

Changing Gender Relations within the Families of the Internally Displaced Population in Georgia

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For my mother

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of forced migration, specifically the shift in gender relations in IDP households from Abkhazia currently residing in Tbilisi, Georgia. The main research question I asked was to what extent has the displacement affected gender relations in migrants' households and in which ways has the self-identification of women, as well as men changed since the time of their involuntary movement. I situated my research within the context of scholarship which focuses on gendered implications of forced migration for displaced households in exile, deals with the renegotiation of gender roles in refugee households, and does not discuss migrant women in isolation from men but rather with the experiences of both on an equal basis and in relation to each other. It is one of the major findings of my analysis that the engendered response of displaced men and women to forced migration can be related to the fact that women and men were deprived of different things and identifications as a result of the armed conflict. On the whole, the study shows that the displaced women themselves have been the prime contributors to the preservation of the traditional family ideals and men's authority in the family.

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Introduction

In the beginning of the 1990s Georgia went through serious military conflicts, as a consequence of which thousands of people from two regions of the country – Abkhazia and Tskhinvali became Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). Persons, who were left homeless, sought shelter in different parts throughout Georgia, as well as in a neighboring country, Russia.

At the age of fifteen together with my family I was also made to abandon my native place, leaving home with the high hope and absolutely no hesitation that the return of the uprooted population would be made possible in the nearest future - as soon as the conflicting parties would reach a ceasefire agreement. Unfortunately the displacement has been protracted since the outbreak of the armed conflict and the reality has made it evident that there is not a slightest perspective of resolving this conflict in the foreseeable future. Moreover, we – the persons who were forcefully displaced following the military activities of 1990s, are now being referred to as ‘old refugees’ after the events of August 2008, as a consequence of which there has been a new flow of IDPs from Tskhinvali region of Georgia.

The decision to write about the households of displaced community from Abkhazia originated from my own experience, from the experience of my closest surrounding and namely the fact that my family, as well as the families of my relatives and the displaced community in general had to experience a complex nature of problems after being expelled from the native place. The course of writing the thesis and especially dealing with the analysis of the questionnaires has personally been a painful process,

since I - a displaced person myself – have revisited the past, my childhood, as well as the post-conflict extremely stressed situation; It was the revision that I have continuously tried, but failed to avoid before.

Back then, as a fifteen-year old girl I could see the things changing in my nearest surrounding at a quick pace. My family, as well as many others, was made to wander from one destination to another, each movement obliged each of us to find strategies which would enable us to get used to a totally unfamiliar surrounding. We were required to manage several things at the same time: to search for opportunities to survive, get familiar with new people, settle in a new world and most importantly - adapt to new, completely different life circumstances. It has been a hard and long journey until we could settle in the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi and obtain our own accommodation, after having spent first several years of displacement in a housing kindly provided by our relatives, although, thousands of IDPs from Abkhazia still reside in severe conditions of collective centers provided by the government.

From being familiar with many households and people belonging to the displaced community, I have come to realize that the difficult process of resettlement and adaptation to the new situation following the military events, has developed in many different ways. At an earlier age I could not notice the variations in experiencing the post-displacement reality, I rather tended to see a single picture of pain, economic hardship, mourning, sorrow and longing for return in each migrated family. Yet as time passed, it has become more explicit for me that the forced migration, in this case a protracted displacement has shaped the experiences of particular families, as well as of individual men and women in ways which sometimes did not resemble each other.

I have decided to explore the complexities of developments characteristic to migrated families with the focus on the gender relations in displaced households from Abkhazia. On the one hand it was an attempt not to let the remembrance of events of ethnic conflicts of 1990s gradually fade away and lose its meaning in the constantly changing dynamics of the political life in my country. On the other hand I considered that the knowledge of the diverse picture of forced displacement would enable me to better grasp the dynamics of the past, present and future intermingled in the lives of displacees and to a certain extent help to handle our lives which is shadowed with the constant memories of the past.

In my project I explore the impact of forced migration, specifically the shift in gender relations in IDP households currently residing in Tbilisi, Georgia. All the respondents who participated in this research are ethnic Georgians from different parts of the conflict region Abkhazia, altogether seven men and fourteen women, mostly belonging to the middle-class strata before migration. I included three female-headed households consisting of one divorced and two widowed women.

The main research question I ask is to what extent has the displacement affected gender relations in migrated households and in which ways has the self-identification of women, as well as men changed since the time of their involuntary movement.

In chapter one, I present the background overview of the research topic, I then discuss the recent scholarship dealing with the gendered experience of migration within the global flow of displacees in different cultural contexts in order to set up the theoretical framework for my research. In the next sub-chapters I will focus on the

methodological framework applied during the research and describe my position as a researcher.

In chapter two I will present and discuss the empirical data gained during the research. While dealing with the analysis of questionnaires filled in by the participants of the study, I will touch upon several main questions identified during the research. I will concentrate on issues such as gender roles before migration in the displaced households, the different experience of men and women regarding the adaptation process to new life circumstances. Gendered experience and impact of migration on IDPs will be analyzed in the third sub-chapter in which I will reflect upon the shift in gender relations and the authority of men as the heads of households. I will also examine the complexities of the identity–reconstruction process after displacement. By comparative analysis drawn between my project and the studies carried out in different settings discussed in chapter one, I will try to identify similarities and differences characteristic to migration processes regarding the impact of migration on gender relations and to add to the literature exploring the impact of migration on gender relations and gendered self-identification.

In the concluding part I will reflect on the findings, as well as present the answers to the main research questions of my thesis.

Chapter 1: General Background, Theoretical Framework and Methodology

1.1. Topic and Historical Background

As a result of ethnic conflicts in Georgia which took place in the beginning of 1990s in Tskhinvali region and Abkhazia, majority of Georgian population had to flee the places of their permanent residence and settle in other parts of the country. Thousands of people became internally displaced persons.

The category of Internally Displaced Persons differs from that of refugees. Under the 1951 Convention a refugee is a person who is outside of his/her country of nationality or habitual residence, who has a well-founded fear of persecution because of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion. (UNHCR Global Trends 2007, 4) Although there are persons seeking refuge within the borders of their countries because of fleeing conflicts or generalized violence. They fall under the category of Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs.

According to the definition provided by the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement, those who are seeking refuge within their own countries are officially called Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs). They have fewer rights than refugees, yet make up almost two-thirds of the people around the world today who are seeking safety from armed conflict and violence.

An IDP is rather a problematic category, as far as there is no particular international agency with a mandate to protect and assist them. The UNHCR has extended its mandate toward refugees to include certain IDP populations, as well as

people in “refugee-like” and “IDP-like” situations. For instance in sources the Georgian case is referred to as an “IDP-like” situation. (UNHCR Global Trends 2007, 18)

As it is pointed out in the research on State Strategy for IDPs, in the beginning of the unprecedented flow of displaced persons in 1990s in Georgia, there was the lack of coordination and the uniform attitude towards problem solving among the Government of Georgia (GOG), international and non-governmental organizations. Later on the Ministry for Refugees and Accommodation (MRA) has been set up with the direct competence to take care of IDPs. The large part of IDPs became dependent on the state allowance and international humanitarian aid. (Bokuchava 2008, 2)

It has to be mentioned that after the military activities in the wake of August 2008 in Tskhinvali region, ‘nearly 130,000 people [...] fled their homes to other parts of Georgia during the summer; around 25,000 are not expected to be able to return for the foreseeable future’. (Transparency International Georgia 2009, 1)

As of June 2009, based on the information provided by the Ministry of Refugees and Accommodation, the overall number of IDPs residing in Georgia is 228 142. Female displacees outnumber male IDPs. (MRA Georgia 2009) According to the same data fifty-eight percent of the displaced population lives in the private sector while forty-two percent continuous to live in drastic living conditions in collective centers, which mostly represent ‘Soviet-era hotels, hospitals, schools, factories, and other buildings roughly converted into “temporary” living centers’. (CDIE 2000, 5)

Displaced community is still facing barriers to the enjoyment of economic and social rights. They are unable to reclaim their properties in conflict areas due to the fact

that the conflict has not been resolved and their displacement has been protracted for a long period.

The armed conflict in Abkhazia caused the greatest human tragedy. Many internally displaced persons escaped in terrible conditions over the surrounding mountains without adequate clothing or provisions. Hundreds died of exposure and exhaustion. (CDIE 2000, 3)

The UN source describes the violence in Abkhazia as "ethnic cleansing" as far as the conflicts were reported to be particularly violent in terms of rape and physical torture. 'Sexual violence and especially rape were used by soldiers from both conflicting parties "as a tool of ethnic cleansing."' Actual rape numbers are not available because many women have refused to seek assistance for psychological and physical trauma owing to the cultural stigma that such treatment would invite.' (Sabedashvili 2007) The property of Georgians in Abkhazia were either burnt down and destroyed or misappropriated. In 1997 the separatist government started the illegal privatization of the property of IDPs on the territory of Abkhazia. (GOG 2002)

Internal displacement remains to be the most acute issue in the political life of Georgia since the durable solution to the conflicts has been difficult to achieve.

1.2 Exploring Gendered Experiences and Consequences of Migration

In this chapter I will give an overview of incorporation of gender issues in migration studies broadly conceived and current trends regarding this development. Then I will analyze Doreen Indra's approach to gender and forced migration field research

meanwhile looking into a number of the case studies which specifically examine the overall affect of migration on households with regard to the renegotiation of gender roles in familial relationship as a result of involuntary, as well as voluntary movements of migrants.

Three following possible common denominators shaping displaced women's lives are formulated by Susan Forbes Martin 'women's greater responsibility for most domestic activities; necessity to cope with changes in family structures and roles; and the experience of a new role as principal maintainers of the traditional culture'. (Martin 2004, 16)

My project is focused on IDP women and I need to consider a number of specificities of this case study. First and foremost the cultural context and the circumstances of displacement differs from migration contexts insofar as 'refugees and displaced persons move not because they wish to make better lives for themselves in other places but because they are forced to leave in order to seek safety elsewhere' (Martin 2004,13) Despite the common generalities emphasized by Martin, I find it significant to seek for the differentiations which might come up when dealing with the case studies of different migration contexts.

I find it important to have the closer look at case studies mentioned above due to their significant contribution to better understanding the relationship between migration and gender relations, which showed that migration very frequently may have contradictory effects on migrants, i.e. it may at the same time lessen and reinforce gender inequity and questioned the prior assumption that the processes following migration are not evenly liberating and empowering for women. Besides, as evidenced by studies I will

analyze in this chapter, as well as the case I am dealing with, the movement from one destination to another involves the inevitable renegotiation of gender roles, which is manifested in spousal relationship in quite different ways depending on the different circumstances of migration.

It should also be emphasized that I will equally analyze what kind of implications displacement has for migrant men. I believe that the discussion of researches dealing with the impact of migration on gender relations, will be useful to deeper understand the impact of migration on displaced women's, as well as on men's position, and illustrate possible general dynamics of the parallel processes, as well as divergent trends, in different parts of the world including Georgia.

After having analyzed the issues noted above, I will discuss which paradigm is the most applicable to my case and why. Regarding the theoretical framework, I will situate my research within the context of the scholarship (and the studies that deal with the renegotiation of gender roles in refugee households) which focuses on the gendered implications of forced migration for displaced households in exile and does not discuss migrant women in isolation from men but rather is dealing with the experiences of both on the equal basis and in relation to each other.

The domain of migration studies dealing with gender issues was relatively underdeveloped before 1980s when the interest rose due to the increased awareness that many of the migrants comprised women, especially those who accompanied migrant workers when migrating to the United States, as well as within Europe. (Leslie Page Moch 2005, 97)

If previously gender was not recognized as a variable in social sciences and the domain of migration tended to be ‘relegated behind issues such as employment, gender relations and reproductive rights’, (Katie Willis and Brenda Yeoh 2000, xi) the studies which increasingly appeared since 1980s tended to focus specifically on the experiences and the impact of migration on women.

Thus, until 1980s the gender of migrants was not taken into consideration; the male experience was taken as the general one; or it was assumed that migration was experienced in the same way by both sexes. The academic discourse did not show sustained interest in processes generating involuntary migration. As noted by Doreen Indra ‘refugees were sometimes spoken of as women, men, or children, but typically either in passing, in relation to idealized, traditional ‘family’ life and roles, or in regard to programs aimed specifically at family unification, women’s health, or employment [...]’. (Doreen Indra 1999, xii)

Besides the growing interest and focus on the experience of women in the process of migration, the diversity within the categories of ‘men’ and women’ and the need for more detailed approach to the experiences of various groups of women and men has been recognized :

Recent research has highlighted the ways in which gender is cross-cut by class, ethnicity, sexuality, age and other social variables. This research demonstrates the impossibility of generalizing about ‘male’ and ‘female’ migrants, but stresses the need for more nuanced approaches to migration studies. (Willis and Yeoh 2000, xi)

Another characteristic of older migrations studies which has hindered the exploration of renegotiation of gender relations in the process of post migration was its main focus on issues such as the settlement and the integration of displacees, which was not sufficient to properly understand the dynamics regarding specifically the gender or power relations which turned out to be inevitable in migrant communities. Moreover, the reasons for their movement - either voluntary migration or the flight caused by different factors – determined the ways in which displacement has been experienced by both male and female migrants. In other words, factors such as the original and destination country, the causes and types of migration have framed the ways and extent to which the gendered migration is consequently experienced.

The volume edited by Doreen Indra “Engendering Forced Migration” provides an insightful analysis and her own approach regarding the gendered migration within the global flow of displacees. Other scholars who contributed to this volume theorize gender and forced migration by giving wide-ranging examples of case studies from different corners of the world.

In her work ‘Not a Room of One’s Own’ Indra traces the tendencies of how the refugees have been framed in feminist anthropological thought and locates forced migration within developing approaches to the study of gender. Indra provides her own perspectives on how the gender issues should be integrated into the research on forced migration:

I want to challenge: that ‘gender’ *is* simply one topic or topical frame among many in forced migration [...] instead I would like to explore the possibility of deeply engendering knowledge in the study and practice of forced migration, through its many topical dimensions. (Indra 1999, 1)

Indra elaborates on how the research questions regarding gender issues have been transformed in a number of disciplines and, drawing on contemporary feminist theory, she emphasizes that '[...]neither in talk , research, analysis, policy , nor programming can 'gender' be equated solely with women, nor solely with women's activities, beliefs, goals or needs [...] that 'gender' is instead a key relational dimension of human activity and thought [...] having consequences for their social or cultural positioning and the ways in which they experience and live their lives. (Indra 1999, 2)

In stressing the need for due consideration of 'activities and thoughts' informed by individual perceptions of men and women, Indra draws attention to the issue important for my research. She calls her approach *Woman in Forced Migration (WIFM)* approach to gender issues and asserts that that this kind of study may enable forced migration specialists to be more responsive to 'situationality and variability' so that each research on forced migrants may have a potential to present a gendered, particular local story. (Indra 1999, 19) Furthermore, she believes that this approach will consequently ascertain the need to alter the way women are analyzed in forced migration discussion and practice. Indra stresses that it is insufficient to deal solely with refugee women and emphasizes the need for greater 'situationality' specific knowledge of forced migrants' life experience, as well as their 'class, ethnic, cultural, subcultural, national, and transnational systems with which they articulate.' (Indra 1999, 21)

Indra's approach thus lives up to the claim of 'viewing the concept of 'gender' not as a substitute for 'women' but as a relational process' (Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson 1999, 225) unfolding in a particular socio-cultural setting; this approach lies at

the core of my own research, which explores changing gender roles and relations within IDP households.

As it was commonly evidenced by the examples of studies carried out with regard to the effects of migration on gender relations, the response of displacees to the forced migration is gendered in a specific ways in different refugee situations. While dealing with the gendered migration I find it significant to concentrate on the dimensions such as ‘situationality and variability’ noted by Indra. Appropriate consideration of these factors would enable the specialists in gendered migration to come up with specific trends intrinsic to each story or the case study.

The research conducted by Atsuko Matsuoka and John Sorenson “Eritrean Canadian Refugee Households As Sites of Gender Renegotiation “ draws on Indra’s approach in that it considered gender to be a relational process in which both men and women’s experience in forced displacement equally play the key role. It deals with women’s, as well as men’s gender roles redefined in exile within Eritrean diaspora in Canada. This community settled in Canada was generated in the context of Eritrea’s thirty-year war of independence from Ethiopia.

The study paints a multilayered picture of the ways in which forced migration experience might be gendered, especially when it comes to the redefinition of gender roles within Eritrean households. Some of the developments the study findings are similar, others to a certain extent different from the processes I identified in my study.

Matsuoka / Sorenson show that the forced migration in exile definitely led to the renegotiation of women’s gender roles and beliefs. It turned out that life in exile offered greater opportunities and personal freedom to younger, urbanized and well educated

women, but it has to be highlighted that for women, who were engaged mostly in menial positions, also stressed that they ‘typically perceived themselves as having a broader range of options as a result of immigration’. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 239-240) Thus, according to the above-mentioned example, both categories perceived migration as a positive development in their lives. Besides, almost uniformly participants perceived the household in a positive manner, serious conflicts of interest were not seen as inevitable. In addition, responses from both male and female displacees to the new roles and responsibilities they had to assume after migration considerably varied within the same community. As regards the experience of migration as a relational process, authors point out that refugee women tended to analyze their live circumstances in relation with those of men at all times, and by no means separately.

It was observed that the issue of labor division in households turned out to be somewhat problematic in the community concerned. Migrant women often worked outside the home for wages, sometimes earning more than their husbands or providing the family’s sole source of income. Women, whose responsibilities increased as they were supposed to earn the wages outside home after migration, were quite frequently dissatisfied with their husbands who would not agree to share household tasks. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 224-226) Although, as the authors describe the process in Eritrean families specifically dealing with the division of labor, it is clear that the question was not solved in a uniform manner in the households studied. While some men rejected previously unfamiliar chores of the household, ‘still other men were quite proud of their newly acquired domestic abilities and promoted more equitable relationships as desirable.’ (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 223)

The study also reveals certain tensions Eritrean men experienced regarding the loss of the status. Many men who failed to find appropriate jobs and experienced immediate loss in their status suffered because of the ‘strong sense of unmet duties and failed responsibilities’ that consequently provoked further tensions and stress. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 229)

According to the authors the tensions following the gender roles redefinitions within the households sometimes were manifested in violence against women and children. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 235)

On the whole, the implications of Forced migration for the households of the Eritrean diaspora studied by Matsuoka and Sorenson were manifested in complex developments:

The outcome of these [gender roles “N.A.”] negotiations had serious economic implications. In some cases, economic uncertainty lack of (even unsuitable) employment, recourse to welfare (often accompanied by a sense of failure, inadequacy, and shame), and the psychological stress associated with exile, adaptation to a new culture, and loss of a status led to attempts by men to strengthen traditional forms of hierarchy and dominance within family. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 234)

Overall the study by Matsuoka and Sorenson rejects treating the Eritrean diaspora as a homogeneous group and takes due consideration of exceptional cases, for example those cases when utter solidarity, cooperation and mutual support between the spouses was found. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 239-240)

Now I would like to analyze the study which deals with the situation of Vietnamese migrants settled in Canada which through another case study brings the process of ordinary migration into the picture. Nazli Kibria in her study “Power, Patriarchy, and Gender Conflict in the Vietnamese Immigrant Community”, which is based on an

ethnographic study of women's social groups of Vietnamese immigrants settled in the United States, describes the dynamics of change in power relations in these women's households. She explores the mediation of disputes between men and women in these families, and builds conceptually on the notion of 'bargaining with patriarchy' - the term coined by Denis Kandiyoti.

By 'patriarchal bargain' Kandiyoti was referring to the process 'in which women and men negotiate and adapt to the set of rules that guide and constrain gender relations'. (Kibria 2000, 177) Kandiyoti claimed that this kind of 'bargain' takes place when the new system of patriarchy emerges from the ruins of the old one while the process of production of the compromise takes place not quite smoothly, but through personal and political struggles:

The breakdown of a particular patriarchal system may, in the short run, generate instances of passive resistance among women that take the paradoxical form of bids for increased responsibility and control by men. A better understanding of the short- and medium-term strategies of women in different social locations could provide a corrective influence to ethnocentric or class-bound definitions of what constitutes a feminist consciousness. (Kandiyoti 1988, 286)

Kibria asserts that 'the bargaining is asymmetric, for as long as patriarchy is maintained, women's power and options will be less than those of men in the same group'. (Kibria 2000, 177) Kibria's research on Vietnamese immigrants revealed that the effects of migration on gender relations in the case of the Vietnamese community appeared to be distinctly uneven and shifting in quality, 'often resulting in gains for women in certain spheres and losses in others'. (Kibria 2000, 177) Increased power enabled women of the Vietnamese community to cope effectively with male authority, although women simultaneously tended to support a patriarchal social structure because it

preserved their parental authority and secured economic security. Kibria argues that moving to the US increased opportunities for the growth of women's power because of their greater economic contributions to the family economy, while those of men have declined. This fact to a certain extent led immigrant women to challenge the male authority but they didn't do this openly: '[...] they did so in ways that did not challenge, but rather reaffirmed traditional Vietnamese ideology concerning the family and gender roles. Vietnamese women found it more advantageous to maintain patriarchal family structure.' (Kibria 2000, 180)

Kibria came up with the findings that the migration to the United States has had somewhat ambiguous impact on the status of Vietnamese immigrant women:

On the one hand, migration has weakened men's control over economic and social resources and allowed women to exert greater informal family power. At the same time, the precarious economic environment has heightened the salience of the family system and constrained the possibilities for radical change in gender relations. (Kibria 2000,181)

In reviewing the literature I found that in order to get familiar with the range of complexities characterizing and impacting on the renegotiation of gender roles and relations in households in migration contexts, it is necessary to have a close look on the findings of as many cases studies as possible. Looking at different cultural contexts helps to better understand the specificity of the individual case.

The study "Migration and relationship power among Mexican women" (Emilio A. Parrado, Chenoa A. Flippen, Chris McQuiston 2005) for example is useful to develop a deeper understanding of the impact of displacement on women's position. In discussing a specific case, i.e. "relationship power" among migrant and non-migrant Mexican women and its socioeconomic correlates, the study by Parrado, Flippen and McQuiston

contributes to the better understanding of the relationship between migration and gender. In this case researchers examined differentials in women's relationship power associated with the residence in the U.S. by identifying three dimensions of relationship power: relationship control, sexual negotiation, and emotional dissonance. The study of these dimensions revealed that Mexican migrant women within the chosen community appeared to have lower relationship control and sexual negotiation power but higher emotional consonance compared to their non-migrant peers. It became evident that issues such as marginalization, family separation, and social isolation might actually increase women's dependence on their partners that leads to the strengthening of patriarchal structure. Parrado, Flippen and McQuiston conclude that migration simultaneously challenges and reinforces patriarchy. One reason for this development as they argue could be the case when migrant communities reinforce "traditional" gender roles as a way of preserving their cultural norms and as a strategy to separate from other minority groups, by which they defend Mexican identity against negative perceptions prevalent in the host society. The study has also shown that women's educational background has served as an important determinant of women's power. (Parrado, Flippen and McQuiston 2005, 365)

The study by Parrado et al. challenges the assumption prevalent in the classical literature on gender and migration, according to which the employment and other new opportunities, as well as a more egalitarian gender environment in the U.S. tend to enhance Mexican women's power position compared to Mexico, i.e. that migration has positive effects on women's empowerment. Parrado et.al. emphasize the marginal position of migrant women in the U.S. The authors state and propose in view of the

further studies that ‘rather than emphasizing an overall positive or negative effect of migration on women’s relationship power, what is needed is a better understanding of which changes facilitate or impede greater gender parity within relationships’.(Parrado, Flippen and McQuiston 2005, 366)

It is evident that the researches analyzed above have revealed a diverse picture of the processes following migration depending on factors related to the original, as well as the destination places and to the patterns and the causes for migration. As it has been discussed, among the factors impacting gender roles and relations, the following have been mentioned more frequently: precarious economic environment, a lack of employment possibilities, recourse to welfare, psychological stress associated with exile, greater range of responsibilities in households assumed by women, men’s sharp loss of the status, tensions created over the flexible division of domestic labor.

In my research I try to determine which among these factors, and which other factors play a key role in the process of renegotiating gender roles and relations in Georgian internally displaced households. In doing so I will also draw on one study which is directly related to my project since its target community are the Internally Displaced Persons from Abkhazia. The study carried out by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE, U.S. Agency for International Development 2000) on the effects of conflict on Internally Displaced Women in Georgia, explored issues such as the changes in the economic roles of women, rapid decline in living standards of IDPs characterized to the post conflict societies. It also concentrated on the affects of migration on women, as well as the shifts in gender roles of displaced persons from Abkhazia. The study revealed that compared to men, displaced Georgian women have adapted to new

life circumstances much easier and have become the main providers for the family. With regard to the renegotiation of gender roles in households expelled from Abkhazia the assessment comes to the following conclusion:

The role of displaced women as leading family income earners has not led to a growing sense of empowerment within the family or IDP communities in general. On the contrary, gender roles have remained clearly delineated [...] men spend much of their time in and around the household, as observed by the CDIE team, but they do little to help in chores traditionally reserved for women in Georgian society'. (CDIE 2000, 9)

I will refer to the study and compare the findings of CDIE assessment with what has been revealed as a result of my project in the chapter where I explore gendered experiences and consequences of migration. In the next sub-chapter I will talk about the methodological framework applied to the study.

1.3 Methodology

In this sub-chapter I discuss the methodological framework applied to the study. I will also touch upon the issues such as the significance of reflexivity and interpretative authority when carrying out feminist research, the strategies employed while dealing with the findings, ethical issues and possible obstacles. I will also reflect on my position as a researcher.

1.3.1 Research Design and Methods Applied

My research represents a case study. Stake notes that the intrinsic type of study is undertaken because 'the researcher wants better understanding of this particular case. [...] it is not undertaken primarily because the case represents other cases or because it

illustrates a particular trait or problem, but because, in all its particularity and ordinariness, this case itself is of interest.’ (Stake 2003, 139) In my study I will seek to find the particular developments of the case study, as well as analyze the similarities and differences it might share with other case studies in the relevant field.

So that to better understand the specificity of this individual case, I found it important to get familiar with other case studies within different cultural contexts, which I have discussed in the previous chapter. As emphasized by Stake ‘[...] we may be interested in a general phenomenon or a population of cases more than in the individual case. And we cannot understand this case without knowing about other cases. But while we are studying it, our meager resources are concentrated on trying to understand its complexities.’ (Stake 2003, 136)

I applied the qualitative method and used the thick description so as to make the feelings, actions and voices of the interacting individuals heard and visible. As Norman Denzin points out, thick description enables the interpretive writer to capture the nature of the lived experience. According to him ‘[...] thick description goes beyond mere facts and surface appearances. [...] It inserts history into experience. It establishes the significance of an experience or sequence of events for the person or persons in question. In thick descriptions voices, feelings, actions and meanings of interaction individuals are heard, made visible.’ (Denzin 2001, 100)

The number of the participants in my project is twenty-one - seven men and fourteen women, all of them being ethnic Georgians from Abkhazia who have been living in Tbilisi for more than a decade. Some of them moved to the capital immediately after

the armed conflict, while the rest had lived for a couple of years mostly in the western part of Georgia.

On the one hand, the selection criteria of participants – i.e. the displaced people living in Tbilisi - was originally prompted by my interest in exploring whether the urban area has had a positive affect on their experience of living in displacement with regards to better employment opportunities or in general the environment of the capital city. On the other hand, I relied on my personal connections in Tbilisi through which I was able to get in touch with the participants from the same location.

Since my research has the focus on the gender relationships in households, it was significant for the findings of the study that among the participants there would be the spouses from the same family. Therefore I included six couples, which enabled me to see the dynamics and complexities of change in gender roles and relations between the wives and husbands as ultimately revealed from their answers.

During the research I have collaborated with my friends and acquaintances that helped me to identify and contact the potential participants. Besides this, my main collaborator was my sister, who played the role of the mediator between me as a researcher and the participants, directly contacting the respondents mostly residing in collective centers. Through a personal contact my sister had in one of the collective centers, she was able to get in touch with the displacees who expressed their readiness to participate in the study. It has to be mentioned that the number of displaced persons who showed their interest in the study and were eager to participate was larger than the number I finally interviewed. Yet I had to consider a number of selection criteria I had developed, which determined who ultimately participated in the study. To be precise, I

wanted to include spouses, i.e. the members of the same households in this study, besides I concentrated on couples who had been married before and not after displacement.

In the following chapter where I analyze the actual research, I refer to the participants by pseudonyms. None of them indicated their real names when filling in the form, and participants who are my acquaintances and relatives asked me not to share their personal information regarding the real names except the age, which all of them specified in the forms.

The questionnaires have been filled in Georgian in handwritten form and subsequently the scanned, electronic versions were sent to me and later translated by me. I have also done the summaries of questionnaires.¹

In the questionnaires I used open-ended questions comprising introductory, as well specifying, follow-up questions, which enabled me to explore the way in which the perceptions of the respondents regarding their lives in displacement have been constructed. As the target group of my study consisted of both men and women, I have developed the separate questionnaires for male and female respondents with several similar questions included in them.² In the introductory part of each form I included the paragraph where I introduced myself, explained my background and the research topic I was dealing with. I also elaborated on the question of confidentiality so to let them make sure that the information shared with the researcher during the study would only be used for the academic purpose.

Some participants were more reserved and probably cautious when dealing with the personal questions such as the spousal relationship or changes in gender roles and

¹ See Appendix I

² See Appendix II

relations in their households, while others readily described some of the sensitive issues, moreover, they tended to go beyond the actual questions and elaborated on different issues linked to the general topic.

Before conducting the research I had envisaged the possible obstacles and the ethical dilemmas which might have been induced due to the particularities of my position as a researcher. The fact that I come from the same community and most importantly the fact that I have shared the same experience with some of the participants enabled me to gain the credibility of the respondents and better understand their experience. I was aware that my being an ‘insider’ might have worked in both ways – on the one hand as an advantage and on the other as a drawback. In addition, I was aware of the problem that my personal experience and involvement as an IDP myself would most probably make me launch this project with certain envisioned presumptions about the findings. Therefore I have been conscious of possible obstacles and tried to be careful not let hidden elements of the discourse escape from me while analyzing and interpreting the data.

Ethical use of the interview material is another key issue to consider when conducting the kind of research which is at the core of this thesis. As Stake points out ‘along with much qualitative work, case study research shares an intense interest in personal views and circumstances. Those whose lives and expressions are portrayed risk exposure and embarrassment, as well as loss of standing, employment, and self-esteem’. (Stake 2003, 154) Undisputedly, creating the narrative requires from the researcher responsibility and honesty. Moreover, researchers should always be aware that scholars owe to the interviewee as well as ‘to the profession and future scholars.’ (K’Meyer and G.Crothers 2007, 93)

One of the strategies I employed in order to solve certain ethical dilemmas connected with my project was to conduct the research by using questionnaires and not the actual, face-to-face interviews as far as I intended to involve my closest acquaintances and relatives whose sharing of their experience of life in displacement would greatly contribute to my research. The circumstance that I had the previous knowledge of some of the participants obliged me to think about certain ethical considerations. I had assumed that some of my respondents would feel uncomfortable and not open enough to discuss their life experience, of which I happened to have a personal knowledge, openly during the interviewing process, especially in the circumstances when they would be interacting with the researcher face-to-face.

On the other hand, I have envisaged the limitations of this method, which is the lack of visual contact and personal contact during the face-to-face interview, which allows the interviewer, as well as the participants to fully engage in the interviewing process. Nevertheless, as I discussed above, there might be a certain advantage in conducting research from the distance, probably in this case respondents feel much more confident and open to express their views in a relaxed manner.

While reflecting on and interpreting the stories of my respondents I paid particular attention to what meaning my respondents wished to convey, which particular memory they preferred to be heard or silenced. This, in turn, should enable me to reveal some of the hidden elements of the discourse. I also felt responsibility as a researcher to accurately interpret my respondents' ideas and carefully read their personal memory, which might offer different interpretations of past events

Besides all this, presenting the findings in the clear manner is one of the central issues for carrying out the research. As noted by Reinhartz it is crucial for the researcher to be able to provide the findings of the research through the use of a clearly understandable language. As he points out, 'there is no escape from the dilemma that every search for understanding starts with a premise about the way one should search for understanding.[...] It is valuable for researchers to translate their work into language that is comprehensible to others, or does this represent a violation of its intellectual integrity.' (Reinhartz 1992, 432)

Another important question to be considered when doing feminist research is the reflexivity used during the study. Many researchers take life stories so that to further link them to a broader cultural formations or phenomena. Sometimes participants may be stunned to encounter that, from their point of view, their narratives have been distorted in the study emerging from the research. It might happen that what they have shared with the researcher has been interpreted in a way which is alien to the meaning they themselves attach to their narratives.

A clear example of the need for the proper use of reflexivity is provided in Katherine Borland's article "'That's not what I said'", in which she describes how her grandmother disagreed with her conclusions and framing of the passage in her narration, which she interpreted as a female struggle for autonomy within patriarchal order, while there was not such the meaning in that particular example. In her examination of this story Borland admits that interpretation is inevitable. She points out that 'to refrain from interpretation by letting the subjects speak for themselves seems to me an unsatisfactory if not illusory solution.' (Borland 1998, 321) Borland admits that it is not easy to answer

the question ‘how might we present our work in a way that grants the speaking woman interpretative respect without relinquishing our responsibility to provide our own interpretation of her experience’, although she emphasizes that ‘by reflecting on our practice we can move towards a more sensitive research methodology.’ (Borland 1998, 322) Thus, whether to use or not a reflective practice when conducting the research seems to be a sensitive issue which has to be approached according to individual case and attitude of the researcher.

As regards the use of interpretative authority, in my opinion I, as a researcher need to take the advantage of this position, although a very careful analysis is needed especially when dealing with personal life experiences. If the interviewer seeks to give a voice to a more marginalized group which hasn’t been heard before, he or she should deal with it with proper sensibility. In the case of my study I found it more appropriate in a number of contexts to preserve the original narratives of the respondents, rather than to risk misinterpreting their messages.

Chapter II Gendered Experience of Migration.

In this chapter I will present the empirical data acquired by me during the research and analyze the interviews conducted within the project, meanwhile focusing on several layers of complexities identified while interpreting the interviews. I will also refer to the study conducted by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE 2000) on the effects of conflict on Internally Displaced Women in Georgia and discuss the trends identified here in relation to the developments revealed when doing my research. Besides, I will refer to the case studies analyzed in the previous chapter which reveal a whole range of complexities characterizing the renegotiation of gender roles and relations in migrated communities.

First I will touch upon the question of gender roles before migration in the displaced households so that to find out to what extent the new conditions of life and the problems of economic survival after displacement has brought the shift in roles both of men and women. Then I will concentrate on the adaptation process to new life circumstances after migration while focusing on different experience of men and women. Gendered experience and impact of migration on IDPs will be analyzed with its different constitutive components, meanwhile reflecting upon the shift in gender relations and the authority of men as the heads of households in the displaced families. I will also examine the complexities of the identity–reconstruction process after displacement with a special emphasis on displaced men’s experience in this regard.

All participants of this study are ethnic Georgians from different parts of the conflict region Abkhazia, altogether seven men and fourteen women, mostly belonging to the middle-class socio-economic society. All of them had extended families before displacement. I included three female-headed households consisting of one divorced and two widowed women.

When asked about the circumstances and reasons of their migration, all of them responded that due to the outbreak of the war they were forced to abandon their homes in front of the coming forces so that to escape the military fights and flee to a safer place.

Most of the participants moved to Tbilisi, the capital of Georgia in 1992 or 1992. When asked what stipulated their decision to settle in Tbilisi rather than in other regions of Georgia, nearly all the respondents underlined the better employment environment for survival as the key reason for this choice, doubled with another factor also mentioned quite frequently, which was the hope that their friends and relatives living in Tbilisi would support them in the initial phase of their displacement, i.e. in the stage when they appeared to be in an extremely vulnerable condition:

We have decided to stay in Tbilisi because we considered that in the capital city there would be more job perspectives so that to earn our daily bread compared to other places. [Interview Nino, 14.04.09]

Two participants, however, emphasized that it did not particularly matter for them where to go in that time because of being involved in the armed conflict, they just sought for a shelter in a safer place.

Thus, for the overwhelming majority of the respondents, the settlement in the urban area of the capital city Tbilisi was triggered by the hope for better occupational opportunities;

In terms of experiencing dramatic economic decline after forced migration the life stories of participants quite resemble each other.

2.1 Gender Roles of Displaced Persons before Migration

Almost half of the female participants interviewed declared that before displacement they economically depended on their husbands, while three others stated they were not dependent on husbands financially. It has to be pointed out that in some cases, even if both spouses used to work outside home, according to their narratives economic maintenance of the household by and large depended on incomes of men rather than both of them, because of men's relatively higher salaries.

The answers of respondents revealed that before migration in most cases men were considered to be main heads of the household in terms of decision-making. As regards the breadwinning, in ten out of fifteen families men gained main sources of income before displacement.

In prewar Abkhazia most of these households had well-provided, secured lives. They owned private houses with a garden and a land plot. Meanwhile, it was emphasized by nearly half of them that even if their lives were not particularly affluent, they did not experience economic hardship and did not need to worry about daily bread or survival problems due to the financial stability of their households ensured by stable jobs.

Traditional gender roles were clearly defined in most households of the study before the displacement. Men were primarily responsible for livelihood security of their

families, while wives' first and foremost obligation and concern was related to the management of domestic matters and the responsibility for proper upbringing of their children.

Most of the female participants of the research who were employed before displacement had worked as teachers or in healthcare, while – as they stated – their husbands used to be engaged in various fields such as constructing, trade, education, manufacturing industry, some of them holding senior positions.

As it was mentioned above, majority of women interviewed were economically dependants on their husbands before migration. Nevertheless, it should also be mentioned that among participants, three women stated that they earned their own means and were not economically dependant on their husbands

When asked about the participation in intra-household decision-making process during the period before migration, the overwhelming majority of the respondents answered that they did participate equally, which did not automatically mean that the final decisions were made by mutual agreement.

While speaking about her life before migration Nana, one of the female participants described it in the following way:

After getting married in Abkhazia I quitted my job and became a full-time housewife, having taken care of my children. I became thoroughly dependant on my husband's income which consisted of quite a solid amount. This fact of course decreased my participation as a decision-maker, I was limited in spending the money earned by my husband and I always silently agreed to decisions made by him. [Interview Nana, 15.04.09]

On the whole, it could be drawn from the answers of the female, as well as some male participants that even though all household matters were discussed together, men were important members of the household who took final decisions.

2.2. Adapting to a New World

One of the key issues I wanted to explore during the research was the difference (if any) of the adaptation process of male and female participants to new life conditions in the post-war reality. What has stricken me most was that all male respondents unquestionably admitted that displaced women have revealed greater strength, dignity and common sense to bravely face the difficulties and harshness of the post conflict miserable life. To make it through in the worst financial crisis they have come up with a range of ideas. As it was emphasized by Zurab – one of the male participants:

Women have undoubtedly managed to adapt to a new life much easier than men have, in some cases they have become the ones who lead the households, especially in terms of financial maintenance.’ [Interview Zurab, 24.04.09]

One of the respondents elaborated on possible reasons of easier adaptation process for women:

One of the reasons why women have adapted easier might be the availability of various, even though physical, menial jobs, but still it has turned out easier for them to keep being employed. [...]. Moreover, women are responsible for the well-being of their children primarily as mothers, thus they have somehow acquired more strength and have not displayed weakness while overcoming stressful and deteriorated conditions of life after displacement. [Interview David, 25.04.09]

From Giorgi I got an interesting explanation of why women could have adapted easier than men. :

Women turned out to adapt to new life circumstances much easier I think because when being busy with housekeeping and all that related work, their minds have been driven away from thoughts about what happened in the past. Contrary to women, displaced men started drinking in order not to be constantly haunted by thoughts about their immense loss. [Interview Giorgi, 28.04.09]

I could even trace some sort of envy in Giorgi's words while speaking about women's traditional responsibilities.

Many displaced women emphasized that the process was hard but relatively manageable for women rather than men. Although it should be noted that some of them had the opposite view:

I think for women the adaptation process has been more difficult because of the double shift they had to endure. Many things have changed during their struggle for survival. Mostly displaced women were engaged in buying and selling different goods. Sometimes they were helped by men. [Interview Tamara, 16.04.05]

As regards the adaptation process of male IDPs, it has to be highlighted that nearly all male respondents of the study - like Giorgi does in the interview quoted above - commented about other displaced men, claiming that most of them have become alcoholics for not enduring the severity of their post conflict reality, which came about to be a common occurrence especially in the first years of displacement.

Indeed, both male and female respondents stressed the above-mentioned characteristic post war development, namely the tendency that men tended to start drinking alcohol, turned out to be a widespread case. The study done in 2000 on the impact of conflict on Internally Displaced Women in Georgia by the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE 2000) also reveals the same characteristic feature of the post conflict society. In this assessment it is emphasized that

while women have adapted to drastic conditions after displacement more successfully, ‘many men [...] have largely been unwilling to trade and find other menial methods of generating income, instead spending much time idling and loitering in housing centers, [...] their lives were often characterized by escapism, by “empty and routine time-passing,” and by a growing pattern of alcoholism.’ (CDIE 2000, 6)

It should be emphasized that the studies analyzed in the previous chapter paint quite a diverse picture of the processes of gender renegotiations in different cultural contexts. For instance, Matsuoka/Sorenson point out, among other trends, the tensions which developed in Eritrean households around the question of the division of domestic chores between men and women. Women, whose responsibilities increased due to their engagement in work outside home, tended to express dissatisfaction about the fact that their husbands did not share household tasks. At the same time not all men reacted to the new situation in the similar way, some of them felt quite comfortable ‘of their newly acquired domestic abilities.’ (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 229) Matsuoka/Sorenson also elaborate on ‘strong sense of unmet duties and failed responsibilities’ (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 229) among Eritrean men caused by their failure to find appropriate jobs.

The CDIE study on Internally Displaced Women in Georgia points to a somewhat similar development in the case of displaced men from Abkhazia, namely the growing sense of shame caused by the failure ‘to fulfill their traditional role as leaders of their families’. (CDIE 2000, 7) The study stresses that the shame was generated due to the fact that women turned out to be more inventive compared to men in finding ways to support households.

As regards my project, it has to be noted that neither men speaking about themselves nor women when reflecting on the changes in their husbands, named the shame or the ‘strong sense of unmet duties’ as a constitutive component of their experience. The male interviewees in my project mostly complained about the unemployment, loss of their status and the property. I will elaborate on the tensions displaced men had to go through during the adaptation process and the possible reasons of this development in the section on identity reconstruction process in displacees.

2.3. Impact of Displacement on Gender Roles

In this section I will trace whether there have been any shifts which the displacement process might have brought about, especially in terms of changing gender roles in the households concerned.

An important issue I paid attention to during the interviews is whether traditional gender roles have undergone any changes as a result of migration. As I mentioned before, in most of the families traditional gender roles were clearly delineated before migration. Men were main breadwinners as well as primary decision-makers while for the majority of women the primary responsibility was to take care of the household and bring up the children.

As regards the intra-household decision-making in the post-migration period, most of the female participants stated that they do participate in decision-making process, though they also emphasized that men are expected to be responsible for the final, critical decisions. One can assume that women’s assertion that their husbands are considered to be main decision-makers contradicts to their own statements on equal participation in decision-making process, however from the answers of female respondents it could be

drawn that the above-mentioned issue about the final decision made mostly by their husbands, seemed to be and still is an undisputed question in their families. For instance, Liana – a displaced woman when answering the above-mentioned question stated the following:

Both of us take part in decision-making process; nevertheless I generally accept his decision, even if personally I would not share the same opinion with my husband. [Interview Liana, 21.04.09]

For almost all women of the study the situation in terms of decision-making has not changed after displacement. All of them stated that migration has not had any impact in this respect, while the majority of the female respondents emphasized that they generally accept that men are supposed to make critical decisions in families. Probably this development, i.e. the fact that my interviewees do/did not report any definite change in the decision-making processes in the household, could be read as a variety of the reinforcement of patriarchal structures as a result of migration. This could be interpreted as a parallel with the findings of the study discussed in the previous chapter about Vietnamese women who migrated to the USA. According to Kibria these women tended to support a patriarchal social structure and did not challenge it openly despite the fact that migrant women acquired greater financial autonomy due to increased opportunities and greater economic contributions to the family economy. (Kibria 2000, 180) In the case I am dealing with, displaced women did not seem to challenge openly patriarchal structures as well. One of the reasons for it might be the precarious economic condition of their households, another one – the cultural setting which encourages maintaining stable marriages and the traditional family values.

One of the developments characteristic to forced migration in Georgia has been the extensive professional displacement of IDPs from Abkhazia. The CDIE survey confirmed that ‘formal employment was one of the most acute and unsolved issues for displaced women, increasingly demoralized by almost a decade of epidemic level rates of joblessness.’ (CDIE 2000, 7) Consequently, the situation after migration has radically reversed for women who used to be skilled professionals in their previous lives and were employed according to their professions, as well as for those who used to be the full-time housewives. In the years since the displacement, they have struggled under conditions of extreme poverty and unemployment. More than half of them have been engaged in jobs different from their professions so that to provide families with the basic income, food and other items necessary for survival. Those who have had to work outside home after migration said they have been engaged in hard physical work, trading activities, being mostly employed in bakeries, restaurants as minor laborers so that to barely make ends meet.

The question of unemployment among IDPs from Abkhazia after their forced migration is explored from a comparative perspective in the study “Social Capital and Employment Opportunities Among IDPs in Georgia” conducted by Gocha Tskitishvili, Larry Dershem and Vano Kechakmadze (The Institute for Polling and Marketing) for the World Bank in 2005. According to this study the rates of employment differed significantly between IDPs and the general population of Georgia for the most part in time period between 1991 and 1999. Among the contributing factors to the higher rate of unemployment among the IDP population Tskitishvili et al. list the following ones: displacement from their former employment; displacement to a collapsed economy with

few employment opportunities; and years of uncertainty about the length of displacement which created the utter need to seek permanent employment. It is also emphasized in the study that the situation regarding the unemployment in IDPs has improved since 2002, but notwithstanding the fact that displaced community has the same formal chances to employment as the general population as it shows the same level of qualification, the study found that IDPs continue to 'have less quality of employment than the general population of Georgia.' (Tskitishvili ,Dershem ,Kechakmadze 2005, vi)

In my research almost all male participants complained of being unable to find stable jobs. All of them used to be either unemployed for a considerable period of time or employed sporadically, having tried a range of low-paying, unspecialized jobs, engaging mostly in hard physical activities of menial nature. Among other jobs displaced men recalled being employed at irregular intervals as a laborer, a loader, a road worker, an assistant to the cook, a painter, a taxi driver. As regards the unemployment issue, I find it important to note that not only displacement was the major cause for being left jobless. Many multipart processes should be taken into consideration when we talk about the beginning of nineties in Georgia. Namely, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Georgia, the country with thousands of IDPs started to undergo the transformation processes towards democracy meanwhile experiencing the high rate of poverty and unemployment. 'Society struggled for survival and stood defenseless in front of huge political and economic challenges, lacking the knowledge and skills necessary to cope effectively with the new developments.' (Sabedashvili 2007, 10)

Thus the difficulties faced by displacees in finding proper, stable jobs can not solely be attributed to their being IDPs, but it rather seems to be triggered by the complex nature of the developments the whole country was exposed to at that specific time.

As regards the changes after displacement in the families, it has to be mentioned that even in households where women's direct economic contribution to the family economy has not grown, both men and women participants have willingly admitted that women's duties and responsibilities have dramatically increased after forced migration. In my opinion, one of the factors contributing to this development might have been the fact that a woman - a wife and a mother, may have been primarily responsible for a rational and effective management of the scant income earned by either her, her husband or both. Participants have not been asked the question particularly on who primarily managed the income – a wife or a husband, although I have personal knowledge which enables me to reflect on this particular development.

As the main interest of my research lies within the shifts in gender relations after displacement, I tried to design the questions in a way which would gradually lead me to this specific issue.³ Thus, first I attempted to reveal the changes in personalities of each of the participant, both male and female, and afterwards I attempted to find out how those changes, if any, affected their marriage and spousal relationship by and large. The first task turned out to be achieved much easier than the second one. Regarding the shifts, both men and women eagerly elaborated on their personal changes after forced migration.

One of the questions was asking whether the life after migration to any extent has granted women more power, confidence or freedom, while the second one was more of an open-ended nature, aimed at finding out how each of my respondents would describe his/her personal change after migration. The answers struck me because of their sometimes controversial nature. For example, nearly all of the female interviewees described their personal experience in an extremely negative way caused by the existing

³ See interview questions in Appendix II.

reality after migration, three of them even compared their miserable life to – as one of these three formulated - ‘the endless torture which may only be experienced in the hell’.

[Interview Eliso, 16.04.09]

Tamara expressed concerns in a more general way, especially in terms of a protracted nature of their displacement:

Forced displacement has changed the whole country, not only IDPs. Personally I have become more emotional, pessimistic and hopeless. Mostly I have lost the faith in the system, i.e. the government, especially after the events of August, 2008 which rendered us - ‘old refugees’ in a more difficult situation. Sometimes I think that we can never get rid of the IDP status. [Interview Tamara, 16.04.09]

Nino reflected on her life away from home in the following way:

My life in Tbilisi in contrast to Abkhazia can be compared to the endless torture. I am never abandoned by the feeling of living not in my native country. I am continuously looking forward to the day of return to our homes in Abkhazia. This feeling makes us feel at home and not at home at the same time. After all, what can be worse than living a refugee life in your own country? [Interview Nino, 14.04.09]

When reading the experience of displaced women from Abkhazia against the findings of the study by Matsuoka/Sorenson on Eritrean migrants it can be noted that the Matsuoka/Sorenson found certain positive developments in life experiences of Eritrean migrant women after their move to the US. For instance, the new life in the US offered greater employment opportunities and personal freedom not only to younger, urbanized and well educated women, but also to those who were engaged mostly in menial labor, in terms of being granted ‘a broader range of options as a result of immigration.’ (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 239-240)

None of the respondents of my study stressed any such experience of positive effects of migration. There is however one development which I think is noteworthy to mention.

Nearly all female participants stated – when asked about personal change triggered by migration – that the utter need to struggle for survival personally made them much stronger and confident.

On the whole, even if the displacement was experienced very negatively, the typical answer to the question was focused on the fact that displaced women definitely gained more confidence, belief and courage. For example, Liana could observe her personal change ‘in terms of being made to take on more responsibilities for the survival of the family.’ She said that this certainly gave her more strength, courage, confidence and that she has developed the trust in herself. [Interview Liana, 21.04.09]

From the answers of some female participants of the study it became evident that the strength, courage, belief or increased self confidence can only be attributed to their share necessity to act appropriately in existing circumstances. They constantly stressed that the post war reality made them strive for earning their daily bread. Many of them emphasized that it was done quite unconsciously, insofar as they were expected not to reject any available job so that to provide their families with basic survival needs.

This is how one of the displaced widows described her feelings:

Because of being left jobless I have faced a lot of difficulties. I had a child to raise on my own, whom I could not feed properly and give the proper education after he left school. I felt especially miserable because of the fact that I could not provide him with the most basic needs. There have been times when I often regretted my survival after the war; I wished I was killed in the fighting.. I had such a wish especially on days when I could not look into my child’s eyes because I was not able to supply him with the sufficient food on that day [Interview Tamara, 16.04.09]

Post-conflict reality has rendered the female headed households extremely vulnerable because of being expected to lead the household on their own. As Tamara further described, she personally was not able to work outside as other displacees did, because

the distress and health-related problems she had to experience after the military conflict. In her case her 16-year-old son became the main breadwinner of the family, who did everything to earn money for the medication Tamara needed:

He was made to engage in physical work in the market. Consequently my son could not be educated properly. He passed the University exams but we could not afford to pay the money for his education and as a result, he had to quit studying in his second year. [Interview Tamara, 16.04.09]

Unsurprisingly, wartime events have undoubtedly left their impact on the individuals forcefully expelled from their native place. This confirms a general trend noted in the United Nations report “Specific groups and individuals: Mass exoduses and displaced persons”. According to this report the trauma of conflicts has manifested itself in the high occurrence of suicides and various diseases among IDP populations in many places in Georgia. (UN 2003) Rates of disease among displaced women have been increasing since their displacement. Another report stresses that in Georgia ‘the percentage of disease among displaced women increased from 45 percent in 1994 to 55 percent in 1997 [...], causes for psychosocial stress were both conflict- and post conflict-related. Substantial numbers of women surveyed by Oxfam were traumatized by the loss of their homes and property (91 percent), by bombings (82 percent), and by the loss of close family members during the conflict (34 percent).’ (CDIE 2005, 6)

In order to show how the personal changes were manifested in displaced men after migration, I would like to quote a few of them. Many of them stressed the loss of property and the status among other factors of concern. The loss described by David as a result of the war was particularly related to the position he had acquired before and the lack of private property after involuntary migration:

Life before displacement can not be even compared to the life we faced afterwards. Even if you are a refugee in your own country, this is still a different, strange environment you need to adapt to, where nobody respects you because you have not yet gained enough authority [...] I have quite frequently felt humiliated in the new place I was forced to live in, where I found myself to be left without my own property, first and foremost my depression was linked to the material hardship, the reality of being left without any job and proper income... [Interview David, 25.04.09]

The tensions migrant men experienced as a result of the loss of the status was also emphasized in the study on Eritrean community, which noted that ‘psychological stress associated with exile, adaptation to a new culture and loss of a status led to attempts by men to strengthen traditional forms of hierarchy and dominance within family. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 234)

In my study the tensions around the loss of the status was closely linked to the loss of the property. As in above example, among other reasons the absence of property was named by Zurab and mostly by displaced men still accommodated in collective centers, as the factor which renders them extremely vulnerable:

Life after displacement has been especially hard for me because of the absence of the private property. Being left homeless, I am under constant fear that one day we will be evicted from the accommodation provided by the state. There have already been a number of such efforts from the government. This unresolved question makes my life even more strained. [Interview Zurab, 24.04.09]

While depression, aggressive behavior and alcoholism was mentioned by some of the female respondents, none of the male participants readily admitted their change in terms of becoming more depressed or aggressive. One of them stated he has remained the same person except for the gained life experience, while his wife Mzia said quite the opposite,

namely she stated that since displacement her husband has become very depressed and still suffers from serious health problems. [Interview Mzia, 24.04.09]

On the whole, only a few women have spoken about their husbands' change towards becoming more aggressive. It could be read from their answers that they are trying to understand the condition of men, as well as to show compassion and ease their stressful situation by giving as much support to their husbands as they can. In my view, this is at least one of the reasons, why ten out of fourteen women interviewed answered that there has not been any significant change in their spousal relationship. Male participants gave the similar answer. However, four out of fourteen women did stress that all above mentioned circumstances they happened to face after displacement have made a negative influence on their marriage. For instance Nino described it in the following way:

My husband has noticeably changed after our move to Tbilisi. He has lost self-confidence and become very depressed. Economic hardship has rendered him particularly vulnerable [...] Displacement in general has affected our relations a great deal. I am particularly shocked by the strange feeling, some sort of alienation towards each other which we have experienced from time to time. [Interview Nino, 14.04.09]

It should be emphasized that one male and two female respondents gave an answer that differed quite substantially from the answers discussed above. They underlined that despite the hardship and difficulties they had to undergo after forced migration, only with the support of each other they have been able to survive, as a result of which their bond has become stronger and marriage even more stable.

Thus, the tension in spousal relationship was not perceived as unavoidable in displaced community from Abkhazia. Matsuoka/Sorenson too refer to the fact that some migrants perceived migration as a positive development in their lives. They point out

that nearly all participants perceived the household, i.e. the family bond in a positive manner; moreover, the authors happened to come across spouses who spoke about the utter solidarity, cooperation and mutual support in their spousal relationship. (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1999, 234) Neither in the Eritrean migrant community nor in the community of the displaced persons from Abkhazia, conflicts of interest of spouses were seen as inevitable.

In the case I am dealing with, almost all the participants acknowledged the utter increase of displaced women's responsibilities after migration, but the fact that only a few participants admitted the change in the spousal relationship, creates an interpretative puzzle. If we take into consideration their own narratives regarding all the changes in their life conditions after migration, certain dynamics with regard to the affects of existed circumstances on their spousal relationship should have been present after migration. Moreover, shifts in resources might have created some ground for the renegotiation of the patriarchal authority. Contrary to this, none of the female respondents of this study seems to challenge the male authority after migration.

The interview with one of the couples included in the study revealed some controversial attitude to this specific issue. For instance, when asked about the change in authority of her husband Liana answered that her husband's position as the head of the household has in no way been challenged even if he has become dependant on income she earns. Nevertheless, I got the contrary answer to the same question from her spouse. Namely, Giorgi answering the question about the changes in gender roles as a result of displacement and the impact of migration on his status as the head of the family gave the following answer:

Yes, I absolutely agree that after displacement traditional gender roles have definitely been renegotiated at the expense of losing authority of men as primary heads of the households. [Interview Giorgi, 28.04.09]

I also find it noteworthy to mention that most of the female respondents conveyed the longing for the ‘good old times’ when the man was the main breadwinner and a family-member principally responsible for economically supporting the household:

I could never imagine that I would manage to deal with the problems faced after displacement. If before displacement I could afford to be a housewife, now to be able to stay home would be a luxury for me. [Interview Eliso, 14.04.09]

Thus, some women considered the luxury that they could afford not to work outside home in lives before displacement.

2.4. Tensions of Identity Reconstruction Process

Another important issue already examined above is how differently migration was experienced by men and women. It has to be emphasized that the way displaced men and women relate to the loss they often tend to mention differs from each other to a certain extent. I find it important to look into the self-identification rooted in of both of them first before their violent expulsion from the homeland in order to understand the different impact of the displacement on men and women as we have seen in the previous section.

While dealing with the narratives of the respondents I could trace the underlying theme of their relationship to ‘something’ which they were ultimately deprived of. In other words, the issue of the ‘loss’ was differently perceived by male and female displacees.

Displaced men associated their identities mostly with the property and the status - i.e. the recognition of their acquired position by the people of the community they belonged to, which they had been developing over the years before the actual conflict. While none of the respondents neglect the issue of the loss, men tended to elaborate relatively more on their lost status and property compared to women. It might be argued that this tendency could partially elucidate the tensions and instability of male self-identification after forced migration and its manifestation for example through alcoholism which was often mentioned by exclusively male participants themselves when generally speaking of displaced men's relatively strained adaptation process. As I quoted above, some of the male displacees stressed how humiliated and depressed they felt after they have found themselves jobless and penniless in a new environment, having left prosperous, successful lives and stable jobs behind, all of a sudden losing literally everything they owned in their previous provided lives.

Thus, the experience of humiliation was strongly associated by them with the loss of property and status.

It turned out that in finding themselves helpless to influence and improve their lives in existing reality right after the involuntary migration, many displaced men (as emphasized by study participants) ended up by i.e. seeking refuge in drinking by which consequently distancing from the harshness of their real life, especially in the initial phase of migration. This may well have contributed to their difficulties in developing a more productive perspective towards an important dilemma of rebuilding their lives, while women appeared to handle this process more affectively. Tensions in adaptation process in displaced men might have been triggered by experiencing low self-efficacy

while they were expected to get over the difficult situation which was experienced in a self-destructive way. Most probably the fact that men found themselves unable to control or alter certain aspects of their life after displacement rendered them in an extremely depressive condition, which was stressed by their wives when asked about the impact of displacement on their spouses.

Analyzing the patterns of adaptation by displaced man discussed above as well as displaced women, it has to be emphasized that the process of identity reconstruction after forced migration, which is a major precondition for the successful resettlement of the displacees, was experienced by all of the interviewees very stressfully, but as we have seen in different ways. The fact that many years of protracted displacement doubled the longing of return to their homes has been mentioned by most of the respondents; although it has to be pointed out that the displaced men more intensively kept touching upon the issue of their relationship to their original home:

I think it is obvious that the life spent outside your home, your native town is very hard, even in case it offers you a blissful life. In our case, we -IDPs were not welcome and paid proper attention to in Tbilisi. The most important thing is that you do not consider yourself to be a full citizen of your country, in addition the economic hardship you have to handle makes your life even more miserable. [Interview Levan, 13.04.09]

Many of them spoke about the adaptation process which entailed the feeling of the alienation even if they were refugees in their own country. I find it crucial to emphasize that while stating that displaced women managed to adapt easier by finding strategies to better cope with the post-conflict reality, I do not mean that this process was not hard to undergo for them. As it was illustrated in the previous section by quotes of the female respondents of the study, all of them put an emphasis on their stressful condition and difficulties while dealing with the hardship. But at the same time they vividly spoke about

strength, confidence, courage and belief in themselves gained as a result of displacement in the situation of the sheer necessity to find ways to survive and provide for their families.

It has to be mentioned that the loss of the status was experienced not only by men but also by women. As it was said, nearly half of the female participants were employed in fields such as healthcare and education, thus by the time the armed conflict broke out they had also acquired respectful position. As it is pointed out by Iulia Kharashvili in her article “Georgia: Coping by Organizing. Displaced Georgians from Abkhazia”:

Women in their forties and fifties also suffer from low self-esteem. Before they were displaced, many of them had occupied fairly high positions in society. The change in their social status was a painful, humiliating blow. (Kharashvili 2001, 243)

Although, I would add that for the majority of the female respondents the primary concern before migration and their self-identification was associated with the stable family, proper upbringing of their children and by that time already achieved carefree, safe and well-provided life , when they could afford not being engaged in work outside home so that to provide for the family . While after displacement as stressed by most of them the values and priorities have been renegotiated, when their first and foremost obligation and concern has become the everyday, survival problems.

Therefore, in my view an important factor which had a significant implication for the adaptation process experienced by male and female displacees in a relatively different way might have been the discrepancy in the ways they constructed their self-identities, which in the due course has shaped their relation to what has been left behind after the forced migration. In other words, it can be summarized that displaced men and women

were deprived of different things and identifications as a result of the armed conflict. For men the loss was primarily associated with their status and property while for women it was primarily related to family values, children and carefree life.

On the whole, interviews shed more light on the dynamics of changes in gender roles rather than gender relations. While pointing to the definite changes in the traditional gender roles of displaced households, the respondents at the same time admitted limited transformations in relationships between the spouses after displacement. As it appeared, changes in gender roles took place without any considerable shift in men's power and authority. One more striking thing which has been revealed as a result of this study is that the displaced women themselves have been the prime contributors to the preservation of the traditional family ideals and men's authority in the family.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore the impact of forced migration, specifically the shift in gender relations in IDP households from Abkhazia currently residing in Tbilisi, Georgia. The main research question I asked was to what extent has the displacement affected gender relations in migrated households and in which ways has the self-identification of women as well as men changed since the time of their involuntary movement. I used questionnaires which were filled in by fourteen female and seven male participants of the study. I applied a qualitative method and used thick description in order to make the sentiments, actions and voices of displaced persons heard and visible.

I situated my research within the context of the scholarship which focuses on gendered implications of forced migration for displaced households in exile, deals with the renegotiation of gender roles in refugee families, and does not discuss migrant women in isolation from men but rather with the experiences of both on an equal basis and in relation to each other. Against the background of these studies carried out in different settings I tried to identify similarities and differences in how migration processes are engendered and to add to the literature exploring the impact of migration on gender relations and gendered self-identification.

The literature discussed in the study showed that the movement from one destination to another involves the inevitable renegotiation of gender roles, which is manifested in spousal relationship in a variety of ways depending on the different

circumstances of migration. Displacees respond to migration in similar and divergent ways and these responses are gendered in specific ways in different refugee situations.

My empirical analysis revealed that in displaced households from Abkhazia gender roles have been undisputedly renegotiated. Women's duties and responsibilities have dramatically increased after forced migration. But only a few participants admitted the change in their spousal relationship.

In terms of adaptation process all respondents unquestionably admitted that displaced women have adapted to new circumstances of the post conflict life much easier as compared to men.

The study also showed that men used to be and still are important members of the households who take final decisions, even though both spouses participate in decision-making process.

As for the affects of migration on displacees, nearly all the respondents described their personal experience in an extremely negative way and pointed to the existing reality after displacement – particularly the economic scarcity, unemployment and health-related problems – as the main or exclusive reason.

From the answers of some female participants of the study it became evident that the strength, courage, belief or increased self confidence as a personal change in women could only be attributed to the share necessity to act appropriately in existing circumstances after displacement.

It is one of the major findings of my analysis that the engendered reaction of displaced men and women to forced migration can be related to the fact that women and men were deprived of different things and identifications as a result of the armed conflict.

For men the loss was primarily associated with their status and property while for women, though there is the loss in terms of carefree life and certain values related to family and children, contributing to the survival of the household and caring for the family as a primary orientation remained largely intact. The tensions of self-identification were sometimes manifested in aggression and alcoholism in men, although this was not characteristic to all households.

On the whole, the study showed that the displaced women themselves have been the prime contributors to the preservation of the traditional family ideals and men's authority in the family.

Taking into consideration the limitations of this study which I analyzed in the section on methodology, I am aware that here are still questions which remain unasked – such as the issue concerning the division of domestic labor and any change with this regard after migration - and the aspects of lives of Internally Displaced Persons to be further explored.

I hope that my work will to a certain extent contribute to the scholarship which deals with the affects of migration on gender roles and relations in migrant families, with a particular focus on the impact of displacement on gender relations in households displaced as a result of the armed conflicts.

Appendix I: Summary Data about Respondents

Female Participants

	Name	Age	Occupation before Displacement	Occupation after Displacement
1	Liana	52	Housewife	Engaged in different menial jobs outside home
2	Nana	58	Cashier /Housewife after marriage	Sporadically engaged in baking activity
3	Mzia	62	Secondary school teacher	Engaged in menial work outside home
4	Lia	52	Hospital nurse	Housewife
5	Lamara	52	Housewife	Housewife
6	Eliso	48	Housewife	Engaged in different menial jobs
7	Nonna	54	Hospital nurse	Engaged in physical work outside home
8	Ketevan	44	Housewife	Engaged in physical work outside home
9	Lali	60	Secondary School Teacher	Engaged in any available physical activity
10	Guli	55	Housewife	Engaged in different menial jobs outside home
11	Nino	52	Secondary school teacher	Substitute teacher , recently employed on a regular basis
12	Tsiala (widow)	56	Employed at Technical Institute	Engaged in different menial jobs outside home
13	Tamara (widow)	63	Hospital nurse	Housewife
14	Naira (divorced)	43	Employed at the University as a scientific secretary	Employed at the University as a scientific secretary

Male Participants

	Name	Age	Occupation before Displacement	Occupation after Displacement
1	David (husband of Nana)	60	Head of the Nutrition department	Worked as a taxi driver, then as an assistant to the cook. Currently unemployed
2	Giorgi (Husband of Liana)	62	Employed in Trade sector, held senior position	Sporadically has done different , available physical work
3	Zurab (Husband of Mzia)	64	Director of the Sanatorium	Employed in State sector
4	Gia (Husband of Liana)	58	Constructing engineer	Engaged in different menial jobs
5	Guram (Husband of Lamara)	52	Coach	Engaged in any available menial jobs
6	Levan (Husband of Nino)	58	Scientific worker at the Institute	Sporadically engaged in different physical work
7	Zaza	58	Head of Department (Seaside management)	Engaged in different menial jobs

Appendix II: Interview Questions

Questions for Female Respondents:

1. When and under what circumstances did you move to Tbilisi?
2. What stipulated your decision to stay in Tbilisi and not to settle in other parts of Georgia?
3. How would you describe your life before displacement in general?
4. Were both you and your husband employed before displacement? In which field?

Follow-up questions:

- a. *Who mainly provided the family with the basic income?*
 - b. *Were you financially dependant on the income earned by your husband?*
 - c. *Did you and your husband equally participate in decision-making process in the household?*
5. How would you describe your life in Tbilisi compared to the life back in Abkhazia?

Follow-up questions:

- a. *In which ways did you personally change after displacement?*
 - b. *Did the life in Tbilisi after displacement to a certain extent give you more power, confidence or freedom as a woman?*
6. How did you manage to deal with material hardships after displacement? Were you engaged in any available jobs to support your family?
 7. Do you have more responsibilities and obligations in the household now than you used to have before? If yes, how do you feel about this development?
 8. In your view, how differently was the displacement experienced by men and women?
 9. In your opinion, how did the displacement affect your spousal relations? Has your husband become dependant on the earnings made by you after displacement? If yes, did this circumstance simultaneously mean that his position as the head of the household has been weakened in terms of decision-making?

10. Do you feel that you have obtained more authority as a wife in the household after displacement? On the whole, has your role in decision-making process increased after displacement?

11. In your opinion, have the traditional gender roles been renegotiated after displacement?

Questions for Male Respondents:

1. When and under what circumstances did you move to Tbilisi?
2. What stipulated your decision to stay in Tbilisi and not to settle in other parts of Georgia?
3. How would you describe your life before displacement in general?
4. What was your occupation before displacement?

Follow-up questions:

- d. Who mainly provided the family with the basic income?*
- e. Was your wife dependant on the income earned by you?*
- f. Did your wife and you equally participate in decision-making process in the household?*

5. How would you describe your life in Tbilisi compared to the life back in Abkhazia?

Follow-up questions:

- a. What problems did you face in terms of adaptation to a new place?*
 - b. In which ways did you personally change after displacement?*
6. After displacement, how did you manage to deal with material hardships? Were you engaged in any available jobs to support your family?

7. Would you say that your wife has relatively more responsibilities and obligations in the household now than she used to have before displacement?

8. In your view, how differently was the displacement experienced by men and women? Who managed to adapt to new life circumstances in an easier way?

9. Did the displacement to a certain extent lessen your authority as the head of the household?

10. Do you consider that the duties and responsibilities of your wife have changed since the displacement?

11. Do you think that the displacement had any influence on your spousal relations? If yes, in which ways was it experienced?

12. In general, would you say that your position as the head of the household has been changed in terms of the decision-making in the family?

13. In your opinion, have the traditional gender roles been renegotiated after displacement?

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