

Cultural responses to changing gender patterns of migration in Georgia¹

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Abstract: The feminization of migration causes social tension, with economic forces typically conflicting with cultural norms that define women in terms of their domestic and childcare roles. This paper examines the emergence of temporary female labor migration in Georgia. Using in-depth interviews with former migrant women in Tbilisi and secondary data concerning migration trends in the region, we examine the increase in registered and unregistered migration from Georgia over the past decade. Institutional changes, particularly the implementation of restrictive immigration legislation in Russia, are shifting migrants to other destinations, often with higher demand for female labor than Russia. Responding to this new migration environment, increasing numbers of women are migrating from Georgia. Our findings indicate that even in the context of shifting migration patterns, traditional gender norms discouraging female migration remain widely held. In addition, strong negative stereotypes of female migrants persist. Female migrants struggle with their own internalized perceptions of “proper” gendered behavior, in the face of Georgia’s dire economic circumstances, which leave women few opportunities to support their families aside from temporary labor migration. We find women utilize a variety of strategies to justify their own migration, and distance their behaviors from negative popular stereotypes.

The political and economic turmoil following the collapse of the Soviet Union has dramatically changed migration dynamics within and from Eurasia. A Eurasian migration system is increasingly evident, reflecting the renegotiated linkages between the newly independent states and the region’s growing ties to the global economy. Within Eurasia, Georgia has long served as a sending country. Over the past twenty years there has been an expansion of labor migration from Georgia, often reaching beyond Eurasia. Since 1990, many members of minority ethnic groups, including Russians, Greeks, Germans, Jews, and Ukrainians, repatriated from Georgia to their national homelands. At the same time, increasing numbers of Georgians have gone abroad in search of work, spurred by widespread unemployment and dismally low salaries. International labor migration has

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become a critical stabilizing factor in Georgia's economy and society. Estimates of the number of Georgians working abroad reach as high as 1 million (out of a total population of 4.6 million), and remittances are conservatively estimated at 20 percent of Georgia's GDP (Kuznetsov 1997).

Temporary male labor migration has long played a role in subsidizing family budgets in Georgia, and dampening the effects of Soviet-era labor shortages in Russia (Shabanova 1991). In the early 1990s, migration from Georgia intensified, dominated by men going to Russia. While many thousands continue to work in Russia and Ukraine, potential destinations for Georgian migrants have expanded substantially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Today, migrants from Georgia can be found in Israel, Turkey, Greece, Western Europe, and even the United States, and many of these migrants are women. Female migration from Georgia challenges deeply embedded social norms that portray men as breadwinners and emphasize the domestic duties and family obligations of women. As cultural norms have yet to adjust to contemporary economic conditions, women's labor migration is typically seen as a negative phenomenon, associated with the destruction of families and linked to immorality and vice.

High demand for female immigrants in many parts of the world leads women to migrate from a wide variety of low- and middle-income countries, even in spite of widespread ambivalence or hostility toward female migration in their home countries. As conditions favoring female labor developed quite recently in Georgia, it provides an interesting and important test case for examining the discrepancy between gender norms and economic imperatives in a migrant-sending society. Although the existence of such a discrepancy is well-documented in a number of countries where female out-migration is

common, there has been little exploration of how female migrants adapt to cultural norms that stigmatize their migration. This is particularly true in Eurasia, where interest in female migration tends to focus heavily on issues of trafficking and exploitation of women. Using structured interviews with returned female migrants, a review of previous studies, and secondary migration statistics for Georgia, this paper examines how women in Georgia manage the discrepancy between their own beliefs about proper gendered behavior and the economic imperatives that encourage them to migrate. We also explore the consequences of this discrepancy, both for the women who migrate, and for society as a whole.

Migration Trends in Georgia: Gender and Destination

During the Soviet period, migration from Georgia was dominated by men who participated in seasonal construction and road building projects in Russia and Ukraine. This demand for mostly male workers reinforced gender norms placing the responsibilities for economic provision upon men, and the responsibilities for domestic provision upon women. These gender norms remain strong. More than ten years after Georgia became independent, a coalition of Georgian women's organizations found that 70 percent or more of the participants in their women's rights seminars believed that the most important tasks for a woman were to remain a virgin until marriage, bear children, and care for their families. Of these tasks, bearing and raising children is generally considered the most important (Tsihistavi and Berekashvili 2002).

Since 1991, both political and economic incentives to emigrate from Georgia have increased. Civil wars in Georgia's regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia forcibly displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes. The majority of these

displaced people remained in Georgia (UNHCR 2000), but at least 100,000 went to Russia (Greene 1998: 291). Throughout the country, energy shortages, political turmoil, and deterioration of public services made living conditions extremely difficult. Economic reforms and marketization have generated intense dislocation, creating large numbers of un- and underemployed. In 2004, 22 percent of adults in Georgia were unemployed, and 63 percent of urban residents, and 81 percent of rural residents, lived below the official poverty level (Dershem and Khoperia 2004). These dire conditions have pushed hundreds of thousands of Georgians to look for work in other countries over the past 15 years.

In addition to these strong push factors, Georgian migrants are also pulled to fill specific labor market needs in a variety of destination countries. Russia provides substantial economic opportunities for Georgian migrants, particularly in the areas of construction and retail trade (see Adelaja 2007; IOM 2003). Prior to the adoption of recent restrictions on migration, Russia was the most accessible destination for Georgian migrants. Georgian nationals could travel to Russia without visas, rely upon strong existing social networks, and benefit from the familiarity (in terms of language and culture) of a shared Soviet experience (see Badurashvili 2004).

Temporary labor migration was not the only form of mobility in Georgia over the past two decades. Georgia is historically a place of considerable ethnic diversity, and when Soviet-era restrictions on migration eased, migration among Georgia's ethnic minorities grew. In the late 1980s, Greece offered residency to anyone proving Greek descent, leading approximately one third of Georgia's approximately 95,000 ethnic Greeks to emigrate by 1993 (de Waal 1994). Similarly, large-scale migration of Soviet Jews to Israel included many Georgian Jews. These ethnically-motivated migration flows

created social networks linking Georgians to former compatriots in Israel, Greece, and other countries.

Russia's desirability as a destination began to change after the 1990s. Escalating political hostilities between Russia and Georgia led to restrictive visa regimes, increasing the costs of Russia as a destination (BBC 2000). In 2006, in the midst of a diplomatic conflict between the two countries, Russia deported thousands of Georgian migrants (Adelaja 2007). This was followed by a presidential decree in early 2007 prohibiting the employment of non-citizens in Russia's retail food sector, including open air markets (RFE/RL 2007). As Russia's policies toward immigrants became increasingly restrictive, job opportunities, offering lower salaries than in Europe, became less attractive. The declining appeal of Russia increased the relative appeal of destinations in Europe, Turkey, and Israel, encouraging the development of nascent formal and informal networks to circumvent migration restrictions. These countries, in turn, have larger demand than does Russia for health aides, nannies, and housekeepers, making them more attractive to female migrants.

Several summary studies have noted the growing number of female labor migrants from Georgia, particularly among migrants going to Europe and the United States (Badurashvili 2004; Dershem and Khoperia 2004; IOM 2003; IOM 2002). Based on a household survey that measured international migration from 1990 to 2003, Dershem and Khoperia (2004) found that 35 percent of migrants from Georgia were women. Badurashvili (2004) estimated that approximately half of migrants who left Georgia from 1997 to 2002 were women, evidence of a trend toward feminization that is likely to be ongoing. The percentage of women among international migrants varies substantially

from region to region, with the highest percentage of female migrants coming from the large cities such as Tbilisi and Rustavi (IOM 2002). Major cities may have led the process of feminization; as early as 1999, a survey by Chelidze (2000) found that nearly half of labor migrants in Tbilisi were women.

However, due to the very high prevalence of undocumented migration, reliable statistics on the total number of men and women who have left Georgia are unavailable. According to the 2002 Georgian census, a total of 113,726 Georgians had left the country as labor migrants, of whom just over 40 percent were women. The majority of both academic and government specialists in Georgia believe that this number dramatically underestimates the real flows (Tsuladze 2005). Unofficial estimates of the total number of out-migrants from Georgia vary widely. While some authors (see Archvadze 2002) use estimates of around 120,000—similar to the census numbers—others estimate that the total number is at least 1 million (see Gachechiladze 1997; Meladze and Tsuladze 1997). Without accurate data on the total scope of out-migration from Georgia, it is impossible to estimate the precise scale of the feminization of labor migration from the country, but all present indications point to its substantial, and growing, importance

There are difficulties in the precise evaluation of migration trends across Eurasia. The emergence of fifteen independent countries after the fall of the Soviet Union internationalized what were previously internal migration routes, disrupted existing systems of migration monitoring, created sizable ethnic diasporas, and coincided with increased regional stratification which raised motivations for migration. In the early 1990s two major international migration flows were anticipated. First, with 25 million ethnic Russians residing in Soviet successor states other than Russia, a massive

movement into the Russian ethnic homeland appeared immanent. Second, large scale out migration from Eurasia into the relatively better off regions of Eastern Europe, or even Western Europe was projected. While returning ethnic migration and out migration to the west did occur, due to a combination of economic perceptions winning over ethnic ties, location loyalty, administrative restrictions, destination labor markets demands, and information asymmetries neither of the anticipated migration movements materialized on the scales projected. Labor migration within Eurasia, typically from the southern Caucasus and Central Asia into Russia, dominantly male, and nearly always unregistered, emerged as the dominant migration trend in the region in the 1990s, and remains an increasingly polarizing political topic (Tishkov et.al. 2005). Poor monitoring of migration in Eurasia, the temporary and unregistered nature of most movement within and out of the region, and the increasing politicized nature of migration discussions in both origin and destination countries combine to generate vastly differing estimates of the number of individuals involved in migration, their age, gender, and ethnic composition, migrant destinations, and the size of capital transfers linked to remittances. However, recent reports have noted indications of increased female participation in labor migration within and out of the Eurasian region.

Women's migration and cultural conflict

The feminization of migration in Georgia reflects both regional specificities and larger global trends. Women have long made up a substantial percentage of all international migrants (Zlotnik 1999). Now, they are increasingly prominent among independent migrants, no longer dependent on migrant husbands, fathers, or sons, but responding to a complex set of pull and push factors (Castles and Miller 2003; Matthei 1996; Pedraza

1991). Substantial demand for female immigrant workers in many industrialized countries pull women to labor markets abroad. Aging populations and high rates of female labor force participation in many industrial societies create demand for workers in traditionally female jobs such as companions for the elderly, housekeepers, and nannies. Pay in these sectors tends to be low, but as housing is often provided within the terms of employment, female immigrants may find migration cheaper and easier than do men. Additionally, women may find it easier than men to migrate without legal documents. Often working in private homes, female undocumented migrants are not always in the public eye, and therefore have some protection from deportation (Lutz 2004).

Both men and women are subject to general push factors, such as unemployment, low wages and poor capital access, (see Massy et.al. 1998), but women experience additional push factors. Research in Thailand indicates that families see female members as more responsible, family-oriented, and likely to send remittances than males, making them better migrants (Curran et.al. 2005). In the Philippines, while male migrants send home a larger percentage of their earnings, women are perceived as remaining more devoted to their families when they go abroad (Semyonov and Gorodzietsky 2005).

Although women are seen as posing less of a risk of abandoning their families after migration, the loss of women's household labor due to migration can be detrimental to the wellbeing of families. Women's typical roles in the household, including housework, childcare, and care for the elderly, are not easily transferred to men when women leave the household (Curran et al. 2005; De Jong 2000). When men migrate, women readily take over traditional male roles, such as disciplining children, interacting with government agencies, and planning household investments (Parrenas 2005; Hondagneu-

Sotelo 1994). More importantly, female migrants present a greater threat to traditional ideals of family and gender relations in comparison to male migration. Male migrants maintain their traditional breadwinner roles, while female migrants cannot easily maintain their roles as mothers and housekeepers from abroad (Asis et al. 2004). Migrant mothers are portrayed as selfish, abandoning their children. Male migrants are viewed as altruistic, sacrificing for the good of their families (Keough 2006; Parrenas 2005). Young, unmarried female migrants are viewed especially negatively. By living abroad, they are not subject to traditional sources of family and community control, placing them at risk of dishonorable behavior (Dannecker 2005).

In the many instances where women migrate in spite of the challenge it presents to local gender norms, little is known about how women adapt to such norms. To some extent, migrant women's exposure to less restrictive gender norms in their destination countries, and their experience as autonomous participants in the labor market, may motivate them to challenge the gender norms of their home communities (Dannecker 2005; Parrado et al. 2005). But deeply held gender norms do not change easily, even where female migration is very common (Parrenas 2005; Mahler 1999), forcing women to develop other strategies in order to fulfill their roles as both women and migrants.

Focus

Using interviews with nine female international migrants who have returned to Georgia, and a review of previous work on outmigration from Georgia, this paper focuses on documenting the social norms that female migrants from Georgia face and the strategies that they use to adapt to them. Limited literature on female migration from Georgia exists, but most tends to focus upon issues of trafficking and exploitation of women (see

IOM 2003; IOM 2002; Tsihistavi and Berekashvili 2002). This paper expands our understanding of women's migration from Georgia by examining the pressures, constraints, and opportunities that women experience in their negotiation of the global labor market. It complements previous research on labor migration and gender norms in other countries by examining a country where women's participation in the local labor market has long been the norm, but participation in the global labor market is relatively recent. It expands our theoretical understanding of discrepancies between economic incentives facilitating women's migration and cultural norms discouraging it by focusing on women's adaptation strategies and their consequences.

Because of the prevalence of undocumented migration, very little is known about the Georgian migrant population, and even less about female migrants. We used semi-structured interviews to conduct preliminary research on this population. Using semi-structured interviews, we explored specific issues of importance in migration decision making, such as social networks, legal restrictions, and stereotypes about women who migrate. We also employed open-ended inquiries to illicit respondent insights concerning the migration process and returning home. This allowed us to both compare Georgia to other migrant-sending countries and identify issues specific to the local context.

Methods

We conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews of nine migrant women in Tbilisi, Georgia, in June and July 2007. Prior to the initiation of data collection, we developed a standardized interview protocol. The instrument was translated into Russian, and then back translated to ensure accuracy. Using a snowball sampling technique, respondents with Russian language ability, who had worked outside of Georgia for at least 6 months,

and had used their earnings to support family members remaining behind were selected through a snowball sampling technique. All interviews were conducted in Russian, taped, and transcribed into English by the first author. Transcripts were then assessed for clarity by the second author, and edited, returning back to the taped interviews as needed.

The data was coded according to three meta-codes corresponding to the main themes that emerged from the interviews: factors in the respondents' decisions to migrate, gender norms related to migration, and consequences of migration. The data was then broken down further into secondary categories for each meta-code. The first stage of coding was done by the first author, and the resulting codes were then reviewed by the second author and revised for clarity by both authors. The final coding scheme included between three and five secondary codes for each meta-category. The migration decisions meta-category consists of five codes that encompass push and pull factors, the costs and risks of migration, networks, and the influence of family and friends on migration decisions. The gender norms meta-category includes stereotypes about female migrants, a code to indicate changing norms, as well as a code for perceived differences between male and female migration. The consequences of migration category included codes related to remittances as well as the personal and psychological costs of migration. To assess inter-coder reliability, we selected five key codes (the three codes in the gender norms category, plus one each from the migration decisions and consequences categories) and compared the coding of both authors. We achieved between 80 and 86 percent agreement in coding in each of the five categories.

Basic characteristics of the respondents is provided in Table One. Of the nine respondents, three had worked outside of the CIS, and five in Russia and one in Russia

and Azerbaijan. The duration of migration ranged from six months to 14 years. At the time of the interview, two respondents were married, two were separated from their husbands, two were widowed, and one was single. Only one respondent had no children at the time of her migration, two had children who were already adults, and the remaining six had minor children at the time of migration. The respondents were well educated, several had completed higher education. Only two of the respondents, both of whom had gone to Russia, had worked legally. While three respondents went to Russia during the period of an open visa regime, and portrayed themselves as legal migrants, they openly noted they lacked proper work permits while in Russia.

Table One. Sample Characteristics

Name	Marital Status	Year of Migration	Children (at migration)	Destination	Duration	Occupation	Legal Status	Co Mi
Tamuna	Widowed	2000	1 adult	Israel	6 years	Eldercare	no	yes
Irina	Separated	1990, 1994	1 school aged	Greece	6 wk, 6mo	Factory worker, Maid	no	yes
Eka	Single	2004	none	Turkey (Istanbul)	2 Years	Domestic worker	no	yes
Nina	Divorced	1993-1999	1 school aged	Russia (Valdikavkaz)	Seasonal	Baker, NGO	yes	yes
Shorena	Married	2001, 2005	2 school aged	Russia, Azerbaijan	2 Yrs, 6 Mo	Market trader	no permit	yes
Maka	Separated	1997	3 school aged	Russia (Moscow)	2 years	Market trader	no permit	yes
Khatuna	Married	1996	3 school aged	Russa (Rostov)	6 mo	Market trader	no permit	am
Bidsina	Widowed	1993	2 adults (mig.)	Russia (Moscow)	14 years	Cook	no	no
Ketevan	Single	1996	1 preschool	Russia (Moscow)	5 years	Store clerk	yes	no

Findings

Findings illustrate how Georgian women, motivated by poverty and assisted by strong international networks, are engaging in international migration, but also suffering from

local norms stigmatizing women who migrate. Women who have engaged in labor migration nonetheless openly discuss, and appear to agree with, norms discouraging female migration. Two cognitive strategies for adapting to their norm challenging behavior emerged from the interviews. First, all of the respondents present labor migration as their only available option for economic survival, rather than an active choice among various options. Secondly, most respondents were quick to differentiate their individual migration experience from situations linked to stigmatizing or “bad” migration.

Factors facilitating women’s migration

The perception that employment opportunities were much better in other countries than in Georgia was the primary reason that women gave for their desire to migrate. All of the respondents complained bitterly about the lack of good jobs in Georgia. Eka, a young woman who had worked in Turkey to support her brother and widowed mother, said: “Here, in Georgia, it is very hard. There is no work, there is no salary. I... finished university in the economics department...and there is no work. In our family there are problems. My mother doesn’t work, my brother doesn’t work...there was no money.” There was a widespread belief that just about anywhere one could go, there would be better job opportunities available than in Georgia. Irina, a divorced woman who had worked in Greece and was eager to back, noted: “The important thing is to get out of here...If you want to find work, you’ll find it.”

Several of the women mentioned the potential to migrate legally as a motivating factor, and the risk of illegal migration as a deterrent. Shorena, Bidsina, and Ketevan, who had worked in Russia in the past, felt at the time of the interview that working in

Russia was no longer worth the risk, given the strong anti-immigrant—and particularly anti-Georgian—climate in the country. Bidsina, who had been in Moscow during the 2006 deportations of thousands of Georgians, found the experience very frightening:

[Russian police] went into restaurants and cafes where mostly Georgians worked. And when they found [Georgians], they immediately took them without any questions. There were even cases where people had valid documents, and they didn't even consider that. You're a Georgian, and that's it... I saw my acquaintances getting deported, sitting in jail for two months, or one month, or two weeks in these containment cells. And I got scared. I thought, I'm getting to be an old woman, and I have my problems, if I end up [in jail], I won't come out alive.

Other respondents, also aware of the risks associated with illegal migration, felt that the potential rewards were worth the risk. Khatuna described how Georgians would travel to Greece by hiding in boxes in the back of busses: “To travel like this, without documents, is a big risk, but it is worth it to many people.”

Most of the respondents chose destinations where friends or family members were already living. Having such social capital at destination was seen as a means of mitigating the risks of migration. The social networks that facilitate women's migration have existed for many years. The first of the women in the sample to migrate, Irina, made her first trip to Greece in 1990. She went to Greece with logistical and financial support from two friends—members of Georgia's Greek minority who had emigrated in 1989. Two other early migrants were motivated by ethnic conflict in Georgia. Nina, a Georgian with an ethnically Ossetian mother, began making regular trips back and forth to her family in Russia's North Ossetia province in 1993. Bidsina, an ethnic Georgian from Abkhazia, fled to Moscow at the start of the region's civil war in 1993. The women who migrated in these early waves, motivated by ethnic conflict and a desire for repatriation, could serve as network builders and as examples of successful migration, facilitating the

migration of further waves of women.

Gender norms and stereotypes

While ethnically motivated migration flows tend to include both men and women, labor migration has traditionally been a male-dominated activity in Georgia. Although participation in the local labor force is the norm for women in Georgia (largely a result of Soviet labor policies), the roles of wife and mother are substantially more important to social conceptions of women, as well as to women's own identities, than are the roles of breadwinner and provider. Women's migration presents a challenge to these traditional gender norms. In the interviews, women tended to speak less about the money they earned, and more about how difficult it was for them to be separated from their families, particularly their children.

We were right on the shore, and sometimes I went out, and I cried so, and I suffered so much, thinking that [my son] was with mom, my nostalgia was so terrible...Before I left, in one week I had called home six times. [My friends in Greece] were already telling me to stay for longer, but I missed [my son] so much, I so wanted to go home, I couldn't stay. I held out for half a year, I couldn't hold out any longer [Irina].

In response to questions about how people in Georgia perceive women who have worked abroad, respondents echoed issues raised by previous work on female migration. Several respondents mentioned the risk of behaving immorally, or of being suspected of immoral behavior (mainly prostitution), as a problem for migrant woman, particularly those who went to Greece or Turkey.

Now about those who went to Turkey and Greece, there are legends about them. True or untrue, and maybe they are not true, but once you have gone there, it means you are not a decent [*poriadochniy*] person [Nina].

The women in the sample were generally eager to dispel this stereotype, at least as it

related to themselves. Irina told this story:

My friends and I, ten years ago, we were a bit younger, and prettier. And so my friends, they were living [in Greece], and they came here for a visit, and their father said: “so you left, and you don’t have anything, you don’t have an apartment in Greece or anything, and look, other people come back and they have an apartment, and a car.” But they told him straight off: “papa, we don’t earn money that way, so don’t expect anything.”

Although they took pains in the interviews to present themselves as decent, moral people, not all respondents made the same assumption about other female migrants. To a large extent, therefore, it seems that they had internalized the stereotype that women’s migration is often associated with immortality and felt a need to demonstrate that they themselves were exceptions. Only one, Khatuna, who was married with three children, expressed resentment at negative stereotypes of female migrants, saying “I think our national mentality is just rather stupid in this regard.”

A second aspect of the negative perception of female migrants is the belief that they have abandoned their roles as wives and mothers.

If someone leaves, then let it be the husband who leaves and let the woman stay home. Let the woman stay and look after the home, and that’s it. And when a woman leaves her home, that’s something bad [Shorena].

Respondents feared that when women leave their families, it could harm both their children and their husbands. Several stated that children needed their mothers—more so than their fathers—and feared that mothers who migrate for long periods deprive their children of an important presence in their lives. Another common concern was the effect that the migration of wives could have on their husbands, who would lack their supervision.

But many women have divorced their husbands, because they work over there, they brought their children with them, and only the husband is left, and for many people the family has fallen apart in this way...Many of

these men have died, from drinking or from something else [Nina]

By going abroad, women could greatly improve their ability to provide economically for their families, but being a good provider did not necessarily compensate for being a bad mother or wife. In extreme cases, female migrants were seen as causing the break up of the families that they left to support.

The respondents felt quite strongly that women have a primary responsibility to care for their families, and accepted the norm that providing such care should involve remaining physically close to them. When asked what they would advise an acquaintance who was considering migration, they responded, almost unanimously, that they would advise her to do so, for the economic advantages were substantial. But their responses were qualified. Ketevan, returning to the theme of choicelessness, said: “If there is any possibility of working here, then it’s best of all to stay here, with your children. But if you don’t have such possibility, you have to go.” Shorena advised, even more strongly: “If she goes, then let her take her family and all go, because it is best if the family can be together.”

Echoing sentiments found in other migrant-sending societies, two respondents noted that women’s stronger ties to family can make women better migrants than men. They saw women as more likely to continue to support the family while abroad. Ketevan explained: “It’s better for women to leave. Because when guys leave, no one comes back... Women won’t just abandon their children. Rarely, anyway. But for a man, it’s easy.” This justification of female migration does represent a challenge to the perception of female migrants as abandoning their families, and demonstrates that migrant women in Georgia do not completely internalize all negative stereotypes about them. However, it

does not challenge the centrality of the roles of wife and mother in the social definition of being a woman.

Adaptation

Overall, the women in this sample had internalized social norms about women's role as caretakers and their need for male supervision to a significant extent. Their own decisions to migrate, therefore, were made in defiance of their beliefs about women's roles. The respondents—and usually their close family and friends as well—saw their own cases as exceptions to these general norms, and employed a number of adaptive strategies in making and discussing their decision to migrate.

By far the most common means of adapting one's own migration experience to fit with social norms was by maintaining the belief that migration was the only choice available. This belief was particularly prominent among the women who did not have husbands to provide for them. The majority of the women in the sample (six out of nine) were unmarried (widowed or single), or separated, at the time of their migration. Of the three married women, one, Nina, was married to a drug addict who was unable to provide for the family. These women were by necessity the primary economic providers for their families. In this extreme situation, they felt that their only choice was to find work abroad.

The two women who were married and co-resident with their husbands (Khatuna and Shorena) expressed less of a sense of choicelessness when they discussed their decision to migrate. Both stated that their husbands had been involved in the decision. Shorena explained that she and her husband decided that their unusually strong marriage would allow her to migrate without harm to the family:

My husband and I decided that I should go and find work. But our friends and relatives didn't like it. Because when in a family the husband or the wife leaves, it can happen that the family falls apart, or other bad things. They were afraid of this. But in the family, we decided that we could do this.

Khatuna, on the other hand, had to overcome her husband's objection to her migration on the grounds that it was not a "decent" thing for a woman to do. She was able to overcome his objection without challenging the norm that women require familial supervision by going to Rostov, in southern Russia, where her brother was living. The presence of a close (male) relative convinced Khatuna's husband and other relatives that migration was an acceptable option for her. Although both Khatuna and Shorena described their migration as a choice made within the family, they nonetheless felt that it was a choice made in an extraordinarily difficult economic situation that left them few viable options.

A less common adaptive strategy described by the respondents was a redefinition of womanhood to include the roles that they had played as migrants. Tamuna, who spent six years as an in-home eldercare worker in a single family, presented a very idealized view of the care work that she had provided to her employers in Israel: "The Jews there, they told me there that I did a good deed by looking after a woman who was very sick... When I lived there, I said that while this saintly woman lives, I will look after her." Several respondents also expressed pride in their ability to provide financially for their families through migration. According to Irina: "In my circle, for example, [we think of migration] very positively. If a person is in need, and can solve their problems in this way, than no one will be against it. Just the opposite, we are very happy."

In making their decision to migrate, the respondents typically found that members of their immediate social circle were supportive. Friends and family members were

concerned about the consequences of migrant women abandoning their traditional roles, but they agreed that migration was the best possible response to an extreme situation. Replying to a question about whether or not her parents had wanted her to migrate, Ketevan said: “Well, wanting [me to leave] or not wanting it—that’s not the issue.” The issue, in her opinion, was that they recognized the necessity of her migration. In addition to accepting their daughter’s choice to migrate, Ketevan’s parents, like the parents of most other respondents, provided a vital source of support. Six of the nine respondents left minor children behind during all or part of their migration, and in only one of those six cases were the children left primarily in the care their father. In the others, the migrant’s mother (or both mother and father) looked after the children—sometimes for years. Without such assistance, it is unlikely that these women would have been able to migrate at all.

Another important consequence of the support that the respondents had from their immediate families and close friends is that it seems to protect them from the social stigma associated with being a female migrant. Although there were emotional costs of migration associated with acting in violation of their own beliefs, none of the respondents reported experiencing any direct effects of the widespread negative perceptions of female migrants. Overall, adaptation strategies that allowed women to frame their migration in ways that did not challenge traditional gender norms appeared to be very effective, both for the respondents themselves, and in eliciting support within their immediate social circles.

Consequences of the disconnect between migration decisions and gender norms

To some extent, the adaptation of female migrants and their families to the idea of

migration can have a transformative effect on social norms. Several respondents encountered a widespread encouragement of migration for women who face financial need.

If you don't have a job for at least 500 lari [around \$180 per month], at a minimum, then it is very hard for you here. I, for example advise everyone to leave, just as everyone advises me to do the same. They yell at me, even [Nina].

When asked if she would advise a female friend to migrate, Maka replied: "God willing, if she find work there, if everything will be good for her there, if it helps her family, then why not go?" Although most respondents qualified their opinion by saying that migration should only be used as a last resort, nearly all would advise female friends to migrate.

Two respondents (Nina and Ketevan) expressed the belief that as more and more women have left Georgia in search of work, gender norms have started to change. Specifically, they both felt that women who had worked abroad were less likely to be suspected of immoral behavior today than they were in the past.

I'm sure there are some people who are still against [women's migration], but...before, you know, you may have had one or two or three acquaintances who had gone abroad, and people might talk about them. But now very many people have left, and this already touches [everyone's] families. So if earlier, someone said, look, his wife has left, and is off doing who knows what, well, now his own wife is the one who has left [Nina].

Because international migration has become an attractive option for such a large number of women in Georgia, it seems likely that negative stereotypes about women migrants—particularly the association between migration and immoral behavior—may diminish with time. But although in this respect social norms appear to be changing to accommodate the new reality of women's migration, in other respects migration appears to have little or no effect on social norms. The belief that women have the primary

responsibility for caring for children and family and should not leave them if at all possible was very strong among all of the respondents. There is no reason to assume, therefore, that social norms will fully “catch up” with the realities of migration patterns in the foreseeable future. The migration of women may continue to be seen as a negative phenomenon, even as many people are willing to accept—and even encourage—the migration decisions of their daughters, wives, sisters, and friends.

One potential consequence of the persistence of traditional gender norms is to discourage women from migrating. Studies of Bangladesh (Dannecker 2005) and Morocco (Heering et al. 2004) have shown that restrictive cultural norms can dampen women’s migration. At least two of the respondents in this study (Irina and Khatuna) cut their period of migration short out of loneliness and a sense that they had abandoned their families. In both cases, they had the opportunity and ability to remain working abroad, but instead chose to return home after about six months, choices that resulted in significant financial losses for their families.

Even those women who did not report limiting their migration period described the separation from their families as extremely painful. Eka reported:

I was two years there. The first three months were very frightening, very hard. I missed home. I had nothing. No mother. No family, no friends. When there is nothing, you can go crazy.

Although migration is an inherently stressful event, and separation from one’s family and friends will almost certainly be a painful experience, female migrants, who often act in defiance of their own beliefs about the proper role for women, may face additional, emotional costs to migration that do not affect men. In Hondagneu-Sotelo’s (1994) interviews with Mexican men who had migrated to the United States, the prospect of

adventure, and of seeing the world, was a strong motivation in their decision to migrate—stronger, in fact, than the desire to help their families. This was not the case among the respondents in this study, most of whom felt pushed out of Georgia, rather than drawn to see the world. Two respondents (Tamuna and Irina) did have positive memories of their migration experience and saw it as something of an adventure. Nevertheless, even they described the pain of separation from their families. Tamuna, who left behind a grown daughter and granddaughter while working in Israel for six years, said: “To part from your family, your children, your dear ones, your relatives, it’s very painful, of course...the love of a family is a holy thing...But when you are in need...that pushes you to close your eyes on love and go somewhere where you can earn money.”

Despite the intense difficulty of separation, out of all the respondents, only Tamuna reported any long-term negative effects on her relationship with her family as a result of migration. She found it difficult to pick up her life in Georgia when she returned because her personal relationships had been strained by her six-year absence. “From the financial side, [migration] is good, but, you know, you lose some of your connections, your old connections...I very much wanted to return, but it has been nothing but disappointment.” The remaining respondents said that their relationships with family and friends had not been hurt by separation, and, in one case, that her relationship with her husband and children had been strengthened by the trials that her migration had caused them.

Conclusions

Georgia provides a valuable case study for examining the emergence of a discrepancy between migration patterns and gender norms, and the consequences of such a discrepancy, because the economic and institutional factors that encourage large-scale

out-migration of women developed fairly recently in Georgia. The case of Georgia demonstrates the rapidity with which migration patterns can shift in response to changing political, institutional, and economic conditions. Poverty and a lack of local employment opportunities were the primary motivators for women who decided to migrate, and strong international networks facilitated their migration. Despite the fact that labor migration from Georgia was historically male-dominated, by the mid-1990s, women who wished to migrate had a number of social networks available to them. The shared Soviet experience and flows of refugees after the Soviet collapse meant that many Georgian women had close friends or relatives living in Russia. In addition, ethnically motivated migrations from Georgia established Georgian-origin communities of both men and women in countries like Greece and Israel, who could also assist women who wished to migrate. The growing hostility toward Georgian migrants in Russia has increased the relative importance of networks leading to Europe.

Although economic and structural factors tend to promote out-migration among women, cultural norms tend to discourage it. Norms that define women in terms of their roles as wives, mothers, and homemakers remain very strong in Georgia. Stereotypes about women who migrate portray them as bad mothers and wives because they are not available to care for their families, and as potential prostitutes or criminals. From the experiences of the women in our study, it is clear that women who chose to migrate are not necessarily rejecting traditional gender norms. Two cognitive strategies for adapting to their norm challenging behavior emerged from the interviews. First, all of the respondents present labor migration as their only available option for economic survival, rather than an active choice among various options. This was particularly true among

women who did not have husbands who could support them. Secondly, most respondents were quick to differentiate their individual migration experience from situations linked to stigmatizing or “bad” migration.

The families and friends of many women who wish to migrate also accept that there is no other choice, and they are willing to “excuse” these women from their normal caretaker roles and encourage them to go abroad in a breadwinner role. Cultural norms are not entirely stagnant, and they have shifted somewhat to (grudgingly) accommodate new realities. But while social acceptance of women as migrants and breadwinners has grown, women as wives, mothers, and caretakers remains the clear ideal.

This study begins to draw some conclusions about how the discrepancy between gender norms and individuals’ actions affects female migrants in Georgia. Grudging societal acceptance of female migration, and—more importantly—the support of close family and friends can serve to buffer women from the most severe social stigma associated with being a woman and a migrant. The most common effect among the respondents was the pain and worry that they felt at being separated from their families, particularly from their children. In some cases, the desire to be reunited with their children led women to cut their periods of migration short, or to reconsider future trips abroad. The possibility of migration forced women to choose between being breadwinners and being caretakers. The respondents are women who, at least for a time, chose to be breadwinners, but none of them found the choice to be easy or painless.

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