuttgart more than three years. I took three years as a minimum

21

period for having lived in Germany as criteria to choose my interviewees in order to have a more "experienced" sample group. To be more precise, their first year is usually spent in German families as au pairs. During the second year Georgian women usually attend language courses and/or acquire a student status at a German university. Their second year differs from case to case; it is dependent on their level of German language proficiency.

Based on my selection criteria, which I describe in chapter IV, I chose the respondents of different age and also with different length of time of staying in Germany. I did not conduct interviews with two au pairs and one migrant woman who lives in Germany under asylum status. However, I had informal conversational talks with them about the issues that were related to the topic of my research.

The oldest of the interviewees was 32 and the youngest 22 years old. The maximum length of living Germany was 11 years and the minimum 3 years. This diversification revealed some interesting facts, which I will discuss in the fifth chapter. Out of ten respondents, two women were married, one of them had a child; the others were single.

Six interviews were conducted in the private places of my respondents. One was conducted in my gate-keeper's home and two others at work place of the interviewees. All interviews were conducted in the Georgian language and with nobody's presence except of the interviewer and interviewee. The longest interview lasted 80 minutes and the shortest - 25 minutes. All of them were recorded on mp3 player and later were transcribed and translated by me.

Although my visit to Germany and the interviews with my respondents helped me to observe the daily lives of migrant women and receive information from them, a very short period of field work and almost no possibility of repeated interviews and meetings with my informants set limits to my research. The only person with whom I had repeated interviews

22

and long lasting informal talks was my gate keeper with whom I stayed as a guest during my trip to Stuttgart.

Both interviews taken in the working place (in a pub in both cases) were conducted in the morning hours when there were no clients and my respondents felt free to talk with me. Only one interview was interrupted once for some minutes because the interviewee had to perform her tasks according to her working schedule.

Conducting interviews in different surroundings was determined by the busy schedule of the respondents. I had to adjust to their daily plans because there was no possibility to postpone any of the interviews. I am aware of the impacts these different environments, especially working environment might have had on our conversations, however I should add that in all cases the time and the place of the interviews were chosen by my respondents.

To identify the main patterns of the data: recurring ideas, themes, perspectives and descriptions, the migrant women make of their experiences, I will use narrative analysis. I examine how my interviewees reconstruct the details of their past life, how they construct their present and future and how represent the events that happened in their lives.(Riessman 2000, 9) I put special emphasis on the meaning of the migration experience itself and how this meaning is produced in my respondents' talk. I discuss the associations which women established in regard to their experience and the way they imagined it.

3.2 My position as a researcher

Researches in the social sciences often have autobiographical roots (Seidman 1998, 26) and the connection between the research project and the researcher's self frequently takes the form of „starting with one's own experience." (Reinharz 1992, 259) Feminist researchers use this strategy of "starting from one's own experience" for many purposes. It helps to define the research question, leads the researcher to the sources of useful data, helps to gain the trust

of the respondents and gives the possibility to test the research findings. (Reinharz 1992, 260) As an au pair myself in 2004 in Germany, Baden-Württemberg, I met other Georgian migrant women there and the idea of the whole research, later here, at the Central European University, derived from the experience I had as a migrant. My migration "life history" does not resemble that of my interviewees because I had no intention to study in Germany and live there more than one year. However, we still share certain experiences derived from living far away from home and from gaining the "skills" for an independent life. Thus, having shared a certain "piece" of my interviewees' experience enabled me to better understand the lives of migrant women than an outsider could. Besides, the fact that I am also a Georgian woman, have the same citizenship, class, gender and age, gave me certain privileges as a researcher, especially by making it easier to get frank answers and free spoken histories from them. Due to all these factors I was not perceived as the "other". Thus, all of the factors mentioned above helped me to easily gain rapport and make the relationship of interviewee and interviewer less hierarchical than it could be in other cases.

All of the respondents expressed their willingness to give me the right to use their original names and not invented ones in my thesis. Besides, most of them asked me questions about my research that displayed their strong interest in the topic itself.

Chapter 4: The German Pattern of Georgian Female Migration

In this chapter, I present an empirical description of the migration processes of young women from Georgia to Germany, based on data I acquired through a field trip research in May, 2008. (4.1) Then, I apply the integrative approach to the German pattern of Georgian female migration. In this case my aim will be to understand the reasons other than economic ones which stimulate young Georgian women to migrate. I also analyze "social legitimacy" within the context of Georgian women's migration to Germany and examine how the concepts of "political selectivity" and "social selectivity" work in this case. (4.2)

4.1 "Solo Migration Projects" of Young Georgian Women

The spread of the capitalist system in former socialist countries resulted in extensive declassification and deskilling of women. (Hess 2005, 232). Many women having lost the source of their income began to seek second and third jobs by turning to the informal economy. In this "age of female creativity" women invented all sorts of income generating projects. The young women learned this lesson from their mothers and desired to earn their own money in a good position. Their high school or university degrees were no longer sufficient. However, they recognized that knowledge of the West and western language skills were the key to getting ahead in the westernizing economy. As their family-based social and financial capital was not enough to acquire the necessary education at home or find a job in a highly corrupted country as Georgia, many of them opted for the transnational space and migration. (Hess 2005, 233)

As mentioned in the first chapter, in Georgia, like other post-Soviet states, the transitional period brought social and economic setbacks, the social system has undergone

cuts, the cost of living has risen, and severe economic decline left many people jobless. In Georgia's case political issues like civil war and conflict zones further activated a large-scale migration process from the country. Among the post Soviet states, Georgia became one of the countries having the highest rates of migration. (IOM Georgia 2005) Economic hardship and the lack of opportunities became the main cause for leaving the country. Women and men of different ages, social, class or educational background have become involved in large scale migration movements. One of the most preferable destination places for thousands of young Georgian migrant women became Germany. Their recruitments have been done through Georgian and German au pair agencies and through social networks of au pairs themselves.

The opportunity to leave for Germany as an au pair opened up for Georgian women (generally 18-24 years old) in the mid 1990s. From then on, thousands of them have gone through the "German pattern" of migration. This form of migration can be defined as "solo migration project," as Sabine Hess calls it. (Hess 2005, 233) A "Solo migration project" is defined as independent migration, not for the purpose of family reunification or migration for any other reason, but rather for self-fulfillment. Many researches and case studies indicate that young single women tend to migrate for individual reasons and independence, whereas most older and married women migrate to support families. (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003, 10)

Young Georgian women use the possibility of getting an au-pair status to enter Germany and work there legally for one year. Au-pair jobs are seen as a stepping stone to something better; most women use au pairing as a ladder to change their social position by becoming university students and stay in Germany to continue further their education. (Williams and Gavanas 2007, 19) Those who do not manage to acquire a student visa adopt the mobile strategy of commuting back and forth or return back to the home country. In case of Georgian women most of them, however, do acquire a student status. Only a few, and

especially those with poor German language skills who do not manage to get a student visa, migrate further to neighboring countries e.g. to Austria or in Italy.

Most Georgian women at the time of their migration have basic knowledge of German. It is an obligation to present a certificate (Start Deutsch 1) to prove their knowledge of the language to get au pair visa. (Requirements for au pairs - Goethe Institute, Georgia) Out of the ten women I interviewed, seven had the basic level of German language when migrating, while three of them had their major in German studies. Two of these three completed their studies in Georgia and then migrated, while one postponed her education further to migrate to Germany in order "to get to know better the German culture and people and further to extend my skills in the language. An au-pair program gives the best chance to do all these things" (Elene, 23). All three interviewees with a background in German studies said that they chose to study German with the intention further to continue their education there.

All of the ten interviewees stated that the main reason for migration was to get higher education in Germany. Two of them also mentioned economic hardship as a stimulating factor. Seven of the interviewees named the lack of opportunities in Georgia and the difficulty to find an appropriate job there. Three of the interviewees have already had experience of working in Georgia. One worked as a journalist and two worked in an office. The reasons for abandoning their jobs were the low salaries and the lack of opportunities to build a successful career. Out of the ten women, five had higher, two of them incomplete higher and three of them secondary education. Those three migrated at the age of 18 while the others migrated no later than the age 22, indicating that that migration in most cases is determined by very restrictive chances for new graduates to find well-paid jobs in Georgia.

It seems that those who left for Germany more than 5 years ago are less determined to go back to Georgia than those who have lived there for a shorter period of time. Four out of

the ten women I interviewed did not intend to go back to Georgia; three of the interviewees were not sure, while the others expressed their intention to return only after they would have finished their studies. However, to complete education takes more than 5 years. It is not possible to work and study at the same time due to the overladen schedules in both cases. Thus, they are switching back and forth periodically to either working or studying. The German educational system gives them this possibility. By the time of the interviewing, four women were studying while the rest were working to accumulate financial resources to cover their educational fees and living expenses for the next semester. Two of the interviewees will complete their education in the near future; one of these two intends to go back to Georgia. She thinks that she will easily find there a job, appropriate to her educational background because "western diploma and knowledge of foreign languages are the guarantee to find a good job there" (Shorena, 28). The other woman intends to live in the USA with her husband who has US citizenship. Relative "newcomers" (whose duration of stay in Germany is less than four years) are more determined to return to Georgia than those migrants who have lived in Germany more than 4 years. This can be explained by the latter's higher level of integration in German society. During the interviews it became visible that nostalgia has very little place in these women's lives because all of them except one have been in Georgia at least once for their "summer return" vacations. The student visa gives them this possibility freely to cross the borders and travel back and forth.

The Georgian migrant women I interviewed have both blue and white-collar jobs. Almost all of them work or have worked as waitresses, hotel maids, saleswomen, or cleaners. At the time of the interviews, one of the women had office work and appreciated it highly. In spite of the fact that in most cases such kinds of jobs are considered as stepping back from the previous educational background or in some cases even from previous work experience, Georgian women still perceive their current occupations listed above positively. Working and

sometimes working overtime at different places at the same time is the only source for them to fund their education and support their living in Germany.

4.2. Socially and culturally constructed reasons of young Georgian women's migration

In this sub-chapter I deal with the issues concerning socially and culturally constructed reasons of young Georgian women's migration. I introduce the concept of *Social Legitimacy* discussed by Oishi in order to understand the factors other than economic ones which stimulate women's migration. The analysis of Georgian case will be done within the framework of meso-society level of integrative approach.

Social legitimacy often reflects various discourses in society and works as "an endorsement that a society or community attaches to individual's particular behavioral patterns." (Oishi 2005, 145) For international female migration social legitimacy means the set of norms that are conducive to female migration. Social legitimacy for women's international flows has deep roots in different social factors. The degree to which a society accepts and legitimizes international female migration, significantly influences the decisions women make. (Oishi 2005, 145)

On meso-society level different factors create a stimulating environment for young Georgian women to migrate to Germany. As far as their main goal is to acquire higher education, and au-pair work is used as a possibility to enter the country with a legal status, young women's aim to migrate is usually accepted and respected by household members. The knowledge gained in western states is highly appreciated in Georgia. Western university diploma are directly associated with well paid jobs and hence, safe future. After the collapse of state socialism millions of people lost their jobs and from then on, massive unemployment has been one of the main problems of the state and the reason for massive migration. (IOM

Georgia 2007) Accordingly, to have a job in Georgia, apart from having an income for living, means to have a status, authority and respect.

Therefore, because of the "safe future", decisions about migration made independently by young women are accepted, and in some cases, stimulated within the family. This kind of "household behavior" reveals an interesting case of gender based "family politics". In Georgian society young people and even grown-ups are usually controlled by their parents. This kind of strict control over children, especially daughters, partly stems from deeply rooted patriarchal values of Georgian society. Partly, I think that it is the "legacy" of the Soviet educational system which required strict control over the young. Parents of the generations of young migrant women, who were born and raised under the Soviet rule, "maintained" the Soviet methods of raising the children. Besides, Georgian educational system which is still under the process of "westernizing" reforms, after the collapse of the empire for years could not overcome its "Soviet past."

Comparatively new, "transitional" reason to stimulate young women's migration is economic dependence on the parents determined by massive unemployment and lack of opportunities to find a job. I assume that the decision of the household to give consent daughters to go abroad has specific economic, social and even psychological roots. Namely, from economic perspective, migration is associated with earning money independently and in case of need, assisting the family members financially. If one of the household members, in this case daughter or daughters, migrate abroad, it automatically means that parents have to provide only those who are left in the country. Thus, migration of young people serves as a kind of "economic relief "for the household. Besides, migration of daughters is much more stimulated than that of sons. This kind of gender based division is rooted partly in the values of the society itself and partly, in demographic problems of the state. For centuries, sons within the Georgian household have been perceived as the continuers of the offspring and

30

keepers of the family and ancestral values, while daughters were automatically recognized as future wives and mothers of the "other", someone outside of the family. In a country where motherhood is extremely worshiped and woman's primary obligation is considered marriage and maternity, daughters are generally expected to leave the original family for another one. Thus, the household, unconsciously, is already ready for the departure of a daughter. Hence, daughters' leaving is not felt as painfully as that of the sons. Young Georgian men do migrate but in most cases they leave the country to study abroad, are financed by parents and have the strong intention to return in order to keep family and offspring. In spite of the non-availability of statistics, undoubtedly more Georgian women than men within the ages 18-24 migrate. For example, seven out of my ten interviewees declared that their brothers live in Georgia and have no intentions to migrate. Almost all of these brothers are married and have their own families.[*]

Oishi gives special importance to the factors of "political selectivity" and "social selectivity" in international female migration. Political selectivity works at the macro level of immigration policies – it defines how and why migrant women are chosen by destination countries and reveals the factors that determine this kind of decisions by receiving states. "Social selectivity" deals with the choices made by society – particularly by individual employers and recruitment agencies. (Oishi 2005, 21)

How do "political selectivity" and "social selectivity" work in the case of Georgian migrant women? It is predominantly socio cultural stereotypes that shape the demand structure for migrant women of certain nationalities. I argue that a culturally stereotyped and predominantly positive image of Georgian au pair exists in German society. Presumably, the generally positive attitude of German society to Georgia plays a role too. This attitude has

---

[*] Besides, I remember the long queues of women willing, including me, to get au pair visa in German embassy in 2004 Tbilisi, Georgia.

partly been shaped by the phenomenon of the former president of Georgia, Eduard Shevardnadze (1992-2003) who, during the end of his Soviet carrier, was an active participant in the break up of the Berlin Wall. As one German told me in an unofficial conversation, it was through Shevardnadze and Georgian au pairs that German people got to know such a small country as Georgia.

The widely shared positive image of the Georgian au pair entails the following attributes: she is well aware of household chores, has a high sense of responsibility and good skills of cooking and taking care of the children. This kind of positive image of young Georgian women further provides a "demand" for Georgian au pairs on the "German market"[*]

The domestic skills of Georgian au pairs are determined by the fact that most of them are brought up in traditional Georgian families where gender roles are strictly divided. In many families girls from their childhood begin to perform household chores. Besides, some social factors also serve as a reason for "producing" skillful daughters in the domestic sphere. Those born in the early 1980s, when their mothers lived under the "double burden" of the Soviet era, quickly learned to take care of themselves and their siblings during the absence of the mother. For those who were born later, the situation did not change much. In the transitional period in many families mothers became main supporters of the family whereas fathers lost their traditional breadwinner's role. Thus, their absence due to an overloaded working schedule or overwork hours also produced a whole generation of daughters who were the supporters of the mothers and took care of the household.

Another and I would say main factor that plays a great role in the creation of the positive image of the Georgian au pair was very well formulated by one of my respondents.

---

[*] The case of my family can serve as an example. For many years they used to prefer having Georgian au pairs and still recruit them until now.

My Gastmutter (guest mother – mother in the family where au pairs live and work) used to say that she would always have Georgian au pairs. She said that Georgian girls are coming here to get an education and do an "Ausbildung". Others arrive with the plans to get married. She said she never noticed this kind of intension to Georgian girls. She highly appreciated the fact that we want to take root here by means of education and knowledge and not by marriage. (Elene, 23)

Thus, Georgian migrant women's goal to get higher education is appreciated and respected not only by the household of migrant women by also by German families. I know several cases in which guest parents themselves supported au pairs in their educational intentions. They bought language course material for them and in some cases even paid the course fees, though according to the rules of au-pair placement, it in not necessarily the obligation of the guest family to cover the costs for the language school. Besides, Georgian au pairs' free time is mostly dedicated to the preparation of exams for getting a student visa. Thus, in most cases, they spend more time at home than outside which is further perceived as a "good girl" attribute by host families.

Additionally, I want to mention one interesting thing. During the interviews it became clear that, in spite of the integration in German society and the positive image they have, Georgian women still feel themselves to be considered as "others".

Generally, German scientific discourse on immigrant women has a history of constructing "images of the other." From the 1970s onwards, the orientalization of migrant women can be considered as tendency where the debate of foreign women became a debate on Turkish women. (Inowlocki and Lutz 2000, 306). However, I assume that the absence of the Christian-Islamic binary in case of Georgian migrant women[*] in comparison with Turkish female migrants makes them less orientalized. However, the usual visual appearance of Georgians, who, comparing to the native people are "a little bit dark," still serves as a reason

---

[*] Majority of the Georgian population (82%) practices Orthodox Christianity.

for orientalization. As a conclusion of this sub-chapter, I would say that the reasons of female migration, their "origins" from different social, economic or cultural levels and the way they are constructed, once again indicates the very complex nature of women's international flows. Social legitimacy plays its important role in young Georgian women's migration.

Chapter 5: Empowerment through Migration?

In this chapter, after giving a brief overview of the issues of empowerment seen through the lens of migration which has been discussed in academia until now, (5.1) I examine young Georgian migrant women's perception of their migration experience. (5.2) Recognizing the fact that their understanding of life in Germany is mediated by comparisons with their pre-emigrating circumstances, I explain women's perception of the impact of migration within a comparative framework, taking into account economic, social and cultural contexts before and after migration.

The analysis developed in this chapter is based on Georgian migrant women's responses to a variety of open-ended questions about different aspects of their migration experience. On the basis of this analysis I try to answer the main question of my research: Do young Georgian women feel empowered as a result of migration? If so, what do they see as the constitutive elements of that empowerment?

5.1 Theory

As Nana Oishi mentions in the epilogue of her book *Women in Motion: Globalization, State Policies and Labor Migration,* empowerment is "the new dimension" of women's migration that was not much discussed in academia. Until recently international female migration has more often been associated with negative aspects, abuse and exploitation. The types of jobs migrant women usually have are often characterized by low wages and bad working conditions. Consequently, migrant women were portrayed as victims of harsh working conditions and maltreatment. Additionally, undocumented migration and trafficking

contribute to migrant women's disempowerment. (Oishi 2005, 187) Hence, in most cases the emphasis was put on the disempowering aspects of women's migration.

However, in recent years some authors have paid attention to the fact that immigrant women often evaluate their experience positively and report about a sense of empowerment, freedom and self-confidence in a new social and cultural context. (Zentgraf 2002, 625) Kofman also proposes to look at the migratory experience as a process of empowerment in a number of ways because most women are able to work towards improving their situation through migration. (Kofman 2000, 21) The fact that one can look at female migration from both empowering and disempowering perspectives makes the phenomenon very complex and multidimensional.

Before discussing young Georgian women's perceptions of their migration experience within the framework of empowerment, first I give a definition of empowerment itself. According to Pillai, quoted in Oishi's book, empowerment is

> a multidimensional process which should enable individuals or a group of individuals to realize their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consists of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice. (p. 188)

As Oishi argues, according to this definition of empowerment, migration may not be a fully empowering experience for women. On the one hand, while working abroad, migrant women often lack legal protection and control over their working conditions. But on the other hand, their positive evaluation of their migration experience reveals the necessity to look at women's migration from another perspective. At the same time the concept of empowerment itself, due to its complex nature, becomes difficult to articulate.

I use the above mentioned definition of empowerment as the basis to examine Georgian women's migration experiences in order to understand to what extent their perceptions of their experience can be placed within the framework of empowerment. I put emphasis on how women construct and represent the reality of their lives and how they conceptualize their experience based on migration.

Women's subjective empowering experiences such as individual self-assertion or psychological experiences of feeling more self-confident and autonomous as Zentgraf argues – must be analyzed not as an individual isolated process but as a process that takes place in relationship with family, community, and the larger social context. Thus, for migrant women it includes not only new social, cultural, and spatial contexts but also those that shaped their lives before the migration. (Zentgraf 2002, 629)

5.2 Practice

During the interviews I asked all my respondents to describe their lives in Germany. As I discussed in chapter IV, most of them go through the same pattern of migration and hence, their life stories are quite similar to each other. In a foreign country, where family or any other support networks are minimal or absent, Georgian women have to solve their everyday problems by themselves. Under such circumstances they make their own decisions about every single aspect of their lives and then develop a strong sense of a decision making power. The experience of living abroad makes them to practice a variety of new organizational skills which they did not have before. The life abroad also develops administrative and leadership skills in them.

I asked my respondents to describe their lives in Germany and talk about their migration experience. (See appendix II) When answering these questions, almost all of them

mentioned a sense of independence and autonomy they gained through migration. As I have discussed in chapter IV, independence for them firstly is associated with "getting rid" of the financial and psychological dependence from the parents. For almost all of them living apart from the family was their first time experience. Hence, their statements about "being alone" abroad were mostly constructed as "being apart and far away from the household."

> When I came here I was left alone in front of everything. I had to do everything by myself, without anybody's assistance. (Irina, 28)

As another respondent, Elene told me independence for her, besides economic freedom, also means success. Independence brings possibilities for personal development and self-fulfillment.

> Here you live alone, without mother and father. When you clash the problems of every day life, you have to solve them on your own, whereas in Georgia there is always someone, parents, friends or relatives or somebody else who will help you to overcome the problem. But here, you solve your problems on you own and you learn a lot from it. (Elene, 23)

All my interviewees evaluated their current situation positively. Most of them talked about hardships they encountered, especially in the first years of migration. On the basis of their narratives, I assume that these hardships were partly determined by the adaptation period to a new country and society. Partly it was also an adaptation process to a new, much more independent life-style.

As I mentioned in chapter III, I conducted interviews with women of different ages and with different duration of stay in Germany. It was not unexpected that the migrants, who had lived there longer, were much more integrated in German society. Besides, they talked less about problems, seemed more goal oriented and had more clearly defined future plans. Though individual decisions about returning were different from case to case, those who

resided longer in Germany, expressed less willingness to return to Georgia than comparatively "newcomers."

Almost all my respondents shared their future plans with me. They seemed quite confident about them. According to Oishi, it is a sense of agency and autonomy that enables migrant women to define their goals and act upon them (Oishi 2005, 191). And autonomy as Meyers defines it, means to figure out what your personal goals and values are – what really matters to you as an individual. (Meyers 2004, 258)

It was interesting that most of my interviewees represented themselves as self-made women and sincerely expressed their pride because in their achievements. The fact that they themselves independently achieved "all this" on the basis of hard work, made them feel self-confident and proud. For example, during an interview with one of my respondents, I found out how important of this feeling of "doing everything on your own" to young Georgian migrant women is. One of my interviewees (whose name I will not specify here) said that at the age of 29 she had already attained the three main goals in her life. She got a western type higher education, bought a private flat in Georgia and had had a plastic surgery operation of the nose. The last fact was quite striking for me and at the same time very important to reveal one interesting factor. In Georgia, due to the legacy of colonial discourse of beauty standards, a perfect visual appearance for women means blond hair and relatively short nose (features of Russian women). Since 1950s, when nose plastic surgery operation became available in Georgia, many Georgian women have undergone it. Due to the same beauty standards it was and is still a tendency to present an "artificial" nose as a natural one, especially for those people who did not know you before the operation, as was the case with my interviewee to me. I think that if someone else had funded her plastic surgery operation, she would not have acknowledged that she has an "artificial" nose to someone like me, whom she only met once.

39

But the pride that she was able to finance the operation by herself was so strong that she no longer restricted herself from declaring it openly.

Besides, it was clear that the respondents were neither willing nor ready to lose this sense of autonomy and independence they had acquired through migration.

When I get back to Georgia, there I want to do everything on my own like now I am doing it here. (Khatuna, 24)

One of the interview questions dealt with the status of Georgian migrant women. I asked them if they noticed changes in attitudes or relationships with their parents, friends or relatives after their migration. Before presenting my respondents' answers I would present one example of a status change young women experience after their migration.

A couple of years ago I visited Eka, a migrant woman, whom I have known since my childhood. She was doing one of her summer vacations back to Georgia and visited her family. It was she who inspired me to do the research about Georgian migrant women and who later, during the conducting of interviews in Stuttgart, became my gate-keeper. We were talking in the room when her mother and sister-in –law (her brother's wife) interrupted us for a while, asking Eka a question that sounded quite striking to me. They had bought new curtains and wanted to hear Eka's opinion on where to put them. Eka had not lived in that house for years and the house belonged to her brother and his expanded family. In such cases, it is mother or a wife of a man, who arranges such kinds of every day household arrangement details. What impressed me was the fact that in this case Eka's opinion was decisive. Later, when I visited her in Stuttgart, I reminded her of this event, which she herself did not remember. She told me that it is quite usual for her that her family members ask her for her opinion about different things. "They always respected my opinion but now they respect it much more. They know that I have seen much and they appreciate it". Eka's case serves as a

40

good example of, I would say, a higher status Georgian women gain within the household members after their migration. It is not only the household but the circle of friends too "who appreciate and respect you" as another respondent, Shorena told me.

> My Georgian friends have active contacts with me. In their eyes I am a powerful person, they think they can rely on. Everybody needs to have powerful and reliable friends nearby. (Shorena, 28)

As I have mentioned above, the attitude of parents towards "experienced" migrant daughters also changes. In the fourth chapter I discussed the parents' control over children that is a widespread practice in Georgian families. As became clear, after migration this kind of parents' control loosens and even disappears.

> I notice that the attitude of my parents towards me has changed. They always controlled me when I lived in Georgia. When I was going out they always asked me "what time do you come back home?" Now, when I am there, they never ask me such questions. Now they treat me as an adult and not as a kid. This difference in the relationship between my parents and me is very visible. I like to feel that it has changed. (Khatuna, 24)

Khatuna herself mentioned the word status when discussing her current relationship with her parents. She said she was very proud "of her new status". Shorena also declared that:

> "My Wert (status) has increased. When I go back to Georgia for summer returns there are lots of people in airport who gather to meet me.

Women's status further increases when they financially support and make contributions for family members or for friends. Kofman argues that women's ability to earn and send money home significantly increases their social worth in their home settings. (Kofman 2000, 24) Five out of my ten respondents mentioned that they send money home if

41

there is a necessity for this. All of them declared that when doing their summer returns they always bring presents for family members, friends and relatives.

When we discussed the most important and valuable things in their migration experience, all women I interviewed mentioned higher education, as the one they are receiving or have received in Germany. Western type education, as I found out, for Georgian migrant women equals a guarantee to find a well-paid job and ensure the safe future. Marika told me that the sense of strength she feels most probably comes from her "German" education. Eight respondents declared that from the very beginning, when they made decisions to migrate, their first and fore-most intention was to get higher education in Germany. As we have seen they used au pair work as a stepping stone to change their statuses and acquire a student visa. It is also interesting to note that two of my respondents told me that they wanted to study in the UK, but because it was easier to get to Germany as au pairs and then get a student visa there they preferred Germany to be their destination. Thus, the irresistible charm of Germany as a destination country for migration for young Georgian migrant women is determined by the availability to get higher education for comparatively low prices seems to be the most influential one. Apart from giving the possibility to foreigners to get higher education for comparatively low prices than other European states, Germany is a welfare state with a highly developed system of social services and with the availability of jobs. Its relatively geographical closeness can also be considered as an advantage for Georgians. (The Mobile International Student 2007)

The way women constructed Germany as a "dream land" in their narratives was very visible.

When I was 12 years old, on TV I saw a girl who left for Germany as an au pair and then studied there. I remember, I thought then "how happy a person can be to leave for Germany for education". (Shorena, 28)

Thus, I argue that among Georgian migrant women there exists a phenomenon I would call a "Western Dream." The notion of it in their narratives is constructed as a huge range of challenges and possibilities which in the first place are linked with the chance to acquire western type education. "Western Dream" can be reformulated as the belief in individual freedom and independence that allows migrant women to achieve their goals through hard work but solely on the basis of their own abilities.

My respondents also gave special importance to the fact that currently most of them speak fluent German. Besides, out of ten interviewees, two spoke fluent English and one - fluent Spanish, other two spoke English on intermediate level and one of them intended to attend English language courses.

Answering the question how they personally changed as a result of migration, many of my respondents mentioned their "inner growth" and the changes in their "inner self." Most of them also stated that they had discovered characteristics they did not know they had before. As Gvantza told me she became more open to changes and easily adaptable to new circumstances. Elene said that she is now much more rational," dreams less and acts more". "Rationalist behavior in every aspect of life" seemed very important for most of my interviewees.

> I am more rational here; I did not have this kind of rational approach to everything in Georgia. And now I see rationalism as an effective tool to solve the problems and achieve goals. I am very proud that I have developed this kind of rationalistic approach. (Marika, 32)

Natia said she was very contented to find "something new and definitely positive" in her personality.

> I am so independent here, I had never imagined in my life that I would have this kind of feeling of self-sufficiency. Only here I found out that personally I am a strong woman, a very

43

strong one. And I like this feeling very much. Now it is unimaginable for me to sit at home doing nothing and be financially dependent on parents. (Natia, 24)

For most of my respondents their wage labor was the first time experience and it was visible that the earned money further increased their sense of financial independence as well as self esteem as that of financially independent persons. Out of the ten interviewees only three used to work in Georgia before migration. All of those three expressed their disappointment with their former jobs stating that either they had low wages or little chance for the full realization of their abilities. My interviewees often mentioned the words "full realization" or "self-realization" in both German and Georgian contexts. They said that in Germany they faced new challenges and opportunities in almost every sphere of life. These opportunities were restricted or not available at all in Georgia. These restrictions they talked about are linked with the non availability of jobs and almost no accessibility to experience independent life-style due to economic dependency on parents.

Some respondents also underlined the organizational skills they have developed while living in Germany.

You cannot be inert or spontaneous here. You have to plan every day in advance. In Georgia I could spend the whole day just doing nothing, only hanging out with my friends but here, I just can not afford it. The day when I am doing nothing is now useless and lost for me. (Gvantza, 24)

Gvantza seemed to be very confident and content of her new lifestyle too. She said she would maintain the same lifestyle in Georgia, be goal oriented and plan everything in advance. Khatuna also mentioned the importance of new organizational skills she had acquired.

44

What I learned here is time management. Now I know how to distribute my time and energy to get best results.

Although during the interviews or conversations I never mentioned the word "empowerment" itself, some of my respondents definitely stated that they have a feeling of self-empowerment they gained as a result of migration.

I am empowered now, empowered in a sense that wherever and whenever I go, I am totally assured that I can start and lead my independent life everywhere. Everything what I have now, I have never had before. (Marika, 32)

Elene, who was the youngest among the interviewees, also mentioned the word stating that she is much stronger now than ever. Because of the independent daily life-style she leads in Germany, she "does not look at the world only through books any more".

Additionally, I find it important to note that, while talking in our native language during the interviews, some of my respondents actively used certain German words such as die Macht, der Wert, die Ausbildung etc. I argue that by saying these words in German when the whole interviews in every case were conducted in the native language, my respondents tried to highlight the importance of these words, giving a huge significance to their connotations. Actions and results they meant behind these words were put only in German context indicating the German "origins" of the experience perceived as self-empowerment.

It was Shorena, who talked much about "die Macht". According to her construction of the concept of Macht, she linked it with acquired educational background and stable income. She expressed hope that with this educational background she would easily find a well-paid job in Georgia but at the same time she was concerned with the future.

45

Now I have Macht (power) But at the same time I have a fear that when I return to Georgia I may lose it, it may disappear. I want to be sure that the power I have here, I will have forever. Even the thought that I may lose it makes me feel terrible. (Shorena, 28)

She also said that:

No one imagined, not even me myself, that I will be as strong as I am now. No one had ever thought that I would achieve all this by myself, on my own. And this feeling makes me so much self confident. And I proved that I am able to do so much by myself. Due to this my Wert is increasing and increasing.

Thus, based on the analysis of the interviews with my respondents, I argue that the challenges and opportunities they encounter in Germany, access to knowledge and the ability to plan their lives, gives them the possibility to perceive their migration experience as empowering. It is their newly acquired status, western type higher education, sense of independence and the ability to plan the future that serve as determinants for young Georgian women's subjective empowerment.

Conclusion

The aim of my research was to explore young Georgian women's experience of migration to Germany. Specifically, I wanted to know whether they feel empowered as a result of the migration and what they see as the constitutive elements of the empowerment. I made a research field trip to Germany in order to conduct interviews with young Georgian migrant women. On the basis of the acquired data, I tried to answer the main questions of my research. I have placed my study into a theoretical framework of integrative approach which in comparison to other conventional theories that deal with migration, most effectively discusses international women's flows on different levels.

Part of scholarly literature as well as my interviews showed that some migrant women perceive their migration experience as empowering. Georgian migrant women's opportunities to have access to a higher western type education in Germany, the possibility to lead an independent life, to have a stable income, to finance their studies and organize their lives were perceived as empowering aspects of migration.

My thesis was an attempt to look at women's migration from empowering perspective within German-Georgian context. Thus, I discussed positive effects of migration, though international female migration also has its disempowering sides. Undocumented migration and trafficking contribute to disempowering women worldwide.

Taking into account the complexity of the phenomenon, I was not able to cover every aspect of Georgian women's migration. I hope that my work will provide insights for further research on lives of Georgian migrant women of different ages and of different destination states they migrate to. In a country with the highest migration rates in post Soviet area, where even the official statistics of migrants is not available, and the surveys done about migration are completely gender–blind, researches in migration field done from different perspectives and focused on gender differences will be very relevant.

Appendix I: Factual Data of the Interviewees

#	Name	Age	Duration of stay	Educational status[*]	Occupational Status	Intentions for return
1	Marika	32	9 years	Higher	Kindergarten	No
2	Irina	29	11 years	Secondary	Bar manager	Yes
3	Gvantza	24	3 years	Higher	Bar/Pub	Yes
4	Khatuna	24	3 years	Higher	Bar/pub	Not sure
5	Eka	28	6 years	Higher	Office	Not sure
6	Elene	22	3 years	Incomplete higher	Bar/pub	Not sure
7	Shorena	28	7 years	Incomplete higher	Bar/pub	Yes
8	Lela P.	28	7 years	Incomplete higher	Bar/pub	No
9	Lela M.	27	5 years	Incomplete higher	Bar/private cleaning	No
10	Natia	24	3 years	Higher	Bar/pub	No

---

[*] Education acquired in Georgia before migration.

Appendix II: Interview Questions

1. How did it happen that you are now here in Germany?

   Follow up questions:

   a. *What was the reason of migration?*

   b. *How do you describe your life before coming in Germany?*

   c. *How do you describe the first year of migration?*

2. How do you describe your life now in Germany?

3. How do you feel here in Germany?

4. How do you describe your relationship with your family members, friends, and acquaintances who live in Georgia?

5. What does your experience of living in Germany mean to you?

6. How did you personally change as a result of migration?

7. Where and how do you see yourself in ten years from now?

Bibliography

Enloe, Cynthia. *Beaches, Bananas & Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics.* Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1989.

Hantzaroula, Pothiti. "Perceptions of works in Albanian immigrants' testimonies and the structure of domestic work in Greece." In Lutz, *Migration and Domestic Work*, 61-76.

Hess, Sabine. "Feminized Transnational Spaces – Or the Interplay of Gender and Nation." *Anthropology Yearbook on European Cultures (AYAC)* 14 (2005): 227-246.

Hondagneu-Sotelo, Pierette. *Gender and US Migration, Contemporary Trends.* University of California Press: Los Angeles, 2003.

Hrzenak, Majda. *Invisible Work.* Ljubljana: Mirovni Institute, 2007.

Inowlocki, Lena, and Helma Lutz. "Hard Labor: The"Biograpchical Work" of a Turkish Migrant Woman in Germany." *The European Journal of Womemn's Studies* 7, (2000): 301-319.

IOM Georgia. "Labor Migration from Georgia," 2003. http://iom.ge/pdf/lab_migr_from_georgia2003.pdf (accessed on May 29, 2008).

Kofman, Eleonore.ed. *Gender and International Migration in Europe: Employment, Welfare and Politics.* London: Routledge, 2000.

Lutz, Helma. Ed. *Migration and Domestic Work.* Frankfurt: Goethe University, 2007.

——— *The New Migration in Europe: Social Construction and Social Realities.* Hampshire: Palgrave, 1998.

Migration Information Source. "Country profiles: Georgia." 2005. http://www.migrationinformation.org/Profiles/display.cfm?ID=314 (accessed June 2, 2008).

——— "Country profiles: Germany." 2005. http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/countrydata/country.cfm (accessed June 2, 2008).

Migration Initiatives Appeal. 2007. http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/shared/shared/mainsite/activities/countries/mi/georgia .pdf (accessed June 2, 2008).

Migration Policy Institute. "Top Ten Countries with the Largest Number of International Migrants". 2005. http://www.migrationinformation.org/datahub/charts/6.1.shtml (accessed June 3,2008).

Meyers, Diana T. *Being Yourself: Essays on identity, Action and Social Life.* Lanham Md: Rowmann and Littlefield, 2004.

Oishi, Nana. *Women in Motion*: *Globalization, State Policies, and Labor migration in Asia.* Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2005.

Ozyegin, Gul, and Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo. "Domestic work, migration and new gender order in contemporary Europe." In Lutz, *Migration and Domestic Work*, 195-208.

Pruemm, Kathrin and Stefan Alscher. "From Model to Average Student: The Europeanization of Migration Policy and Politics in Germany." In *The Europeanization of national policies and politics of immigration: Between Autonomy and the European Union*, edited by Thomas Faist and Andreas Ette. New York: Palgrave, 2007.

Reiharz, Shulamith. *Feminist methods in social research*, Oxford University Press, 1992.

Riessman, Catherine Kohler. *Narrative Analyses*. London: Sage Publications, 1993.

Sassen, Saskia. *The Mobility of Power and Capital: A Study in International Investment and Labor Flow.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Sediman, Irving. *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences.* New York: Teachers Collage Press, 1998.

UNFPA-IOM Expert Group. "Female Migrants: Bringing the Gaps Throughout the Life Cycle". Selected Papers of the UNFPA-IOM Expert Group Meeting, New York, 2006. – http://www.unfpa.org/upload/lib_pub_file/658_filename_migration.pdf (accessed on May 28, 2008).

Weiss, Yfaat. *Challenging Ethnic Citizenship: German and Israeli Perspectives on Immigration.* New York: Berghahan Books, 2002.

Williams, Fionam and Anna Gavanas. "The intersection of childcare regimes and migration regimes: A three-country study." In Lutz, *Migration and Domestic Work*, 13-28.

Yeates, Nicola. "Migration and Social Policy in International Context." Materials for Arusha Conference *New Frontiers of Social Policy*, 2005. http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRANETSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/Resources/ Yeates.rev.pdf (accessed May 29, 2008).

Yinger, Nancy. *Feminization of Migration.* Washington, D.C., Population Reference Bureau, 2006. http://www.prb.org/Articles/2006/TheFeminizationofMigration.aspx (accessed May 28, 2008).

Zentgraf, Kristine M. "Immigration and Women's Empowerment: Salvadorans in Los Angeles." *Gender and Society* 16, no. 5 (2002): 625-646.