

MIGRATION NETWORKS OF LABOR MIGRANTS FROM TIANETI¹

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According to the national Census conducted in Georgia in 2002, the population of the country had shrunk by more than a million since the last Soviet census in 1989. The decrease is triggered not only by a declining birth rate, but also by mass migration.² According to studies of international migration from Georgia, in 2003-2004, 8-10% of Georgia's households had an international migrant.³ High unemployment and underemployment, protectionism and nepotism in hiring push many of the inhabitants of Georgia to search for work abroad, to work in another country and financially support their families back in Georgia. According to the National Bank of Georgia, in 2008 the amount of financial assistance that Georgian migrants sent to their families reached one billion dollars,⁴ and, clearly, this money plays a very important role in the economic life of Georgia.

Despite the fact that going abroad can be quite expensive and that the host countries are doing their best to limit the number of migrant workers, the level of emigration from Georgia is not decreasing. In this situation, it is logical to assume that Georgians who are willing to go abroad for work, will actively use

¹ The author of the article expresses her gratitude to Ekaterine Gerasimova, expert of the Heinrich Boell Foundation, Professor Tinatin Zurabishvili, Professor Lia Tsuladze, Viktor Voronkov, Director of the Center for Independent Social Research, Dr. Abdul-Ghaffar Mughal, Dmitry Poletaev, Leading Researcher at the Institute for Socio-Economic Studies of Population and Professor Gigi Tevzadze, for their assistance in shaping the study, data analysis and comments on this paper.

² Vadachkoria A. G., *External Migration Processes in Georgia (1989-2002)*, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, 2004 (PhD Thesis, in Georgian). Only those who at the time of the census resided in Georgia were covered by the census. For the citizens of Georgia who temporarily resided in other countries, a special "migrant" questionnaire was developed, but it was filled in by only some 114,000 households, while experts estimated the number of migrants at that time to be about one million. See: Tsuladze G., *Emigration from Georgia, according to 2002 Census*. Tbilisi: CRRC, 2005, p. 9 (in Georgian).

³ See: Badurashvili I., *Illegal Migrants from Georgia: Labor Market Experiences and Remittance Behavior*. Paper at IUSSP Conference. IUSSP: Toure, 2005. <<http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=51259>> (25/12/2006); Dershem L., Khoperia T., *The Status of Households in Georgia*. Final Report. Tbilisi: USAID, Save the Children, IPM, 2004, p. 42.

⁴ National Bank of Georgia. Annual Report: http://www.nbg.gov.ge/uploads/publications/annualreport/tsliuri_angarishi_2008_geo.pdf, 2008, p. 20.

migration networks, which reduce the costs of emigration, making it less risky and, therefore, could be considered as one of the factors driving the migration process.

In this paper we follow the definition of migration networks developed by Douglas Massey in his article “Why does immigration occur? A theoretical synthesis:” as “a set of interpersonal ties that link migrants, former migrants, and nonmigrants in origin and destination areas through the bond of kinship, friendship, and shared community origin”.⁵ In this context, migrants are seen not “as solo adventurers, but as actors linked to associates here and there, their social ties lubricating and structuring their transition from one society to the next”.⁶ Relationships constituting migration networks, as a rule, are extremely durable, since they are organically formed prior to migration on the basis of kinship and friendship ties.

Studies of migration networks indicate that even when the economic situation in the country of origin improves – a development that should theoretically result in a decrease in the level of migration – no such decline occurs, as reduced risks and costs associated with migration due to developed migration networks can maintain and even boost the existing level of migration.⁷

Studies of international labor migration from Georgia mainly focus their attention on the study of migration flows, the number, socio-demographic and ethnic composition of migrants, the character of their employment abroad and the amount of remittances sent by migrants to their families in Georgia⁸, but up to now, no study has focused on the role of migration networks of Georgian migrants. Present research is the first attempt to fill this gap. The study of migra-

⁵ Massey D. S., *Why Does Immigration Occur? A Theoretical Synthesis*, *The Handbook of International Migration: The American Experience*, ed. by C. Hirschman, P. Kazintz and J. De Wind. NY: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999, p. 44.

⁶ Waldinger R., Lighter M., *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003, p. 11.

⁷ Massey D. S., et al. *Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal*, *Population and Development Review*. 1993. № 19 (3), pp. 431-466.

⁸ See, for example: Vadachkoria A. G., cit.; Gachechiladze R., *Migration in Georgia and Its Socio-Economic Consequences*, Tbilisi: UNDP, 1997 (in Georgian); T. Gugushvili, *The problem of External Migration and Demography in Georgia (1990-1998)*, Tbilisi: Office of the Press, 1998 (in Georgian); Tsuladze G., op. cit.; N. Chelidze *Labor Emigration from Post-Soviet Georgia*, Tbilisi: Lega, 2006 (in Georgian); Badurashvili I., *Illegal Migrants from Georgia*; Badurashvili I., *Determinants and Consequences of Irregular Migration in a Society under Transition. The Case of Georgia, Caucasus*, Paper at PAA conference, Boston, MA, 2004, <paa2004.princeton.edu/download.asp?submissionId=41960> (20/02/2007); Dershem L., Khoperia T., Opt. cit.; *International Organization for Migration (IOM), Hardship Abroad or Hunger at Home, A Study of Irregular Migration from Georgia*, Tbilisi, 2001; IOM, *Labor Migration from Georgia*.

tion networks, which are a specific form of social capital⁹, can help us to understand and explain the nature and direction of labor migration from Georgia. The choice of some, and not other countries for migration is not determined solely by economic factors, as neoclassical theories of migration suggest. Instead, it is largely dependent on the presence of relatives, friends and acquaintances in the receiving countries, on whose assistance potential migrants rely.¹⁰

Research site and methods

Tianeti¹¹

The village of Tianeti is located in the northeast of Georgia (Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region). According to the national Census of 2002, the population of Tianeti was 3,598.¹² According to a study of poverty in Georgia conducted in 2003, Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region in general and Tianeti in particular, were among the poorest regions and municipalities of Georgia:¹³ 63% of the population of Tianeti lived below the poverty line, which is 16% more than the average for Georgia as a whole. Given that the economic situation in Georgia changed little between 2003 and 2006 (when the present study was conducted), there are reasons to believe that Tianeti was one of the poorest areas Georgia by the time the study was conducted.¹⁴

The Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia published in 1979, gave the following description of Tianeti: “Lemonade, cheese and butter, and asphalt factories, a timber mill. <...> Two high schools (including a boarding school), vocational, music and sports schools, a house of pioneers [Soviet youth club], a culture

⁹ More about this see Massey D. S., *Why Does Immigration Occur?* op. cit. p. 44.

¹⁰ The current paper does not deal with internal migration.

¹¹ In Georgian, status of Tianeti is defined as ‘daba’, a term used to describe a settlement that has properties both of a village and a township. In this paper, Tianeti is referred as a village.

¹² See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia: <http://www.statistics.ge/_files/georgian/census/2002/mo-saxleobis%20ricxovnoba%20da%20gansaxleba.pdf> (05/12/2006), p. 47.

¹³ Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., *Poverty Mapping in Georgia*, UNDP, Tbilisi, 2003, pp. 6-18.

¹⁴ Despite the fact that in recent years Georgia has a high rate of economic growth, this has not resulted in a reduction in poverty. Compared with 2004, in 2005, the level of urban poverty increased from 34.3% to 37.1%, and rural poverty – from 37.1% to 41.7%. The figures of inequality (Gini coefficient) of income (0.44) and consumption (0.39) remains high too. See: Country Program Action Plan 2006-2010 Between the Government of Georgia and UNDP, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 4.

house, a cinema, four libraries, a museum, a recreation park named after Vazha Pshavela,¹⁵ a hostel for tourists, a hospital, a pharmacy, a post office¹⁶ operate in Tianeti". As we see, during the Soviet times, there were various employment opportunities for the population of Tianeti, and unemployment was the exception rather than the rule.¹⁷

Today, there are two high schools, two kindergartens, one technical school, a library, a museum and a hospital functioning in Tianeti. A district administration and a local police department are also located there. A branch of one of the Georgian banks and a few private shops operate in the village. None of the enterprises that functioned during the Soviet era and employed most of the population of the district are active today. A small part of the population works in public institutions (schools, kindergartens, local government, hospital, post office, etc.). Income from agriculture and livestock make up a significant portion of the budget for Tianeti residents. However, Tianeti has a shortage of arable land¹⁸, climatic conditions are quite harsh, the land is not as fertile as in the plains, and in some cases, residents are not able to harvest before the arrival of the cold weather. It is precisely unemployment and low quality of life in the village that push many residents of Tianeti to emigrate.

Research methods

The present study of migration networks consisted of both qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (census of Tianeti households) data collection methods.

1. In-depth interviews. In-depth interviews were conducted with returnees and family members of current migrant workers. In the interviews, motives, conditions, and migration experience, involvement in migration networks, communications of workers with a place of origin were discussed.

In April and September 2006, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted (18 women, 5 men, aged 22-72). In some cases, the same informant was both a returnee and a family member of a current migrant, or a potential migrant. Sixteen

¹⁵ Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915, birth name – Luka Razikashvili) – the great Georgian poet, originally from the village Chargali, the region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

¹⁶ Tianeti, Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Book 4, Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 678-679 (in Georgian).

¹⁷ Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Unit 4, Tbilisi, 1979, pp. 678-679 (in Georgian).

¹⁸ Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., Op.cit. p. 21.

informants were returnees; nine interviewees had a relative living in migration at the time when the interviews were conducted. Three of interviewed returned migrants planned to migrate again in the near future. Seven informants were members of migrant families with no previous migration experience.

Several Tianeti residents were extremely helpful in helping me to identify informants,¹⁹ and without their help this study could not be completed. After conducting interviews with family members of current migrants, I realized that they often have a vague understanding about the migration experience of their relatives, and, thus, I decided to focus on returnee migrant workers as principal informants, regardless of the country of emigration and the duration of their emigration period.

2. Census of Tianeti population. In late August – early September 2006, a population census was carried out in Tianeti.²⁰ Since we did not have any reliable data about the level of emigration from the village, nor about the characteristics of labor migrants and their families, nor about migrants that have returned to Tianeti, it was hardly justified to conduct a random survey of the population. Instead, it was decided to survey all Tianeti households, i.e. to conduct a census and collect data not only on returnees, potential and current migrants, but also on the whole population of Tianeti and its economic situation.²¹

The census questionnaire was developed, consisting of seven blocks, including, among others, questions about the migration experience of family members (past, present) and plans for migration, their inclusion in migration networks, sizes and types of financial assistance provided by a migrant to his/her family.

As a result of the census, data on 1,062 households in Tianeti were collected. Given the fact that during the 2002 census, 1,237 households were recorded, we can assume that the present census reached over 85% of households.²² This gives us reason to believe that findings adequately reflect the situation in Tianeti. Data obtained through both qualitative and quantitative research methods made it possible to compare data, and validate received results.

¹⁹ These were my distant relatives living in Tianeti. They not only helped me to identify returnee labor migrants in Tianeti, but also mediated my first contacts with potential informants. With their assistance, I managed to avoid a situation in which I would end up as a “foreign” researcher in a small village, where all families know each other. The fact that I was recommended by well-known people in the village disposed informants to openness and trust.

²⁰ The Tianeti census was conducted in terms of a research grant awarded by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers in Georgia (CRRRC).

²¹ Census data presented in this article are the result of the initial analysis.

²² Interviewers recorded 210 shuttered or dilapidated houses or houses under construction; they are not counted in the subsequent analysis.

Migration from Tianeti: General characteristics

After interviews and informal meetings with Tianeti residents, I was left with the impression that there was not a single family in the village that did not have at least one migrant. Moreover, there were many families with several migrants; that some families left altogether and their houses are locked.²³ As Tianeti residents say, the village becomes more and more “lifeless”:

Here, the house across the street – their two sons left, the husband is in Russia, sons are in Ireland, and Tamara²⁴ is in Greece. [The family] there – they are all in Greece; Katya with her two children – in Greece, Maria and her child – in Greece. I do not know what to tell you. I don't know how to say it: almost in every family one member has left, in some families – two, but on average, one. If <...> I and my only female neighbor also leave, there will be no women left here [in this neighborhood]. <...> Mostly women are leaving, only men are attending funerals, there are no women left (M, female, 49).

It could be said that half of the residents of our district have left, perhaps, not only to Greece but also to other countries, more than half. <...> My friend's mother-in-law passed away, [the family lives] near the hospital. I went there and on this whole long road I did not see any woman – and just a couple of men. Tianeti is empty now... (N, female, 58 years).

Despite such assessments, according to the census we carried out, only 301 families (i.e. 28% of Tianeti households) had at least one migrant. Overall, the data was collected on 413 immigrants, which constitutes 13.5% of the number of total permanent residents of Tianeti. However, given that the average age of immigrants is about 35 years, at the everyday level their departure might actually be perceived as a kind of “exodus” of the population.

The general level of migration from Tianeti, compared with average data in Georgia, is very high. Women account for 68% of migrants from Tianeti con-

²³ We did not have the opportunity to “survey” families in which all members had migrated. Consequently, we can assume that the level of emigration from Tianeti is higher than the data of our census.

²⁴ Names of all informants have been changed.

trasting sharply with existing nationwide figures, according to which 65%²⁵ of all Georgian migrants are men. Thus, in the case of Tianeti we observe the “feminization” of migration. The gender imbalance depends on the countries of migration and on the demand for a certain type of labor. Thus, among the migrants who left for Greece, Germany and Italy, there are more women, while more men migrate to Ireland.

Most migrants work as unskilled laborers. About half of them work as housekeepers, nannies or care-givers to elderly (Table 1). Men are mostly employed in construction and repair businesses, work in factories and agricultural farms. Seven percent migrated to study – these are mainly young migrants living in Germany.

Table 1. Employment of migrants from Tianeti abroad²⁶

Type of Employment	% from the number of migrants
Housekeeper	23
Caregiver to elderly	21
Construction worker	14
Unskilled manual worker	10
Students	7
Nannies/Babysitters	7
Unemployed	5
Other	13
Total	100

Among migrants from Tianeti there are more individuals with higher and specialized secondary education (40% have higher education, 7% – incomplete higher education, 30% – secondary specialized and only 22% – secondary education). Thus, Tianeti migrants mainly perform unskilled jobs that do not conform to their level of education. The reason for this primarily lies in their undocumented status, as well as in the fact that they often do not speak the languages of the host countries.²⁷

²⁵ See, for example: Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 45.

²⁶ The question was formulated as follows: “What is the main occupation of the emigrant abroad?”

²⁷ Although after some time, this barrier is usually removed and immigrants learn the local language.

After 2000, when Russia introduced a visa regime with Georgia, there was a clear change in the direction of migration flows of Georgian migrants.²⁸ Although migration from Georgia to Western Europe and the United States began well before 2000, the introduction of the visa regime was another reason that triggered migration to the West.

Table 2 demonstrates the distribution of Tianeti migrants (413 people) in the receiving countries, among which, according to our census, Greece leads by a very large margin. This could be explained with the relatively low cost of migration and the possibility to legalize undocumented status there, as well, as demonstrated below, by the presence of migration networks.

Table 2. Distribution of migrants from Tianeti according to the receiving countries (n=413)

Receiving country	%
Greece	59
Ireland	9
Germany	8
Israel	5
Russia	4
USA	4
Italy	4
Spain	2
France	2
Other countries (Azerbaijan, Belgium, Britain, China, Cyprus, Turkey, Switzerland, Sweden, Ukraine)	3
Total	100

The data provided in the Table 2 is confirmed by the 2002 census data, which showed that emigration from Mtskheta-Mtianeti Region was directed primarily towards Western Europe and the USA.²⁹ According to our data, only 4% of migrants from Tianeti lived and worked in Russia, providing a fundamentally different picture of the general picture of emigration from Georgia – as one of the studies conducted in 2003 claimed that about 50% of all migrants from Georgia lived and worked in Russia.³⁰

²⁸ IOM, Labor Migration from Georgia, p. 26

²⁹ Tsuladze G., Op. cit. p. 45. See also: Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 45.

³⁰ Dershem L., Khoperia T., Op. cit. p. 44.

We believe that the direction of migration from Tianeti to the West may be partly caused by the fact that, compared to other regions of Georgia, mass migration from Tianeti started a little later, when migration to Russia has already started to decline. According to our census, the number of migrants from Tianeti began to increase sharply starting from 2000, and the largest number of migrants (77) left in 2004. Our findings are partially confirmed by a survey conducted in February 2004, which found that about half of the migrants (44.8%) from Mtskheta-Mtianeti went abroad in the past two years preceding that survey, i.e. in 2002-2003.³¹

That the mass migration from Tianeti started relatively recently, was confirmed by the interviews with informants:

I was the first one [among the relatives], who went to Greece, there were only 3-4 people from Tianeti there [in 1996 – T. Z.] (A, female, 56 years).

I then [in May, 1996 – T. Z.] went to Greece to support the family, it was something new to go there in order to support the family, only a few people from Tianeti lived there. I did not have any particularly close friends there that I hoped would meet and help me. I was very much afraid, thinking I would end up in the street, but the poverty [in Tianeti] was so overwhelming that I still went in order to help myself, my family and my child. <...> From Tianeti there were only a few people, perhaps no more than 20 when I left, but then after that, a lot of them arrived (O, female, 49).

The majority of the current and returned migrants³² from Tianeti went abroad to find work and support their families (around 90%), others – to study or to travel. The same was true for 50 out of 57 potential migrants from Tianeti, who also wanted to go abroad in order to find a job. Thus, we have every reason to believe that the migration from Tianeti is mainly for labor purposes.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Answers to the question: "What was the purpose of his/her migration?"

The functions of migration networks

“Our people abroad”

As studies of migration demonstrate, migration costs are highest for the first wave of migrants when they travel to new countries where they have no friends or acquaintances on whose assistance they can rely on. When they leave, migrants usually do not cut off ties with their families, relatives and friends who remain in their homeland. Today, with the development of communication technologies that led to decrease in the rates, many are calling their relatives several times a day; in some cases, migrants and their families back home buy computers and establish a connection via internet. Thus, they have the ability to communicate with their families almost on a daily basis, to exchange news and keep abreast of all developments “at home” and vice versa, and their families at home have quite detailed information about the lives of their loved ones abroad.

The first wave of migrants becomes an important resource for relatives and friends if they also decide to emigrate. The choice of the country of emigration depends on several factors: how much will it cost to get a visa,³³ how long will it likely take to find a job, what are the wages that can be expected in the receiving country and type of the migration policy of the host country. However, “apparently these networks function such that potential immigrants usually do not consider other possible destinations and instead go to those locations where strong network ties to the origin area already exist”.³⁴ According to researchers of migration networks, for migrants of second and later waves, the selection of the receiving country depends on the level of development and penetration of migration networks.³⁵ This finding is also confirmed by results of our research.

For example, the daughter of L. traveled legally to Germany on an Au Pair program,³⁶ stayed there a year and a few weeks before her visa expired, she moved to Greece, because a close relative lived there:

³³ Most of the labor of immigrants from Tianeti travel abroad on a tourist or a fake visa, or cross the border illegally. In this process they are assisted by an intermediary, who provides potential immigrants with necessary documents and logistical support. The cost of these services varies by country of emigration and can range from 3,000 to 12,000 USD.

³⁴ Goza F., *Immigrant Social Networks: The Brazilian Case*. <<http://www.bgsu.edu/downloads/cas/file35391.pdf>> (09.01.2011), p. 17.

³⁵ Bauer T., Epstein G., Gang I. N., *What are Migration Networks?* IZA Discussion Paper № 200, Institute for the Study of Labor. 2000, p. 7.

³⁶ Au Pair (French term meaning literally “on equal terms”) – an international program under which young people move to foreign countries for an extended period of time to work as governors/nannies in families and at the same time study the language of the host country. Besides housing, typically, they are provided with food, insurance and pocket money.

L.: Yes, yes, a relative of ours – my mother's niece, she is from here, if you look out from our yard, you can see their house. This woman is married, and was practically a teacher of my daughter and she [daughter] is very close with her children and her family, so I let her [daughter] go without any problems.

T. Z.: That means, when she [daughter] moved to Greece, did you expect your mother's niece to meet her?

L.: Yes, yes, I had thought about everything in advance and made sure this woman cares for her.

T. Z.: What if your relative was not in Greece, but, let's say, in Spain or Italy?

L.: Then I would have sent her [daughter] there, where there are more close people, because I would never let her go without knowing that there would be somebody to pay attention to her (L., female, 50 years old).

Upon her arrival in Greece, a daughter of L. lived for a while with their relative, who also helped her in finding a job.

The husband of K. decided to go to Ireland because he had acquaintances there:

Yes, he knew he had a friend there, a friend met him. <...> perhaps he decided to go there because he was hoping for someone to meet him there. If there had been no one to meet him there, in that very foreign country... I would not have supported him and helped him to go, and he himself would not have gone. Still it is difficult when you don't know the language (K., female, 37 years).

When the son of M. wanted to go abroad, M. advised him to go to France only for of one reason – she had relatives there:

I advised him [to go to France] because I had a cousin there. <...> He [son] wanted to go Ireland. In Ireland, they earn more, but for me money was not important, for me it was more important to have someone there to take care of him – and for me and my brother [it was important]. My nephew and my son went together after they got their papers in order (M., female, 49 years old).

After J. arrived in Israel, she was met by friends who had helped her get an invitation letter. With their help she found a job on the third day in a family, where she worked for over five years. Nevertheless, it took her a long time to pay off her debts. J. later decided to bring her husband to Israel. Moreover, as

J. herself noted, “I brought with me everybody who could come”. Indeed, her case, like the cases of Z. and T. (see below), clearly demonstrates how the migration of one family member leads to the migration of other family members and close and distant relatives:

First, the eldest sister of my husband left for Greece, then me, then my husband's brother's family. Then I went to Israel, took my husband and two relatives with me (J, female, 37 years old).

Z. talks about her nieces, who helped her daughter to go to Germany. Interestingly, from her sister's family only her sister's husband is left in Tianeti. The sister has already been living in Israel for five years.

First the eldest niece left [Au Pair program, Germany, 2000], the eldest took with her younger sister with her child [in 2001], (Z., female, 56 years old).

In the case of Z's daughter, who went to Germany on an AuPair program, the presence of relatives abroad was the key factor in making the decision to emigrate:

...Why did she go? She decided to leave because three of my nieces lived there. One of them has a husband there. The other two are also married, they have one child who is with them there, and because they were there, she also wanted to go. Of course, there was an economic aspect, too. [If we had had no relatives there] I would have never have let her go (Z., female, 56 years old).

Z.'s eldest niece also helped her two friends from Tianeti to go to Germany as Au Pairs – one of them moved to Greece after spending one year in Germany.

The eldest son of T. moved to Ireland in 2000 and a year later brought his brother and uncle. T.'s brother went to Ireland after being persuaded by his nephew, T.'s son:

My brother, for example, was not going anywhere and went only after his nephew [the eldest son of T.] persuaded him. He was already old, he is now 57, and even then he had a good job <...> but still things were not going well [finan-

cially]. And from Ireland, everybody was praising the situation there, [eldest son of T.] was calling and saying: "Come, you will not have any problems here" and so, he went... (T., female, 67 years old).

T.'s brother then took his eldest son to Ireland and now wants to take his wife and young son with him.

At this stage migration from Tianeti apparently became a mass phenomenon, and networks of migrants from Tianeti already developed and expanded to such an extent that for other residents of Tianeti, as in the case of G., it was not difficult to find close friends and/or relatives not just in one, but in several countries who could assist them in the process of migration:

Yes, I had relatives in Greece and in Israel as well. Yes, of course, there were people there from Tianeti, Georgian Jews. I had the address, and I knew I could rely on them when I got there (G., female, 49).

G. herself worked in Israel and sponsored her son's trip to Greece because she had a close relative there who promised to look after her son and find a job for him.

As we have seen, the presence of networking can be very important, and in some cases, can become the decisive factor not only in the process of choosing the country of migration, but also in making the decision to emigrate. "Very quickly these processes of network consolidation and expansion make migration a self-feeding phenomenon,"³⁷ creating "autonomous social structures that support immigration."³⁸ Consequently, it could be argued that with the development of migration networks the level of emigration increases, since the process of emigration is much easier, cheaper and safer.

How networks help

First wave migrants can often assist potential migrants and facilitate their migration at a lower cost. As noted by Franklin Goza, who studied Brazilian migrants,

³⁷ Waldinger R., Lighter M., *Opt.cit. M.*, p. 11.

³⁸ Light I., Bhachu P., Karageorgis S., *Migration Networks and Immigrant Entrepreneurship // Institute for Social Science Research.*, Vol. V, *California Immigrants in World Perspective: The Conference Papers, 1990*, April, Paper 1, <<http://escholarship.org/uc/item/50g990sk>> (09.01.2011), p. 1.

their social networks are instrumental in helping prospective migrants to obtain visas or illegally cross the border to enter the United States or Canada. After the arrival of new Brazilian migrants in the U.S. and Canada, they usually do not need to immediately look for housing, since they can stay with migrant family members, friends and acquaintances. According to Goza, those migrants who have been in Canada and had at least one relative there, were able to find a job on average four days earlier than migrants who did not have any relatives.³⁹

According to the results of Tianeti census, about half of migrants (returnees and present) received some kind of assistance in the migration process from their relatives and/or acquaintances, and about a quarter of them later provided such assistance to other prospective migrants. In most cases, people help their relatives, both close and distant, and count on getting help from them. It can therefore be said that ties between relatives are quite strong and many potential migrants rely on them.

Data on potential migrants completes the picture: 36 out of 57 prospective migrants received assistance from their migrant relatives and/or friends. Most of them, as seen from the table below, were provided financial assistance:

Table 3. How/by whom is help provided?

Type of Assistance	Frequency of assistance ⁴⁰
Money	36
Assistance in finding a job	6
Will meet in the country of destination	4
Obtaining visa	4
Moral support	1

Several types of assistance provided by the migration networks to potential migrants have already been identified in various studies of migration networks.⁴¹ Below we will discuss more in detail how these types of assistance work in case of migration from Tianeti.

³⁹ Goza F., *Op. cit.* p.17.

⁴⁰ Multiple answers were possible. Data for 57 potential migrants.

⁴¹ E.g.: Choldin H. M., *Kinship Networks in the Migration Process // Migration, Diasporas and Transnationalism / ed. by S. Vertovec and R. Cohen. Cheltenham, UK & Northampton, MA: An Elgar Reference Collection, 1999, pp. 5-13; Goza F. Op. cit.; Massey D. S. et al. Op. cit.; Light I., Bhachu P., Karageorgis S. Op. cit.; Waldinger R., Lighter M. Op. cit.*

Financial assistance

Migrants provide financial assistance to each other both before and after migration. Before the migration takes place, financial assistance is provided to cover all or part of pre-departure expenses. In such case a migrant provides the requested amount or part of it (as an interest or interest-free loan) to a potential migrant, who spends it to get a visa, buy a ticket and pay for middleman services. Such financial assistance plays a very important role for residents of Tianeti, because it enables them not to borrow money at high interest rates or mortgage/sell their houses.

Below are several examples of how financial assistance works:

- ▶ N. sent money from Greece to her daughter and grandson, so that they could go to Ireland, where her son-in-law was already living.
- ▶ K.'s mother, working in Greece for ten years, sent 4,000 USD to her son-in-law, K.'s husband, so that he could migrate to Ireland.
- ▶ T.'s son, one year after settling in Ireland, sent money (3,500 USD each) to his younger brother and uncle, T.'s brother, and brought them to Ireland.
- ▶ M., who by then had been in Greece for a year, covered all costs associated with her son's travel to France – 2,500 EUR (in 2003). M. herself also received assistance from her friends, who lent her money to pay for middlemen services in order to emigrate to Greece:

Money for the trip [1,600 USD in 1999] I borrowed. Yes, Leia gave me a loan, part of it I borrowed from Zina. And when I left for the second time [Greece, 2002], I paid 2,000 USD. If my cousin, Zina had not brought the money [to the office in Athens], I would have been sent back from Thessaloniki (M., female, 49 years old).

G., who worked in Israel, funded costs associated with her son's migration to Greece and also assisted three of her close friends and acquaintances from Tianeti to go abroad – both to Israel and Greece:

I was just asked for money, and I lent money to some of them, nothing more. You know, sometimes some of them [migrants] cannot return the money, but I took the risk because they were my friends, some of them were relatives... And I had no problems with them paying me back – they have returned all the money I lent to them (G., female, 49 years old).

The sense of duty which migrants have in relation to their loved ones back home, was emphasized in the interviews. This feeling is binding and despite the risk, it compels them to assist them in the migration process. It was also underlined during the interviews that borrowers were making every effort to repay the debts:

I gave them money, yes, and then they also migrated. Of course, they paid me the money back. Well, when you give a loan to loved ones, and they come and see how you work, it happens very rarely that they don't return your money (J., female, 37 years).

L. worked in Israel, but helped her sister and her sister-in-law (the wife of her brother) to go to Greece, because unlike Israel, in Greece they had an opportunity to legalize their status:

My sister and sister-in-law are in Greece. They worked there and returned the money that I gave them as an interest-free loan. My sister was a nurse, she had children, she had no prospects here [Tianeti] – now she has brought her daughter there and says that she does not plan to come back. Here I have a 600 EUR salary, and there [in Tianeti] I have nothing and why should I come [says L.'s sister]... Now my sister is waiting for citizenship, my sister-in-law is already a citizen, she comes every year to see her children and leaves, so she has all conditions (L., female, 52 years old).

After settling in a new place, migrants provide financial assistance to newly arrived migrants to pay off debts by lending them money at a low, or no interest rate. In addition, migrants establish mutual assistance funds, lending each other money to buy/renovate apartments/houses in Tianeti and/or Tbilisi, or to bring their families abroad:

O.: I quickly paid off my debt because they helped me there, they helped me to send the total amount at once, and then it was easy to pay it off as I did not have to pay the interest. I paid some interest there too, but [it was smaller] compared to what I was supposed to pay here – 10% versus 20%.

T. Z.: Who helped you?

O.: Just friends from Tianeti who were there when I got there [in Greece]. They helped me. Then, when others came, I also helped. There were people who were willing to lend at less than 10% interest rate, and others like this, with no interest, in a friendly way, helping acquaintances (O., female, 49 years old)

I lent money to a lot of people [in Greece] when they arrived there and had debts with interest. I helped a lot of people. I did not keep money at home, so then when I needed it, I did not have money. I helped people, because if there is no help, this debt increases with interest ... it is necessary to help, otherwise it is very difficult [to repay] (M., female, 49 years old).

M., who worked in Greece, had to borrow money to buy an apartment in Tbilisi:

We all have had our own networks, and we all helped each other. Zina, for example, lent me money when I was trying to buy an apartment – “just buy the apartment”, she’d say. She lent me money once but I couldn’t make the purchase, so she lent me money again (M, female, 49 years old).

In the difficult economic conditions in which the residents of Tianeti find themselves, the presence of relatives, friends and acquaintances who can provide necessary financial assistance to potential migrants to cover expenses connected with the departure, is an important factor in making the decision to migrate. Potential migrants do not have to borrow at high interest rates, making migration less costly and risky and hence more attractive and profitable. Most migrants from Tianeti stay in the receiving country undocumented and therefore do not have access to formal financial institutions, and these informal mutual funds help migrants to quickly pay off debts or to make various types of investments in Georgia. By helping each other, migrants know that if necessary they have someone they can rely on to help them and that they will not be left alone facing their problems.

Informational assistance

With the help of migrants who have already settled in the receiving countries, potential migrants learn about living and working conditions, opportunities to get a visa, and ways to emigrate to this or that country.

Four family members of G. (female, 60 years) live currently abroad: daughter and a niece – in Germany, a nephew and his wife – in Ireland. G.'s daughter was the first to leave as an Au Pair to Germany. By the time when the interview was conducted, she has lived, worked and studied in Germany for five years. She helped her cousin (G.'s niece) and provided financial and informational assistance once she got to Germany:

Yes, she [G.'s daughter] helped her [G.'s niece] and covered her travel expenses and prepared all her documents. The person who goes first becomes a "bridge" for the next person. Last year, she [G.'s daughter] submitted documents for her cousin [G.'s nephew for the university]. Yes, like an older sister, because she is more experienced, she tries to take care of them so they face fewer barriers (G., female, 60 years old).

G.'s nephew first wanted to immigrate to Germany, but since G.'s daughter said that in Germany it was very difficult to find a job for men, especially, if they are undocumented, he instead chose to migrate to Ireland with his wife at a cost of 4,500 USD.

D., (male, 40 years old) who migrated to Sweden, advised several of his friends not to come, because "there was no work there".

V.'s daughter who by the time when the interview was conducted, has already been living and working in the U.S. for seven years, served as a source of information on a new migratory route. In 2002, four of her relatives were able to leave for the U.S. for 3,500 USD, whereas the usual cost of departure at the time was 6,000 USD. The route was quite original – the potential migrants applied for a Nicaraguan visa, bought a ticket with a connection in Miami, and then turned themselves in to the US immigration authorities and applied for a refugee status.

T. [V.'s daughter] discovered this new route. A lot of Georgians went to the USA through this route, including the daughter of my sister-in-law, my cousin, my sister, and L. [V.'s distant relative], got there with the assistance of T. <...> So, she found out about this opportunity and took everyone to the US (V., female, 72 years old).

Information about job openings or business opportunities that are available for recently arrived and/or potential migrants is rapidly disseminated through migration networks. After finding a job, the first wave migrants “recruit” their relatives, as soon as there are new vacancies, thus contributing to their emigration.⁴²

Instrumental assistance

Migrants can help prospective migrants to obtain visa, provide them with official invitation letters, and refer them to trusted middlemen, who can guarantee that they get visas, and teach them what and how to say to immigration authorities when claiming political asylum upon arrival in the receiving country. Interviews with returnees and family members of current migrants demonstrate how migrants from Tianeti help newly arrived migrants after they reach the country of destination: Meet them at the airport/bus station and provide accommodation, where they can stay until they find a job. Often they are given a hand in finding a job.

When N. decided to leave with his wife to Ireland, he began looking for his friends from Tianeti there:

In England, they [N. and his wife] were met by [his] classmates, they accompanied them to Ireland. There, too, people from Tianeti met them and housed them for a few days, until they declared themselves refugees. Since then, they have been living in a hotel receiving 19 EUR per day (G., female, 60 years old).

Some other examples of instrumental assistance provided to newly arrived migrants are presented below: V.'s daughter helped her neighbors from Tianeti who applied for refugee status in Los Angeles – she found an interpreter for them, and after the first hearing of the immigration court, lent them money to cover their travel expenses to come to New York.

N.'s daughter and son-in-law gave accommodation to their relatives in Greece for four months, because they could not find jobs. In the end, N.'s son-in-law helped them to find a job.

V., who went to Sweden, gave housing to several newly arrived immigrants from Tianeti. They called him upon their arrival in Stockholm to ask for help and stayed at his place for 2-3 weeks til they found a job.

⁴² Waldinger R., Lighter M. Op. cit. p. 12.

T.'s son also lived with a former classmate during the first weeks after arriving in Ireland. Once he settled in Dublin, he brought his younger brother there and helped other friends as well:

I have a lot of locals asking for his phone number, there are so many people from Tianeti [in Dublin]. He [her son] says: "Sometimes I think this is Tianeti". I give them his phone number, and when they arrive, he arranges for them to be met and assisted... My son found jobs for many of them. <...> And yes, they stayed with them, of course, for 2 weeks, for a month, many friends stayed at their place (T., female, 67 years old).

L. (female, 52 years old) now plans to leave for the US, she has relatives there who can help her to get an invitation letter. Upon arrival, L. says, they "will meet me and help me to get a job, provide an apartment and all that".

When G. became sick in Israel, she was fired and moved in with her friend for about a month. Her friend took her to the doctor and took care of her throughout the period of her illness, practically saving her life.

Even if the migrant does not contact his/her acquaintances, relatives or friends working abroad in advance of his/her arrival, others might do this for them, as in the case of L.:

When I arrived there [in Athens]... I was thinking, God, what I should do, whom I can go to... It so happened that the mother of one of my students was working in Greece... She called her and said that I was arriving and asked her to meet me... So, a woman, whom I even did not know, stepped in the bus and asked who L., the teacher was... I answered, it was me... She said: "Come with me", I said: "I will come, but tell me who are you?" She said: "Come with me and you will find out". She brought me to the hotel. She said that she was the mother of such and such. She said she had been unemployed for the past month and that she could let me stay that night at her place (L., female, 52 years old).

In some cases assistance to newly arrived migrants is provided by people whom they hardly knew back in Tianeti. And when relatives, friends and acquaintances live abroad, a potential migrant, as a rule, has more chances to count on their assistance.

Moral assistance

“First wave” migrants also provide moral support to newcomers. Many of them require such assistance as they undergo the complex process of adaptation, feeling nostalgia for Georgia, their families and familiar environment. M. (female, 49 years old) speaks directly about such “psychological” support her friends provided her right after she arrived in Athens.

Meetings with relatives and friends on weekends are a common way of overcoming nostalgia and spending quality time. Thus, G.’s niece and daughter live not too far from each other and they try to meet regularly:

Yes, they live close to each other. They meet on Sundays, and if they cannot manage, they make it sure to meet on the next Sunday. They meet every Sunday unless something comes up. This means a lot in terms of overcoming nostalgia (G., female, 60 years old).

In Athens, Greece, there is a special place where migrants from Tianeti meet each other. The place is called Omonia. Buses with letters and parcels from Tianeti arrive here every Sunday. From there, migrants send letters and parcels to their families back in Tianeti. Migrants often gather together, cook Georgian dishes and celebrate Georgian holidays, all of which helps them cope with being homesick. Returnees from Israel recalled that sometimes they organized joint excursions to visit historic places and that the Georgian restaurant in Jerusalem *Nana* was a place where migrants often met.

Many migrants regularly attend religious services at Orthodox churches, which often become places to socialize and exchange news. Some migrants take active part in religious ceremonies and sing in church choirs. It can be said that despite the absence of formal associations or unions of Georgian labor migrants abroad, they still find places to meet, communicate, tackle their problems, morally support each other, and engage in familiar cultural practices.

Concluding remarks

The present paper is the first attempt to analyze the role of migration networks in facilitating migration from Georgia on the case of a small migrant sending community, Tianeti. The findings demonstrated that “first wave” immigrants provide financial, informational, instrumental and moral assistance to newly arrived migrants. This assistance becomes a very important resource in the migration process, making the departure safer, cheaper and more profitable enterprise. Especially important are the informal financial assistance which compensates for migrants’ limited access to formal financial institutions and the instrumental assistance that partly performs the same functions as the state welfare assistance, to which undocumented migrants have no access.

Based on the results of the research in Tianeti, we can conclude that migration from Tianeti has a mass character: twenty-eight per cent of households have at least one family member living abroad, a significant part of the population has family members living in several countries who could assist them in the migration process. Thus, potential migrants may have multiple choices in terms of countries of migration, that will be supported by migration networks. A potential migrant selects a country, taking into account such factors as the expected cost of travel, the migration policy of the host country (possibility to obtain legal status), the presence of a certain type of work, etc. The assistance received from “our people” located in one country can be used to migrate to another country, where there are other “our people” (such as when a migrant from Israel lends money to someone to depart for Greece). Consequently, the more developed the migration networks a potential migrant has access to, the greater his or her capacity to mobilize and combine different types of assistance provided by migration networks.

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