IDENTITY STRATEGIES OF GEORGIANS MIGRANTS IN GERMANY

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Abstract

The study shows how Georgian migrants settled down in Germany. This qualitative research centers on the process of adaptation and integration of Georgians in a new environment. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, economic difficulties have led to the highest levels of out-migration from country after independence of Georgia.Based on the data of General Population Census from 2014 the Georgian population as of January 1st 2015 is amounts to 3,729,500 persons. During last two decades from a population reduction of around 1,241 (22, 72%) persons. The processes of adaptation and integration are complex since they usually imply keeping the balance between the will to maintain one's own cultural identity while constructing positive relations with the host society, a multitude of factors contribute to the integration process such as the individual's ability to learn a new language and culture, not resisting a value of dominant and primary culture; the openness and tolerance of the host society towards new members, etc. Identity tactics and strategies, which often resort to the use of representatives from ethnic groups, play a unique role in the interaction processes within new socio-cultural spaces. By mobilizing these strategies, ethnic groups manage to engage themselves into the local social-interaction network and move towards integration to the host society. This explains that representatives of the same ethnic groups located in different socio-cultural environments could mobilize different identity strategies: individual and collective identity strategies (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1980). Based on in-depth interviews with migrants living more than 10 years in Germany this work focuses on study perception of Georgian emigrants about: the dynamic of adaptation process in the new socio- cultural spaces. According to identity strategies based on two axes: the simple and the complex coherence the study tries to analyze Georgian migrants' individual and collective identity strategies.

Keywords: Migration, ethnic identity, identity strategies.

1. Introduction

According to the United Nations, there have never been more immigrants than today. After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Union and Georgia's independence, there was a long period of political and socio-economic instability in the country. Many Georgian citizens decided to leave the country to look for a better life elsewhere, and they emigrated in great numbers. During the first decade of independence, the majority of emigrants had chosen mostly post-Soviet space. Later, Turkey (Badurashvili, 2012, p. 4-5; Chindea et. al., 2008, p. 31) and EU countries became more attractive for Georgian migrants. "2019 Migration Profile Georgia" demonstrates that in 2017-2018, the top destination countries (by number of visits) for Georgian citizens were Germany, Italy, and Greece.

Georgia has a close connection to Germany, which dates back 200 years. After Georgia's independence, Germany was the first country to recognize its independence and opened an embassy in Tbilisi in 1992. The German language is taught as a first-second foreign language in many Georgian schools (ICMPD, 2014). The German academic exchange service offers scholarships on a yearly basis for Georgian students to pursue higher education in Germany and has built strong links with Georgia. In addition, there are organized "au pair programs", which offer young people the opportunity to live with a German family for a year, to take care of their household and children, and to learn the German language (ICMPD, 2014).

Statistical data about Georgians in Germany according to Data 2020 is the following: there are 27,315 Georgians recorded living in Germany, of whom 56.8% are women. The largest age group is 30-35, followed by those aged 20–25 and 35–40. For men, the median age is 31.4, and for women, 33.0.

The proposed research shows how Georgian emigrants are dealing with the two cultures in their current lives and how they maintain their Georgian identity in the host society by using different strategies (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1980) for ethnic identity preservation.

2. Design

To achieve the main purpose of the descriptive research, the study followed the general frameworks of migration scholars (Kim et al., 2001), advocating an in-depth examination of such experience based on instructions for selecting the sample size in qualitative research (Creswell, 2009). The interviews took place from June to October 2021.

3. Participants

Participants were chosen using the snowball sampling method, applying the following criteria: 1) The participants of the study must have been in migration for at least 10 years; 30 participants (6 males and 22 females) have been interviewed during the summer-autumn of 2021; 2) The age of participants should have been between 30 and 50 years old.

4. Method

Desk review: In the research, the legislation related to the migration of Georgians to the EU country was explored. In addition, various research studies about identity were analysed.

Field Study: This research was conducted via qualitative, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observation with Georgian migrants in Germany. Interviews were conducted in a Georgian language and lasted one hour on average. The qualitative interviews consisted of several questions about ethnic identity, how they are choosing the identity strategies for keeping the Georgian identity in the host country, about their perception of host society and the other Georgians living in Germany, about the reasons for conflicts in and out of groups, and about their relationships with other Georgians and Germans according to their perceptions.

Qualitative Content Analysis: According to scholars (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004; Graneheim, Lindgren, & Lundman, 2017), Qualitative content analysis focuses on the subject and the context; it helps to analyse the manifest, descriptive, latent, and interpretative content close to the participants' lived experiences. Analytical Procedure followed the process of qualitative content analysis (cf. Bengtsson, 2016, p. 9; Mayring, 2010).

The category system: The developed category system used for the analysis of the interviews contains categories. These main categories were further divided into subcategories: *settling in Germany*: arrival reason, study, and education; *identity strategies*: collective and individual. Direct quotes were translated from Georgian to English as accurately as possible.

The present study was conducted in line with the *ethical guidelines* of Tbilisi State University.

5. Discussion

5.1. Settling in Germany

The first main category refers to the arrival and settlement of the interviewed Georgian migrants in Germany. A person's decision to migrate is often motivated by a complex of interrelated factors: social, institutional, political, health, and even environmental factors.

Arrival reason - Arrival reasons for Georgian migrants can be divided in the following categories: difficult economic situation, unemployment in the country of origin, debt, and the lack of prospects, the job opportunities and social network in a different country. Almost all of the participants admitted how economic hardship has impacted on the increase of a migration process from Georgia. Migration was and is considered to be the best way to improve life conditions.

Study and Education - The majority of research participants left Georgia to receive higher education in Germany. With the help of the German "au pair programme" they came to Germany to live with a German family initially for a year, to take care of their household and children and to learn German language. Afterwards, they passed exams at the German universities to continue their studies. They stayed in Germany, some of them got married and some made a career.

Since they had a possibility to study German language at school and sometimes with the tutor, they could leave their homeland and go to Germany. During the interviews, most of them emphasized the differences in every sphere of life between Georgia and Germany in the past and now.

5.2. Identity strategies

By mobilizing identity strategies, ethnic groups manage to engage themselves in the local social-interaction networks and move towards integration and acculturation (Berry, 1997) into the host society. According to scholars (Camilleri, & Malewska-Peyre, 1980). Work migrants in a new society use individual and collective strategies to avoid stigmatization and deprecation of their identities, such as acceptance, denial, or idealization.

One collective strategy for Georgian Migrants is cultural idealization of national culture. The second collective strategy is highlighting general human values and equality, this strategy focuses on values common to Georgian emigrants and German people.

Georgian migrants' Identity strategies are characterized by a pragmatic individual identity strategy. Analyzing the narratives of participants, the differentiate identity strategy is a frequently used strategy for study participants in Germany. According to scholars (Camilleri and Malewska-Peyre, 1980) it means that they feel unwillingness from autochthons, they create distance (from the tenants) from host society, this is reaction towards others on the basis of differences.

Georgian migrants in assessing similarities and differences underline **that** there are a few, mostly hidden similarities. They always emphasize differences that exist in the terms of relationships: German are direct speakers; they have less time for each other's; they have distance in each relationship. However, there are a lot of differences, but about similarities one of the respondents have mentioned:

> *"I have encountered that these two societies were very much alike with each other... common is that they both greatly care about public opinion. ..... At first, I thought they were distant people, but in reality, they know everything about you. The same is in Georgia, but here it is just more delicate."* (Female, 39-years-old)

All participants noted a noticeable difference (as "differentiate identity") between different constructs of the main constituents of life: the system of parenting/upbringing, the value of relatives and family members, and friendship. These same differences have been found in the study conducted by me with Georgian migrants in Portugal (Pirtskhalava, 2017) and in France (Pirtskhalava, 2021). They emphasize that the German **style of upbringing** is different from the Georgian. German style of child orientation, that they ask a child what they want and the main focus is on them.

> *"When something goes wrong, or there is a misunderstanding, everyone sits at the table and expresses their opinions and views, this indeed very good, not like we do in the majority Georgian family, that parent decides everything"* (Male, 35-years-old).

But participants are admitted the emotional attitudes between parents and children.

> *"Upbringing system seems a bit cold and more distant than in Georgia, there is less possibility to get attached to the parents, I do not know yet if it is a bad or a good thing... but warming in relationships are important on point of my view"* (Female, 39-years-old).

According to the Georgian migrant the children live with family before they get married in Germany. If children have to move somewhere for education, they will not come back. This is very unusual and unacceptable for Georgians.

Family members in Germany as in the other European family means having only spouse and children. Your Siblings are not your family members. In Georgia still, they are your family members. In Germany, brother and sister would not see each other without a formal appointment and meeting. Besides, staying for the night should be agreed upon in advance. This is not like it is, it is a little bit different in Georgia.

> *"My friend got in a car accident where his brother lived, but she did not call till the morning, instead she stayed in a hotel, in Georgia, it is unbelievable not to inform the family member, especially brother when something unfortunate happens"* (Female, 48-years-old).

The answer to the question of what kind of **friendship** exists in Germany and how it differs from Georgian friendship, most of them have the same reflection in terms of content. A friend is a very close person, like a family member for Georgians, Georgians self-disclosure is higher with friends, than with other family members, therefore friendship is considered to be the most valuable thing in Georgia.

> *"Here mainly friends are talking about general topics, we have never talked about private issues. I love this description, in German friendship, they are never interested in your origins, they never ask an intimate question if you do not want to answer"* (Female, 49-years-old).

For participants of this study very distant (not close) relationships between friends is a little bit surprising. One of the respondents underlined:

".... Myself, like Georgian, I already know everything about my friend and even her/his friends. My German friend is surprised that I know that much information about her friend. But in my culture, it is important to know about your friend, if you know, you can do something nice, pleasant for them, to make my friend happy…" (Female, 37-year-old).

It should be noted that Georgian migrants in Germany rarely use the "unnoticed" strategy when individuals are trying to demonstrate their best sides while talking, but in society, they try to be quiet and unnoticed. Unlike other countries (Portugal and France; Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021), Georgians are not hiding or keeping silent about their ethnic identity. According to their narratives it was greatly facilitated by the Book Fair "Buch Messe" in Frankfurt in 2018, where Georgia was represented as a host of this festival, many books were translated into German and many authors were introduced to the German society, so now Georgians were not only presented in a negative way but from the positive side. They are proud of their identity, because Georgia was already known in educational circles, because Germany is one of the countries in which the Georgians became interested in migration since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The reason of this depends largely on the host society, policy and educational system of the receiving country. In Germany everyone (including Georgians) has a chance to study and specialize, despite the fact that they might feel stigmatized, no one hides his/her identity.

The study also identified a sub strategy called "transferred negative identity" as one of the strategies for Georgian migrants, meaning that people seek to distance themselves from their ethnic group and they have stigmatization within the group, when individually, comparing themselves and their own families with the others. However, this difference deserves another type of explanation within the group:

"Those who arrive as asylum seekers are in a terrible situation, and we can never say anything about them, nobody knows what we will do in such situations" (a 38-year-old female).

"I cannot communicate with "running boys" (they are the people who are stealing small things) or "thief" housebreaker" (a 40-year-old male).

Some of the study participants try to avoid communication with such people from their own/ Georgian groups thus underlining that their family is not the same. This is an example of stigmatization in groups.

"In general, I try not to have contact with the Georgians/or insignificant contact only in case of necessity" (a 27-year-old female).

6. Conclusion

The study shows Georgian Migrant participants activate the collective identity more than the personal identity. The Georgian migrants are characterized by individual Strategies as pragmatic identity.

In this study, migrants are using two types of identity strategies (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1997) - "differentiate identity" and "transferred negative identity". The differentiate identity strategy means differentiating oneself from the host society in terms of the following types of relationships: the system of parenting/upbringing, the value of relatives and family members, and friendship. (the same was with Georgian migrants in Portugal and in France) (Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021) The second strategy is strategies called "transferred negative identity", meaning that people seek to distance themselves from their ethnic group and they have stigmatization within the group, when individually, comparing themselves and their own families with the others.

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