National Gender Norms and Transnational Identities: Migration Experiences of Georgian Women in London

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Gender and nation are two deeply intertwined features in shaping collective and individual identities. Within the hegemonic national community, women are supposed to adapt their own lives and self-perceptions to roles ascribed to them by what is seen as national tradition. However, transnational migrations have been challenging the overwhelming role of the nation-state in shaping people's identities and loyalties. The physical and psychological displacement that migration entails can be used by migrants to liberate themselves from the overarching pressure of the nation-state. Using data from interviews conducted amongst Georgian women living in London, this article investigates the role of gender and nation in a transnational context. Georgian women's narratives highlight whether Georgian national gender norms are challenged or reinforced by these women's distance from their homeland. This analysis leads to some considerations about the present-day role of nationalism and the nation-state in a transnational world.

INTRODUCTION

The national community, although conceived as a 'deep, horizontal comradeship'[1] is actually far from being a homogeneous and inclusive entity. Rather, the nation is formed by multiple and conflicting identities. In order to cope with such heterogeneity, nationalism has attained the status of a 'binding and overarching umbrella that subsumes other and different political temporalities'[2]. Gender, along with ethnicity, class, and age, is a social feature strongly affected by such an all-embracing ideology. In order to be 'proper' and loyal members of their national community, women are required to embrace identities and roles in accordance with national norms. From this perspective, nationalism, although apparently a cohesive ideology promoting its own common values against those of other nations, is rather an exclusive force, which discriminates against those who are supposed to belong to the national community.

Phenomena such as globalisation and massive migration have brought into question both the hegemonic role of the nation-state in the global political and economic arena and the

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[1] B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, (London: Verso, 1983), p. 16.
[2] R. Radhakrishnan, 'Nationalism, Gender and the Narrative of Identity', in *Nationalisms and Sexualities* ed. by A. Parker et al, (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 78.

relevance of considering concepts of culture and society as bound within individual nation-states.[3] Identities are being increasingly de-territorialized and constantly reshaped in an interconnected world[4]. In particular, transnational migrants have been regarded as potential challenges to the hegemony of the nation-state.[5]

This article focuses on narratives of Georgian women living in London, in order to investigate the role of gender and nation in a transnational context. Compliance with Georgian national gender norms, which is deeply rooted in national tradition, is a way to prove loyalty to the nation-state. This article aims to highlight whether migration is seen by these women as an opportunity to escape Georgian gender norms or, instead, if the attachment to gendered roles is reproduced and even reinforced by distance from the homeland. First, the article analyses women's role within Georgian society, linking Georgian gender norms to nationalism. Second, the relationship between migration and identity, and especially the interaction between gender and nation (as two of the most powerful features in shaping identity) in the displacing situation of migration is analysed. This theoretical framework is subsequently discussed in connection with the case of Georgian migrant women in London, exposing findings collected through interviews with seven Georgian women living and working in London. By linking the compliance with Georgian gender norms to attachment and loyalty to the nation-state, this study highlights the heterogeneous and sometimes contradictory role of the nation-state in the transnational context and in transnational migrants' lives and identities.

GEORGIAN WOMEN AND NATIONAL TRADITION

Nationalism is a powerful discourse [6] in shaping collective and individual identities. Setting up a range of values and traditions, supposedly shared by all members of the national community, nationalism draws the boundaries between 'insiders' and 'outsiders', according

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[3] G. Fouron and N. Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family: Gender, Transnational Migration and the Nation-State', *Identities*, 7(2001), 539-582. See also N. Glick Schiller, 'A Global Perspective on Transnational Migration: Theorising Migration without Methodological Nationalism', WP-09-67 (Oxford: Centre of Migration, Policy and Society, 2009).

[4] R. Salih, *Gender in Transnationalism: Home, Longing and Belonging Among Moroccan Migrant Women* (London: Routledge, 2003). See also M. Kearney, 'The Local and the Global: The Anthropology of Globalisation and Transnationalism' in *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995), 547-565.

[5] N. Al-Ali and K. Koser, *New approaches to migration? Transnational communities and the transformation of home* (London: Routledge, 2002). See also S. Lavie and T. Swedenburg, *Displacemet, Disapora and Geographies of Identity* (London: Duke University Press, 1996).

[6] Fouron and Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family', p. 570. Craig Calhoun applied the Foucaldian term of 'discursive formation' to nationalism; the latter is described as a 'floating signifier', which makes the nation and national struggle understandable and attainable by 'those who rally around the same flag'

to individuals' compliance with values of the national group.[7] In post-socialist countries, the link between gender and nationalism has had specific features. Since nationalism was one of the main forces contributing to the final demise of the USSR and the socialist Yugoslavia, nation-building projects of these newly independent states aimed at re-appropriating their own national specificities, distancing themselves from the inherited socialist narratives.[8] Moreover, as women under socialism had supposedly attained a more equal status to men,[9] one of the main tasks of post-socialist nation-building projects was to redefine women's proper role within the newly-born national communities.[10]

Georgian society is deeply permeated by features that are considered essential parts of the national tradition. Overarching characteristics and stereotypes of Georgian society can be traced back to the so-called 'Mediterranean value system', which entails 'close emotional relationships within extended families, the importance of kinship, parent-child interdependency, and certain modesty in sexual relations'.[11] A culture that attaches such value to "informal" relationships among individuals, and especially to kinship and family networks, is expected to prescribe well-defined roles and unwritten yet powerful rules for those living within these social entities. Thus, members of Georgian society are required to comply with social norms rooted in age-long traditions and practices. These norms have always made strong distinctions between men's and women's respective roles, rights, duties, and responsibilities.

Looking at attitudes towards women in Georgian history and tradition, a certain ambiguity is observable. On the one hand, national history is permeated by a cult of women, who are seen as the embodiment of the nation – heroic and strong mothers who give birth,

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[7] Glick Schiller, 'A Global Perspective'. See also N. Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (London: Sage, 1996).

[8] R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

[9]Marxist-Leninist doctrine saw women's emancipation as an essential part of the broader proletarian fight. However, while in some measures were taken the aftermath of the Revolution to emancipate women from the private sphere and to involve them in the public arena (especially thanks to the efforts of feminists such as A. Kollantai and I. Armand, directors of *Zhenotdel'*, the Party branch dealing with women's issues), overall, women never achieved equal status with men. On the contrary, they were oppressed by the 'double burden' of old household responsibilities and new participation in the labour force. See C. Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden: Women's Experience of Change in Central and Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. (London: Scarlet, 1992). See also A. Ishkanian, 'Gendered Transitions: The Impact of the Post-Soviet Transition on Women in Central Asia and the Caucasus', *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 2 (2003), 475-496.

[10] M. Korać, 'Understanding Ethnic-National Identity and its Meaning: Questions from Women's Experience' *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19 (1996), 130-134. See also W. Bracewell, 'Women, Motherhood and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism'. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 19(1996), 25-33. See also K. Verdery, 'From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs: Gender and Nation in Contemporary Eastern Europe' *East European Politics and Societies*, 8(1994), 225-255.

[11] Although Georgia and the Caucasus do not belong to this geographical area, the focus of Mediterraneanist anthropology on features such as the primacy of family ties, honour and shame, the role of networks of friends and acquaintances, which are readily observable within Georgian society, makes such an approach quite insightful for describing the 'Caucasian value system' as well.

raise, and protect the sons of Georgia (but who also need to be protected by them). As Dragadze points out in her ethnography of Soviet Georgian families in a mountain village, 'all people who are female are the potential source and bearers of life, and so it is thought that all essential female characteristics derive from that'.[12] Furthermore, 'Georgia itself, as a nation, culture, and ethnic entity is invariably symbolized by a woman. Your country is referred to as your *Deda-mitsa*, "Mother-ground" [...]. The Georgian language is *Deda-ena*, "Mother-tongue" [...]. The capital of Georgia, Tbilisi, is *Deda-Kʼalakʼi*, "Mother-city"'.[13] Women are expected to have certain attributes, such as constancy, stability, and reliability (qualities considered to be weaker in men), as well as bashfulness, flexibility, and pragmatism.[14] These attributes, although socially constructed and culturally bounded, are deemed to be inherent in all human beings, and the only acceptable characteristics, according to a universal moral system: 'not to possess them or not to manifest them in recognizable ways can only be explained, in local terms, by a lack of humanness, by being outside the human category in a certain way'.[15]

Therefore, this does not mean that women are regarded as lower beings *per se*. On the contrary, womanhood is considered as a fundamental part in the historical and cultural imagery of the nation. However, women are valued as 'Georgians' (and, as argued above, even considered as 'proper' human beings) only to the extent to which they comply with roles considered 'natural' to them; womanhood and motherhood are regarded as two inseparable categories.[16] As a consequence, any expression of women's sexuality that is not strictly related to fertility and pregnancy has to be silent. While pre-marital sex is regarded as an acceptable behaviour for men, the myth of women's virginity is still widespread. By the same token, men and women are judged differently regarding adultery, divorce, and remarriage.[17]

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[12] T. Dragadze, *Rural Families in Soviet Georgia: A Case Study in Racha Province* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988). p. 159.

[13] Ibid., p. 158.

[14] M. Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 'Treading on the Fine Line Between Self-Sacrifice and Immorality: Narratives of Emigrated Georgian Women'. *Transcience Journal*, 1(2010), 50-71.

[15] Dragadze, *Rural Families in Soviet Georgia*, p. 157.

[16] In the aftermath of the dissolution of socialist regimes this issue was overwhelming in nationalist politics. Boosted by demographic concerns and the need to mark the ethnic boundaries of new-born nation-states, nationalist rhetoric urged women to bear as many children as possible, severely condemning abortion as well as parenthood with 'outsiders' See Bracewell, 'Women, Motherhood and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism', Korać, 'Understanding Ethnic-National Identity', Verdery, 'From Parent-State to Family Patriarchs', J. Plakwicz, 'Poland: Between Church and State: Polish Women's Experience', in Corrin, *Superwomen and the Double Burden*.

[17] Statistical data showing how this patterns are still strongly rooted within contemporary Georgian society can be found in a 2003 survey on perceptions of generational and gendered roles and values, as well as in a 2005 UNESCO survey on the spread of HIV/AIDS in the Caucasus. See C. Buckley, 'Socio-Cultural Correlates of HIV/AIDS in the Southern Caucasus', in *UNESCO HIV and AIDS in the Caucasus Region: A Socio-Cultural Approach* (UNESCO Culture and Development Section, Paris, 2005). .

Along with the presentation of tradition in such nationalist terms, the Georgian Orthodox Church has played a major role in the promotion and preservation of the above-mentioned social patterns, especially in emphasising the absolute priority for women to be mothers and nurturers. The link between religion and nationalism has been very strong in Georgian history, with the Church as a powerful element of resistance against foreign invaders and oppressors (be they Muslim neighbours, the Russian Empire or the Soviet regime) and one of the main epithets of 'Georgian-ness' (Johnston 1993). Therefore, personal identification with the Georgian nation widely converges with identification with the Church's values. Religious authorities have a substantial influence in directing public policies and rhetoric, as well as in affecting people's beliefs and practices within the private sphere.[18] Presidential propaganda regularly shows the Head of State Mikheil Saakashvili cooperating with Church authorities and attending all major religious celebrations.[19] The national media itself contributes to reinforcing the role of the Church as a moral and political guide within society. The following statement by the Church's patriarch opened a 2007 issue of the popular magazine 'Georgian Woman': 'Orthodox Christianity is our historical decision, foundation of our consciousness and life. According to the nation's interest the Church even today plays a role of so called "people's diplomat"'.[20] And indeed the Church has attained the status of a quasi collective consciousness in Georgian society, as well as of arbiter of private and public morality and respectability.

Political and religious rhetoric appealing to national history and tradition have been deeply integrated into the everyday practices and beliefs of Georgians. The way in which relations of domination (here gender can be considered a paradigmatic issue) are internalized and reproduced by individuals can be analysed using Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of symbolic violence and *habitus*. Defining symbolic violence as 'violence which is exercised upon a social agent with his or her complicity', Bourdieu points out that gender domination is such a durable issue because it is not solely imposed from above by institutions of power (which, nevertheless, boost and preserve such inequalities), but, most importantly, because dominated individuals themselves perceive it as self-evident and universal, 'misrecognising'

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[18] A. Rekhviashvili, *Nationalism and Motherhood in Contemporary Georgia*. (Master of Arts: Central European University, 2010).

[19] After the 'blood and soil' populist rhetoric of Gamsakhurdia, the first President of independent Georgia, and the more pragmatic nationalism of his successor Shevardnadze, the policies of Saakashvili's government, on the one hand, are seeking integration within Western societies and institutions. On the other hand, contemporary Georgian politicians emphasize the uniqueness of the Georgian nation, particularly after the 2008 conflict with Russia over the breakaway territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. See S. Jones, 'Georgia: Nationalism from Under Rubble', in *After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States*, edited by I. W. Barrington, (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2006).

[20] K. Chartolani, *From "Soviet Woman" to "Cosmopolitan": A Critical Reading of Women's Press in Georgia* (Master of Arts: Central European University, 2009), p. 43.

it as actual violence.[21] The effects of symbolic domination are not part of the realm of logic and consciousness; they are exerted 'through the schemes of perception, appreciation and action that are constitutive of *habitus*'.[22] The latter is defined as 'a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition of all objectification and apperception'.[23] Women's embodiment and display of attributes deemed to be innate to them is a manifestation of female *habitus*, which is, in turn, an expression of relations of domination established through symbolic violence.

THE NATION, TRANSNATIONALISM, GENDER, IDENTITY

What happens to such a deep embodiment of female *habitus*, which strongly shapes women's identities, during the uprooting experience of migration? Migration scholarship has been increasingly focusing on the phenomenon of transnationalism, which describes the migrants' involvement in creating and sustaining economic, social, and psychological relationships between their homelands and the receiving countries.[24] In our supposedly global contemporary world migrants can no longer be analysed as static subjects, uprooted from their countries of origin and transplanted in foreign societies, where they would be expected to settle more or less permanently. Transnational migration sets up links of continuity within and between migrants' sending and receiving countries, which develop into phenomena such as transnational social networks, return migration, the sending of remittances to the place of origin, the constitution of transnational families, and dual citizenship.[25] Moreover, transnationalism entails the constant negotiation and revision of migrants' identities, as well as of the social meanings that they attach to their old and new roles and practices. Indeed,

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[21] P. Bourdieu and L. Wacquant, 'Symbolic Violence', in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, edited by N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). p. 272.

[22] P. Bourdieu, 'Gender and Symbolic Violence', in *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, edited by N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004). p. 340.

[23] P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[24] Glick Schiller, 'A Global Perspective', P. Levitt and N. Glick Schiller, 'Conceptualising Simultaneity: A Transnational Social Field Perspective on Society' *International Migration Review*, 38(2004), 1002-1039, Salih, *Gender and Transnationalism*, Al-Ali and Koser, *New approaches to migration,* Kearney, 'The Local and the Global', L. Basch, N. Glick Schiller, and C. Szanton-Blanc, *Nations Unbound: Transnational Projects, Postcolonial Predicaments and Deterritorialised Nation-States* (Langborne, PA: Gordon and Breach, 1994).

[25] L. Samkharadze, *Education and Incentives of Return Migration: What Makes Us Go Home?* (Master of Arts: National University "Kyiv-Mohyla-Academy", 2007), J. Dreby, 'Honor and Virtue: Mexican Parenting in the Transnational Context', in *Gender and Society*, 20(2006), 32-59, S. R. Curran et al, 'Gendered Migrants Social Capital : Evidence from Thailand', in *Social Forces*, 84 (2005), 225-255, Levitt and Glick Schiller, 'Conceptualising Simultaneity', L. Morris, 'Globalisation, Migration and the Nation-State: The Path to a Post-National Europe?' in *The British Journal of Sociology*, 48 (1997), 192-209.

such a revision may lead to the re-conceptualisation of individuals' belonging to the homeland and the host country.

Transnationalism necessarily challenges the hitherto assumed hegemonic role of the nation-state. From a methodological perspective, transnational migration urges scholars to distance themselves from what is called 'methodological nationalism,' that is 'an ideological orientation that approaches the study of social and historical processes as if they were contained within the borders of individual nation-states'.[26] Social fields, defined as 'sets of multiple interlocking networks of social relationships through which ideas, practices and resources are unequally exchanged, organised and transformed'[27] are proposed as an alternative to the nation-state for the analysis of both national and transnational contemporary dynamics. The boundaries of social fields usually stretch beyond national borders, including individuals and groups with different dynamics of migration, settlement, and belonging in relation to multiple places.

Transnationalism calls into question also the present-day effective primacy of the nation-state in determining worldwide politics and economics, as well as the role of the nation in shaping people's identities. On the one hand, the hegemonic role of nation-state institutions in adapting their policies to new global conditions (for example, by reshaping national policies according to the new global economy, or by revising national legislations to cope with migration issues) seems, for the present, to be quite persistent.[28] On the other hand, the overwhelming power that the nation-state and the nationalist discourse currently wield in shaping people's identities and directing their loyalties in such an interconnected world is a more debatable issue.

The physical uprooting and the social and psychological displacement entailed by migration led to a revision of the concept of "home" by transnational migrants. "Home" is not to be seen just as the geographic location of origin and/or residence, but rather it becomes a symbolic space, 'where personal and social meanings are grounded'.[29] Therefore, if from the perspective of 'methodological nationalism' traditional values, cultural practices, social norms, and customs, as well as political institutions (all of them related to conceptualizations of "home") have been confined within the boundaries of the nation-state, transnational migration entails a de-territorialization of such conceptualizations, which are subject to constant processes of imagining, moving, deconstruction, and reconstruction.

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[26] Glick Schiller, 'A Global Perspective,' p. 4.

[27] Levitt and Glick Schiller, 'Conceptualising Simultaneity', p. 1009.

[28] Salih, *Gender and Transnationalism,* Al-Ali and Koser, *New approaches to migration,*, Fouron and Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family', Kearney, 'The Local and the Global'.

[29] Papastergiadis quoted Al-Ali and Koser, *New approaches to migration,* p. 7.

In such a situation of 'multiple and competing allegiances to places',[30] it is questionable whether the nation-state still retains a primary role. On the one hand, Benedict Anderson's 'long distance nationalism'[31] may act as a powerful factor in determining the transnational migrants' attachment to their physical, cultural, and psychological "home". On the other hand, transnational spaces may liberate people within them; transnational migrants, outside the borders of the nation-state, may be able to escape the hegemony that the latter exercises upon them.[32]

Unlike diaspora members, who 'imagine themselves as a nation outside of a homeland'[33] and are involved in an active and autonomous construction of nationhood both within the diaspora and in the original land,[34] transnational migrants devolve multiple, many-sided allegiances to several places. Moreover, most of them leave all or part of the family behind, return "home" with a certain frequency, consider their condition of migrants as temporary, and experience a higher degree of de-territorialisation and unsettledness.

In such situations individual and group identities are subject to several influences and changes and react to them in heterogeneous, multifaceted ways. From a gender perspective, the compliance with national gender norms is a way to pledge allegiance to the nation-state and to reproduce and preserve its values. Thus, analysing how transnational migrant women rethink and shape their own identities and practices provides important insights on the role and strength of the nation-state in a transnational framework. On the one hand, reproducing gendered identities and norms within transnational social fields is a way to perpetuate the hegemony of nationalism beyond the geographical boundaries of the nation-state. On the other hand, migrant women can break away from their national gender norms, using physical detachment from the national community as a chance to extricate themselves from the constrictive identities and roles imposed by the nation.

Many scholars have focused on the connection between female migration, gender norms, and nationalism, showing either the way in which women adhere to national discourse in a transnational context or women's emancipation from national identities and norms as a consequence of migration.[35] Within the literature on Georgian female migration, a study on Georgian women migrants in Germany asks whether they consider migration as an

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[30] Al-Ali and Koser, *New approaches to migration,* p. 8.

[31] Anderson quoted in Fouron and Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family', p. 542.

[32] Kearney, 'The Local and the Global'.

[33] Ibid., p. 553.

[34] P. Van der Veer, *Nation and Migration: The Politics of Space in the South Asian Diaspora* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1995).

[35] J. Dreby, 'Honor and Virtue', Salih, *Gender and Transnationalism,* A. Ishkanian, 'Mobile Motherhood: Armenian Women's Labour Migration in the Post-Soviet Period' in *Diaspora,* 11(2002), 383-415, Fouron and Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family'.

empowering experience.[36] Possibilities of having access to a Western-style higher education and of being more independent of their families is seen by these women as the most relevant aspect of their condition as migrants (most of them arrived in Germany as au pairs and work in catering service or as domestic workers). In this case, female migration is experienced as a way to get rid of typical features of life within the nation-state (especially those regarding the dependence and submission to one's own parents) and as an opportunity to go beyond imposed national norms.

However, other studies show that the lives of Georgian women migrants is also as a painful, conflicting experience. In order to make their choice of migrating acceptable for the national community, Georgian women's narratives strive to reconcile migration with Georgian gender roles, which suppose them to be tied to their families and homes. In their narratives, Georgian women define their choice to migrate as a necessity and their own migration experience as unique and exceptional. Rather than using migration to empower themselves, women are concerned about framing their migration experience within the boundaries of properness and acceptability within their own nation, minimising the potential threat that migration can constitute for their own status within the national community.[37] In their narratives, migrant women depict migration also as a self-sacrificing experience. They work hard in order to send all remittances to their families at home, without saving anything for their own pleasure or satisfaction.[38] In this way, women behave in accordance with their female *habitus*, which pre-supposes them to be naturally pragmatic and frugal (unlike men, who are deemed to be spenders and less practical, and are considered "worse migrants" than women), and to prioritise their family's wellbeing over their own needs. Therefore, although migration to some extent alters previous family hierarchies (as women become the first providers, and in Georgia there is the widely shared idea that the one who earns the money has the main power within the household), women try to minimise this challenging aspect, showing attachment to traditional gender norms.

To sum up, the analysed patterns indicate that the nation has a contradictory role in the context of transnational migration. In their experiences far from the homeland migrant women can reshape their identities and practices in order both to challenge and to reinforce

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[36] T. Melashvili, *Georgian Women in Germany: Empowerment Through Migration?* (Master of Arts: Central European University, 2008). Empowerment is defined as 'a multidimensional process which should enable individuals or a group of individuals to realise their full identity and powers in all spheres of life. It consist of greater access to knowledge and resources, greater autonomy in decision making to enable them to have greater ability to plan their lives, or have greater control over the circumstances that influence their lives and free them from shackles imposed on them by custom, belief and practice'. See: Pillai, quoted in Melashvili, *Georgian Women in Germany*, p. 36.

[37] Ishkanian, 'Mobile Motherhood'.

[38] Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 'Treading on the Fine Line'. See also C. Solari, 'Professionals and Saints: How Immigrant Careworkers Negotiate Gender Identities at Work' in *Gender & Society*, 20(2006), 301-331.

gender norms set up by nationalist discourse. However, notwithstanding the heterogeneity of women's responses to the pressure of the national norms in transnational social fields, the nation-state proves to still be a fundamental entity in a global world – An entity that may be escaped or longed for, undermined or supported, but anyway a strong point of reference, which indeed stretches its power beyond its physical and political boundaries.

GEORGIAN MIGRANT WOMEN IN LONDON

Recent shifts in the global economy, which have generated the need for importing inexpensive labourers, have fostered massive migrations from developing countries to the big cities of the developed world.[39] In Georgia, the contemporary economic conditions that are pushing people to migrate are those of a country recently struck by a conflict with Russia, with an unstable political situation (president Saakashvili is accused of pursuing a one-party state model and of using repressive methods against the opposition), and a worsening socioeconomic picture. In order to survive, the Georgian economy has to rely heavily on FDIs (Foreign Direct Investments), but Georgia's fiscal problems have jeopardized its reputation as a business-friendly country. A very high inflation rate and account deficit, low domestic saving rates, and foreign debt accumulation are other elements of this burden.[40] One of the most evident features stemming from this situation is represented by inequalities between urban and rural Georgia, which have deepened since the 2003 Rose Revolution. A substantial part of the labour migration comes from the Georgian countryside.[41]

During the post-Soviet transition in Georgia, women have been particularly affected by the political and economic turmoil that comes with the introduction of a market economy. Gender inequalities have deepened due to widespread unemployment amongst women, a rapid impoverishment of households, and the loss of Soviet era maternal and childcare benefits.[42] However, such difficulties have motived women in many ways. Women have proven to be more reactive and flexible than men, both in providing for their households and families and in adapting themselves to informal and unskilled jobs, such as petty trade in the markets and on the streets. The massive migration of women,[43] who have been increasingly

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[39] S. Sassen quoted in Ishkanian, 'Mobile Motherhood', p. 390.

[40] T. De Waal, *Georgia's Choices: Charting a Future in Uncertain Times*, (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011).

[41] L. Dershem and T. Khoperia, *The Status of Households in Georgia – 2004*, (Tbilisi: Save the Children, USAID, and the Institute of Polling and Marketing, 2004).

[42] Ishkanian, 'Gendered Transitions'.

[43] N. Sumbadze, *Gender and Society: Georgia*, (Tblisi: UNDP/IPS, 2008). According to a 2004 survey, women were 48. 7 per cent of the labour migrants from Georgia while men were 51.7 per cent.

moving as autonomous individuals rather than just joining their family's men, can be read as another feature of Georgian women's attitude change towards being more enterprising and adaptable.[44]

I interviewed seven Georgian women aged 22 to 56 years, all of whom live in London, but who have different backgrounds, education, professions, socio-economic and marital positions, experiences of migration, and perspectives for the future. I selected my respondents through snowball sampling, firstly by getting in touch with some acquaintances who then subsequently recruited other respondents amongst people they know. Following the model of semi-structured interviews, my questions were broad and open as they were intended to be a guideline for a spontaneous talk. Since I enquired about personal aspects of my respondents' lives (their self-perceptions as women and their being at ease or at odds within their national gender norms), I used a broad approach to allow them to discuss whatever they felt was most interesting and relevant, even if this was not directly related to my questions. Therefore, my respondents seemed to be quite at ease talking to me. They were very willing to explain their positions and thoughts, as they saw me as an outsider and thus my questions did not sound rhetorical to them. But at the same time, as I am a woman and, more importantly, someone who has lived in Georgia for two years, there was an atmosphere of complicity between us and a sense of mutual understanding of the discussed issues. I conducted my interviews at my respondents' residences (apart from one interview when the respondent came to my residence and a second interview which was held over Skype). In order to protect my respondents' anonymity, all the names in this paper have been changed.

Different conditions of their lives in London strongly affect these women's perceptions of themselves, their homeland, and their position as migrants. All my respondents have quite a high level of education and an urban background (some of them were born in the capital Tbilisi and all of them had lived there for many years). Those who had a profession in Georgia were part of the national *intelligentsia*, working as teachers, educators, or lawyers. However, while three of them have been able to maintain a social and professional status in London similar to the one that they used to have in Georgia, two of them have had to accept lower-status jobs as a cleaner and a cook, respectively, while two others are still students. The respondents with the lower-status jobs are also the only two of my respondents without

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[44] J. L. Vivero Pol, 'Stable Instability of Displaced People in Western Georgia: A Food-Security and Gender Survey After Five Years', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 12(1999), 349-66, and Sumbadze, *Gender and Society*. Georgian men have experienced political instability, conflict, and economic hardship in other ways. Although having an advantage, with respect to women, in the possibility of finding jobs, many of them have sunk into inaction, alcoholism, and depression, often leaving women as both responsible for household management and the main breadwinners (in Georgia or abroad as migrants). The discrepancy between the patriarchal, male-oriented discourse, which still permeates Georgian society today, and the actual "failed" condition of many Georgian men is quite evident.

regular permission to stay and work in the UK, which increases their marginality and vulnerability.

Overall, women living in a subaltern position in London, in terms of legal and professional status, have far less chance to interact with people from other countries. As a result, they seek protection and support within the Georgian community. This, in turn, affects the way in which these women conceptualize themselves and their lives in a foreign country and a different society. On the other hand, those women who, because of their jobs and general conditions of life, are more included in heterogeneous circles, give different narratives about their staying in London and their transnational experience overall. The other elements of distinction among my respondents, like age and duration of residence in London, have turned out to be less relevant in the analysis of differences and similarities in these women's narratives.

All my respondents have agreed that there are some shared perceptions on women's roles and duties in the Georgian society. Amongst these, they primarily stated that a woman is supposed to be a mother, a wife, and a good housekeeper. Interestingly, two interviewees used the same adjective to describe the attitudes considered inherent to Georgian women, '*patiosani*', which can be translated as "honest", "upright", or "sober" and which basically insinuates that a women should have just one sexual partner, i.e. her husband, in her life.[45] However, when asked about their own attitude and opinion about Georgian gender norms, my respondents gave quite different answers. Nino is a 30 year-old human rights lawyer. She has lived in London for four years, first doing a Masters in Law degree and then working for an NGO. She is single, and her family lives in Georgia. In her opinion,

> In the family, what a Georgian woman does is washing, cleaning, taking care of kids and other members of the family, and that's all. I do it if I need to, but it is not my "full-time job", it is part of your existence as a human being, rather than your "profession". I don't really think that there is any necessity of allocating different roles for men and women. But what many Georgians think is: you are a woman, what are you going to do? You are going to give birth, have children, give them an education, listen to your husband, that's what you are going to do. Some people underline the fact that Georgian women have to be of this kind or that kind, you know, the family. I don't really care who they are because I just think that they need to be human beings. I don't think that there is anything more important than that.

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[45] Some of my respondents particularly stressed the issue of female virginity and the difference in judging men and women regarding pre-marital sex. Those who were more critical of these patterns argued that women get married when they are very young ('on average from 16 to 23') because then sex becomes allowed for them. They also highlight social reasons that urge women to preserve their virginity till marriage, such as women who are no longer virgins are not considered suitable wives. Thus, they can miss the opportunity to get married and have a family, which for them means social and financial security.

Nino dissociates herself from dominant perceptions of women in Georgian society. She describes national gender norms as something alien to her mentality and way of life; something which deeply permeates Georgian society, but of which she feels completely outside. Thus, Nino looks at the gender dynamics of her country from a critical and detached point of view. 'That society is not my society anymore,' she told me. She particularly stresses the deeply unequal character of gender relations in Georgia, because she feels that it is something that does not affect her current life and something that she managed to escape from. Such view is shared by other respondents. Salome (47, a language teacher) is divorced from her Georgian husband, with whom she has a daughter who is now 21. She lives in London with her daughter and is in a relationship with a Russian man. Salome stated that she has always been 'irritated with some traditions that Georgians have, mainly regarding man-woman relationships. Some men are sexist in Georgia.' However, when I asked Khatuna (52, a teacher in Georgia, but a cleaner in London who has lived in London for 6 years with her Georgian husband while her two sons live in Georgia) whether her self-perception as a woman matched the national gender features that she mentioned, she answered, 'It doesn't matter where one is from. I think that the qualities that I told you are every woman's qualities, apart from her nationality.' In this case, Georgian gender norms have been so deeply internalized by Khatuna that she cannot conceive a female human being lacking such attributes. Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* perfectly fits this respondent's point of view.

Female *habitus* and symbolic violence have been (unconsciously) acknowledged by my respondents (although from opposite points of view) also with regard to what they deem to be the causes of such a persistence of strict gender norms in the Georgian society. Marina is 55 and was a teacher in Georgia, although in London she works as a cook in a restaurant.[46] She arrived in London 4 years ago and she is a widow. Marina considers gender norms a product of 'Georgian mentality'. The latter, in turn, is linked to the fact that Georgia is 'a very old country'. 'This is Georgian tradition', Marina told me. 'It entails practices which have existed for 2000 years. That's what women experience and what forms women's perceptions about themselves. If there is anything different, it is due to influence from outside.' In Marina's words there is a passive acceptance of a Georgian woman's role, but not with a negative view. Simply, according to her, there is no need either to question it or to think of some possible

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[46] Marina works as a cook in a Georgian restaurant, where all the people, from the manager to the staff, are Georgians. Within and around this restaurant, a network of more or less close kin, friends, and acquaintances has developed, serving as a source of mutual help, support, and information amongst Georgians. This sort of business, where there is a preference (when not an imperative) of hiring co-ethnic employees, is an example of the so-called 'ethnic economy', which has developed in migration settings as a corrective tool against migrants' and ethnic minorities' lower possibilities of finding jobs and their earning inferiority. See I. Light, 'Women's Economy Niches and Earning Inferiority: The View from the Ethnic Economy', in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 33(2007), 541-557.

alternatives. National gender values are regarded as timeless and given, and thus accepted smoothly.

Other respondents, on the other hand, not only reject gender norms as something deplorable and alien to them, they also blame Georgian women themselves for being the primary accomplices and reproducers of such inequalities. Salome told me, 'I've never imagined having a Georgian husband to rule my life, to tell me what to wear, and where to go or not to go. But it happens in Georgia and I think it's the women's fault. They allow themselves to be controlled by their men, they don't protest, they think that their men express love in this way.' Mariami (22, an undergraduate student) stresses more the role of society as a whole. 'Women in Georgia are still under the influence and the pressure of society and the fact that "what people think or say" is still on the agenda.' Therefore, women embody their female *habitus* in order to be perceived as "good women", and thus get symbolic capital within their society.[47] Notwithstanding differences amongst my respondents' points of view, especially regarding their position in 'accepting' or 'rejecting' Georgian gender norms, two overall patterns emerge. First, Georgian women are aware of the way their society expects them to be. Second, the strength of these gender norms is thought to lie primarily within the deep internalization of centuries-long cultural stereotypes and practices rather than from the institutions that impose such norms 'from above' (the specific role of the Church and the state in supporting gender norms was only briefly mentioned by just one respondent).

Migration and its implications are considered overall positive issues in my respondents' lives. Most of them stressed the higher independence and decision-making power that they have in London. Guliko, 31, also a lawyer, stated: "Migration has made me more independent than I used to be, I am relying less on my friends' or family's advice when it comes to taking important decisions". Similarly, Mariami told me: "Since coming to the UK my confidence has significantly improved. Being in a society where you are the only person in charge of your life has played an important role in being a strong and independent person". These women see migration as an empowering experience, as it has given them the opportunity to develop their own potential and to take responsibility of their lives.

However, a peculiar trend should be highlighted. Those of my respondents who have been more critical of Georgian gender dynamics and of women's role in tolerating and perpetuating gender inequalities are also those who have placed less emphasis on the role of migration in changing their attitudes and their lives. Notwithstanding their declared awkwardness and estrangement regarding women's roles and attributes in their national tradition, they do not see migration as a fundamental factor in giving them the opportunity to reshape their identities in a freer way. Rather, they stress that as individuals they have always been independent and open-minded, even when they used to live in Georgia and, at least to

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[47] Lundkvist-Houndoumadi, 'Treading on the Fine Line'.

some extent, they had to conform to national gender norms.[48] They also consider their identities as more "international", rather than rooted in a specific physical or symbolic place. 'I don't need to become a British person,' I was told by Nino, 'because I already have a nationality. And at the same time, I don't need to be very attached to my nationality. So, what works in between is to be a national of one country and then respect everybody else, being as international as possible'. In Nino's point of view, 'multiple allegiances to multiple places', characteristic of transnational social fields, emerge. Nino does not emphasise the primacy either of her homeland or of her migration country in constructing her identity; she conceives the latter as crosscutting cultural and political boundaries of her country and other nation-states. On the other hand, those women who show more compliance with Georgian gender norms and have a far lower degree of social, economic, and cultural integration within the host country, surprisingly have quite an enthusiastic opinion of their migration experience and of the influence that living in London has had on them. Khatuna stated that she has been 'very enriched' by migration and that she 'is having an easier time in her life'. Moreover, migration gave her the opportunity to have an actual 'free life', as 'in Georgia life is not really free. Here ties within families are not as strong as in Georgia, and that's good, because it means less control of people on each other, so more freedom'. Similarly, Marina said:

> I am very happy with my migration experience. Now I look at life more easily, I take it easier. Here women have an easy look at their life, don't have complexes, don't feel the stress. Here women bring their children up very easily and freely. They can ask everything and express their own opinion openly. When I go back to Georgia I'll live my life there more easily and I will be a different person with the children in my school and my own children´.

Remarks by these respondents are interesting for two main reasons. Firstly, the strong positive opinion that these women have of their lives as migrants in London clashes with the tough conditions of life and the very limited opportunities that they actually experience. They talk as if they would enjoy all the privileges of living in a cosmopolitan Western city (meeting new people, having a freer style of life), whereas they mainly split their lives between a tiring job and home, being in touch with almost only Georgians. Moreover, compared to other respondents, these women's sense of longing for their homeland is deeper and more aching, influencing and being influenced by a situation that, overall, cannot be defined as enjoyable. Secondly, and more importantly, there is an apparent contradiction between these women's

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[48] These respondents have also stressed the point that, in their opinion, Georgian gender norms are changing, becoming more flexible and opened to women's independence and self-fulfillment. Actually, there has been an increasing female presence in Georgian public life. Women are being increasingly involved in public debates (e.g. taking part to TV talk-shows) and in politics (the case of Nino Burdjanadze, the head of the opposition to president Saakhashivili, is paradigmatic). However, in everyday social relationships as well as in expectations about behaviour and performances, perceptions of women's nature and role that emerged so far in this paper are still quite durable.

smooth compliance with Georgian gender dynamics and their appreciation of London women's different ways of life.[49] As Al-Ali and Koser argue, 'people engaged in transnational practices might express an uneasiness, a sense of fragmentation, tension, pain'. They add that "everyday contestation of negotiating the gravity of one's home is particularly distressing for those who are vulnerable: poor, women, illegal immigrant and refugees".[50] Therefore, if, on the one hand, these respondents' lives are deeply affected by "long distance nationalism", then transnational migration acts upon them as a displacing and alienating force. While supporting and reproducing national gender norms in their lives in London, these women, at the same time, strive to adapt their identities to their transnational condition by trying to reconcile and display features and values that may seem in contradiction to each other.[51]

Finally, all of the respondents shared a sense of awkwardness when they described their relations with people who have never left Georgia. On the one hand, links to the homeland are, to different degrees, very strong both concretely and symbolically (most of these women have their closest relatives in Georgia, some of them send remittance at home and some have the opportunity to visit Georgia quite often). On the other hand, as Salih points out, transnational migrants 'hold an ambiguous status as insiders/outsiders within their society of origin'. While in some ways, migrants strive to confirm their group membership, at the same time they 'also display their new status and show off their 'modernity' with respect to those who have remained home'.[52] "New status" and "modernity'" can be displayed in different ways, from showing new economic wealth attained in the receiving country to stressing changes in one's own mentality and way of living. Overall, in my respondents' words there was, although to differing degrees, a slight but palpable sense of superiority toward those who have not had a migration experience. 'I feel sorry for those women who have never gone abroad', Khatuna told me; 'everyone should go abroad to see what it is like to live an actual free life'. As for Nino, 'lots of women don't travel, don't see anything outside their own bubble. They don't see how other people live and they are told over and over that this is the way you have to be'. However, such a feeling is not lived painlessly and smoothly. There is also a 'problem of identification' (according to Nino's definition), together with the sense of losing one's roots, of being between different communities and belonging to neither of them. Lia (25, a postgraduate student) told me: 'When I visit Georgia I can clearly see how

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[49] See especially Khatuna's remark on the different kind of relations within families. This is particularly striking, since the Georgian family (intended as an enlarged family whose members have hierarchical control and strong influence on each other's lives, especially male members with respect to female ones) is considered (and my respondents confirmed that) as a very valuable feature of Georgian society and tradition, something which Georgians are proud of and which they like to compare with "Western" families, far less united.

[50] Al-Ali and Koser, *New approaches to migration,* p. 7

[51] It is significant that Marina, who, during her interview, highlighted many positive aspects of migration in her life, when I was leaving her house, further commented on her experience as "*sashinelia*!", which in Georgian means "it's horrible!".

[52] Salih, *Gender and Transnationalism,* p. 90.

my friends have become different from me. I try to turn into a Georgian and do not reveal my European side, as the reaction is not always positive'. Guliko stated: 'I catch myself having arguments with people (friend and relatives left behind in Georgia), trying to persuade them that some things they perceive as unacceptable are absolutely ok'. Finally, these are again Nino's words: 'Georgian society is my society but it's not where I belong. Once you are in there you are part of the 'circle', and once you leave, then you don't belong to it any more'.

   Transnational lives and identities are a ground of negotiation, contestation, deconstruction, and reconstruction. Therefore, transnational migration is a challenging and puzzling experience for individuals and groups, which are subject to different, sometimes opposite pressures, both from the homeland and the receiving country, leading to a sense of rupture and displacement. As to Georgian women, "long distance nationalism", in terms of adherence to national gender norms in a transnational context, is lived in a contradictory way, which entails acceptance and rejection, loyalty and rebellion.

CONCLUSION

Patterns that emerged in this article first highlight the high heterogeneity amongst women's strategies of self-identification and definition of their roles in transnational context. Migrant women shape their transnational identities and lives individually, rather than as a part of a group. Thus, such priority of different individualities over community features may lead to the conclusion that the all-embracing nationalist discourse has been losing its hegemonic appeal.

   However, notwithstanding different attitudes toward national gender norms in migrant women's narratives, singular individualities prove to be still strongly affected by the nation-state. National values appear to be deeply internalised by migrant women, even within their own individual strategies. One more time, the concept of *habitus* as "a *subjective but not individual* system of internalised structures […] *common to all members of the same group or class*"[53] is insightful to show how relations of power within society are internalised and reproduced as natural and universal in individuals' identities and everyday lives. National community members' *habitus* is strictly defined, determining attributes and roles expected from all of them. When social and economic changes occur - as in the case of migration - individuals' *habitus* strives to adapt itself to new conditions, while still proving its capability to preserve its basic structures. For this reason, even in a transnational context, migrant women continue to act according to their *habitus*; they embody gendered attributes and

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[53] Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory and Practice,* p. 86, emphasis added.

perform gendered practices, which are part and parcel of discourses and projects carried on by the nation.

The re-adaptation/conservation of *habitus* in a changed context is not a painless process. Features emerging from my interviews point out deep fractures in migrant women's identities. Contradictory attitudes towards both national tradition and receiving society, as well as an awkwardness with regard to the community of origin, show that transnational migration necessarily entails psychological displacement and a "problem of identification". Either considering migration as an opportunity to emancipate from the burden of national gender norms or reproducing the latter in a transnational context, the nation-state retains a considerable power in shaping women's transnational life, although in different and often contradictory ways. As Georgian migrant women's narratives have highlighted, strategies of resistance against national gender norms or compliance with them in transnational contexts are equally spoken in "the language of 'nation'".[54]

In conclusion, the increasing de-territorialisation of identities and practices requires a unit of analysis which separates social and cultural issues from national boundaries, as well as an approach looking at communities as made up of different, hybrid individuals[55] and crosscut by social cleavages and relations of power. However, understandings of transnational migrations in a global world must take into account that the nation-state, in its "ubiquity and capacity for nearly infinite self-differentiation" (Parker et al. 1992: 3), prove to be a viable, multi-faceted yet persisting force in affecting migrants' lives across physical and symbolic boundaries of "home".

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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[54] Fouron and Glick Schiller, 'All in the Family', p. 566.

[55] Hybridity is defined by Lavie and Swedenburg as the result of "a long history of confrontations between unequal cultures and forces. […] Hybridities resulting from the intermingling of disparate cultures necessarily implicate cultures that themselves are already syncretised, always in process of transformation." Therefore, "all cultures turn out to be, in various way, hybrid". See Lavie and Swedenburg, *Displacemet, Disapora and Geographies of Identity*, p.10.