

**COST Action IS0803**

**Working Paper**

**Con-frontiering the family: past networks and future webs among  
the Georgian immigrants in Greece**

**Eleni Sideri**

**International Hellenic University**

**School of Humanities**

**Cultural Studies of the Black Sea**

**elasideri@gmail.com**

This paper was first presented at: **Workshop 4**

**Time: Pasts & Futures .The Path Dependence of  
Borders' Making and Breaking**

On: **5-6/10/2010**

Location: **HERZLIYA**

Keywords: **transnational migration, gender, Georgian cinema,  
path dependence theory, Georgia, Greece**

Disciplines: **Social Anthropology, Migration Studies**

## Abstract

*Bryceson and Vuorela (2002) in their work, The transnational Family. New Europe, Frontiers and Global Networks, launched the terms of 'frontiering' and 'relativizing' in order to illustrate first, the ways families in migration try to "make a home" and/or "feel at home" in new and sometimes hostile spaces. Secondly, they underline how and to what degree these affinities become quite eclectic in their intensity and expression. With these terms the two social scientists aspire at drawing our attention to the multiple ways the formation of the familial takes place, which often oscillate from being friendly and cooperative to more antagonistic and conflicting behaviours. They also point out to the various backgrounds (social or cultural) and institutions (for instance, the legal systems) involved. Following their incite, this paper will try to apply the notions of 'frontiering' and 'relativizing' not only spatially but also temporally in the context of the Greek-Georgian families that opt for migration. My paper will examine their strategies and how their past experiences and aspirations for the future take advantage family and diasporic networks, but also how the latter deal with institutional or (trans)national boundaries. In this way, this paper will try to conceptualize the ways borders become relativized within families, but also how the latter often turn into frontiers of their own.*

## 1. Introduction

The incentive for this paper was the concept of 'path dependence' and what kind of forms it takes within the context that we usually call family. In my fieldwork among the ethnic Greek Georgians, I realized that my interviewees often based their decisions concerning their migration (destination, time, and forms of travel) on their family both in the sense of family connections as well as of priorities. Soon, I became aware of the fact that this process was double edged: not only family has an impact on migration but migration influenced family too: who constitutes it, what characteristics it takes, how it evolves or even dissolves.

As a result, my paper will use the path dependence theory as a starting point in order to examine how this path takes place in the mapping of families, and in particular, transnational families. In doing so, I will use Vuorela and Bryceson concepts of frontiering and relativizing in order to consider how these transnational families are being formed and how these concepts could contribute to our understanding about path dependence. My ethnographic example will be based on a Georgian film—one of the first that tried to visualize the experience of transnational

migration among Georgian families in Greece. I will compare this representation and the discourses it conveys to my ethnographic work.

I will first consider some issues of the path dependence theory and secondly, its relation to migration studies. Then, I will discuss through a film analysis how Georgian immigrant families are represented and what this representation could tell us about national imaginaries regarding families, gender and migration. In the conclusion, I will reconsider path dependence theory in view of my above discussion of the Georgian case.

## **2. Path Dependence Theory**

Path dependence theory stems from economics and put the stress on the past and its outcomes and impact on the present. The most discussed case studies of the theory come from the field of new technologies in 1980s which drew the attention to the ways considerable returns could be attained in relation to past consumers' habits and practices. The first case study was the gradual dominance of the VHS video tape versus the BETA one and the second the QWERTY keyboard<sup>1</sup>. The former conquered the video market because the VHS recorders were available in more consumer friendly prices, in more accessible main street electro-chains and they had more recording time capacity than BETA, which, however, had been launched as a product of better image quality. In other words, it was not technological excel, but price and accessibility that attracted the main pool of consumers, that of middle class (Brillo 2008<sup>2</sup>). Similar convenience patterns led to the dominance of the QWERTY

---

<sup>1</sup> David, P. A. (1997) "Path Dependence and the Quest for Historical Economics: One More Chorus of the Ballad of QWERTY." University of Oxford Discussion Papers in Economic and Social History, Number 20. <http://www.nuff.ox.ac.uk/economics/history/paper20/david3.pdf> (accessed 2/8/2010)

<sup>2</sup> Brillo, B. B. (2008) "Path Dependence, Increasing Returns, and

keyboard. The users of the old typewriters were accustomed in a certain order of letter that was continued by the new QWERTY keyboard (David 1997). Both cases illustrate how established patterns of behavior of the consumers could have a decisive impact on the returns. As a result, economic processes are contingent on human habits and choices.

The realization that standard economic growth rate is path dependable on less predictable and more diverse agents soon drew the attention of other disciplines to this theory. Political science and in particular, the history of development, establishment and continuity of organizations and institutions was one of them. The latter through path dependence tried to find an explanatory framework for the problem continuity and change of these institutions often considered resistant to alteration under the pretext of order and stability. In this way, the importance of history and time in the study of these institutions and the need for a more contextualized analysis are underlined.

Path dependence theory, though, encouraged different approaches in the way change and continuity were studied. Fetzer<sup>3</sup> (2009) in his analysis of path dependence affects on the European post-Fordist economics distinguishes two general strands of this theory. On the one hand, the past is considered as a legacy that, to a degree, predetermines our decisions and hence, the future. On the other hand, any change is generated from what is called “critical juncture”, which I am going to explain below (see Collier and Collier 1991). The first approach often treats the past as homogenous

---

Philippine Labour Migration Policy” Crossroads” 8:1, 24-62,  
<http://www.webasa.org/Pubblicazioni/crossroads2008-1.pdf> (accessed 28/7/2010)

<sup>3</sup> Fetzer, T. (2009) Beyond Convergence versus Path Dependence  
 The Internationalization of Industrial Relations at Ford Germany and Britain (1967–1985) max Planck  
 Institute Working Paper 09/03,  
<http://www.mpifg.de/pu/workpap/wp09-3.pdf> (accessed 17/7/2010)

and static, as an object to be transmitted. In this way, over-determinism and causality marginalizes individual agency and serendipity which often play a crucial role in the development of any path and especially in migration. The second approach tries to bridge pre-existing social and economic structures with individual experience and its role on the decision-making. In order to define the concept of “critical juncture” David and Ruth Collier suggest three phases: i. the antecedent condition, ii. the moment/point of selection and iii. the phase of reproduction. In this way, they tried to combine an explanatory framework that was dismissive neither of structure nor of agency and inclusive of both lived experience and creativity; the past and the moment. The problem with this approach is the stress on the idea of crisis, as a macro concept which forces decisions to be made (path as punctuated equilibrium). The critical juncture builds upon an idea of crisis of a rather larger scale which generates a breaking line between a before/after.

In other words, the metaphor of punctuated equilibrium depicts an abrupt, enforced change on the one hand, but on the other hand, it aspires and propagates order. At the same time, it does not provide for the periodicity of crisis (when it starts and when it ends, how or when we pass from the one phase to the other). But also, it does not account for who could identify these normative, antecedent conditions, which are only described a posteriori. But what happens in moments which cannot be described as such, neither in magnitude nor in force, but nevertheless, they lead to a series of micro-decisions at a personal level bringing or not equilibrium in an individual’s life? At the same time, the conceptualization of globalization as processes connecting different spheres and levels of interaction, we should replace the idea of conjunctures with junctures. Our analysis should enable us to consider path dependence as a series of re-enactments of past experience and with present dilemmas

and hopes for the future as well as wider socio-economic conditions filtered through personal needs and ambitions. Considering path dependence through this angle could contribute to move from linearity to plurality, from abstractedness to practice and from stasis to transformation.

We do not need path dependence theory in migration studies in order to remind us that past and history matter. Migration is generated through a variety of causes, which combine individual choices and structural mechanisms (migration policies, border controls histories of migration and integration). One of the categories of migration which seems to have emerged since the 1990s is transnational migration. The transnational perspective<sup>4</sup> tried to overcome the inadequacies of older conceptualizations of migration in terms of the ways sending and host countries are interrelated in this process. Although transnationalism initially drew the attention to non-state stakeholders involved in migration, it soon became obvious that transnational migration is constituted through highly institutionalised and hierarchised practices and processes which, as a result, reinforce nation-states. At the same time, although it was underlined that transmigrants are embedded in “multi-layered social fields” (Vertovec& Levitt 2003 4) the lived experience and relations of these fields were often overlooked. Looking at these fields and their impact on migration transforms path dependence to path inter-dependence. How do historical paths, social perceptions of migration as well as policies and legal frameworks affect the formation of migration networks? How do the one connect to each and in what way affect these networks and in which country (that of origin or that of host)? One of them most

---

<sup>4</sup> I take, here, transnationalism as the phenomenon which “ refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation-states” (Vertovec 2009: 13). Although the definition is very wide, what I find useful in the usage of this term is the open invitation to define it because of its broadness and reference to allegedly contradictory poles: nations and their transcendence. Doing so, in my experience, could be more beneficial than the usage of other less problematic and clearer concepts.

important networks that seem to play a critical factor in migration-transnational migration included- is family.

Although the study of family is one of the oldest fields of study in anthropology, it recently reemerged as a subject of academic interest. This shift resulted from the development in reproductive technologies, changes in transport and communication technologies and their impact on global migrations. Several studies in these fields contributed to the denaturalization of kinship by separating it from biology and proposing a new take that considers kinship more as a field where different “cultures of relatedness” take place (Carsten 2000) than a strict category. Turning, therefore, the attention to the study of “transnational families” could create a vantage point in order to reconsider the ways family is constituted and the meanings it takes, often expressed through numerous kinship metaphors. But what is a transnational family? Is it only the family whose members are dispersed in different countries? Bryceson and Vuorela (2002:5) defined transnational families as “families that live some or most of their time separated from each other, yet hold together and create something that can be seen as a feeling of collective welfare and unity namely familiness, even across national borders”.

This definition considers family as an imagined community which is expanded across different borders and brings them together due to need, interest (welfare) and psychic closeness. Membership in these families should take into account constraints in terms of space (where the members are located) and time (when they communicate with each other). What Bryceson and Vuorela underline is that familiness, this feeling of closeness and solidarity, is more a result of the pragmatics of every day life than a naturalized feeling transmitted from generation to generation and from one member to another through blood ties. Furthermore, the latter takes shape within

specific mechanisms and policies that often decide who can cross the borders and in what capacity (legal/illegal migrant, refugee or other categories). At the same time, the various experiences of transgressing or crossing borders generate family stories about successes and failures which produce their own mythologies within families themselves, but also, the wider communities. These mythologies construct new visions about possibilities and options “out there”, but also reproduce similar trajectories resulting to what we have called path dependence. My paper will postulate how Georgian imagination captures the experience of this migration in relation to older conceptualizations of the “Georgian family” and new “mythologies”.

In order to understand the formation of familiness, Bruceson and Vuorela introduced two concepts that of frontiering and relativizing, which describe the difficulties in the production of family. The former refers to the ways family ties and networks are created “in a terrain where affinal connections are relatively sparse” (2005: 11). The concept of front, according to the two authors, shifts the attention to movement which does not exclude conflict, whereas, at the same time, it alludes to histories of colonization where the front was used in order to symbolize the line between western civilization and savagery, for instance in the colonization the American West or the Russian colonization towards the steppe and the Caucasus. I consider this point crucial since first, it turns our attention to movement which, as I will argue, is a good way to conceptualize the formation of path dependence in a non-static way which relates both to personal experiences of the later as well as to legal and political conditions. It also underlines the connection of current migrations to that of the past and sheds light to preconceptions related to this past and how they are reflected in the discussion of the modern migratory waves towards Europe.

Relativizing, on the other hand, refers to the diversity of means used or being invented in order to maintain, renew or interrupt intra and inter-family relations so as they could create or transform familiness and in this way, to contribute to the preservation of these families. Relativizing signifies not only the fluidity of the ties of these transnational families, but also their relational nature, a central condition for their survival across borders. In this sense, I consider its importance as it suggests dependence to but also from which stress the subjective and objective aspects of transmigration.

Let me at this point turn to an example of a Georgian transnational family, as it is depicted in the Georgian film “Kutaiseli Babua” (2007) (The grandpa from Kutaisi) by Zaza Kolelishvili. The discussion will help me examine the two concepts introduced by Bryceson and Vuorela in the Georgian context in order to show their inter-dependence and to discuss how they could contribute to trace of path dependence. It will also help me compare the representation of this case to my ethnographic experiences through my interviewees in Georgia.

### **The grandfather from Kutaisi: filming a transnational family**

The Georgian cinema was one of the most respected in the former Soviet Union but also in the wider European cinematographic landscape with a long history that started in the 1900s. It became known for its often critical stance against the Soviet authorities through an idiomatic surrealism, but also its references to the Caucasian folklore traditions. Zaza Kolelishvili is a popular Georgian artist, actor since the 1970s and director since the 1990s both in the theatre and cinema. His movie “Kutaiseli Babua” (2007) (The grandpa from Kutaisi) is the second feature film he directed and the first one on migration. The film is a comedy about a Georgian family

split in two between Kutaisi (western Georgia) and Athens, which is reunited on the occasion of the first grandson's christening. The film was screened in Thessaloniki in a special ceremony organized by the Georgian grassroots (Saqartvelo) in October 2008. I was invited to the event by my friend Manana (21-year-old) who lives in Thessaloniki. I met Manana through an advertisement I posted at the Aristotle University in order to find somebody to practice my Georgian after my return from the field.

The ceremony took place in a small cinema hall that the municipality of Ambelokipi owns. Ambelokipi is situated in the western part of Thessaloniki which lies just behind the main train station and has almost 50.000 inhabitants (Census 2001). The municipality was founded by the Asia Minor refugees (1922) and on the official web site, the mayor proudly speaks of a 5<sup>th</sup> generation of refugees who grows up in Ambelokipi<sup>5</sup>. Despite the various urban problems, such as environmental problems, Ambelokipi received a great number of immigrants from the former Soviet Union in the 1990s. Many of them were from Georgia (Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace 2001), which justifies on the one hand, the decision of the municipalities of Ambelokipi to allow the event and on the other hand, the presence of the authorities (mayor, prefect and people from the Georgian consulate). The ceremony had a double objective: the screening of the film and celebration of the Greek national celebration (28<sup>th</sup> of October), that is why the date chosen was two days before the national celebration.

The ceremony was centred on the screening of the film but besides that, it included Georgian dances from a group of ethnic-Georgian immigrant children, local to Ambelokipi and a short documentary about Georgia, its culture and cuisine. Both

---

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.ampelokipoi.gr/index.php?SCREEN=show\\_page&sid=1&id=1](http://www.ampelokipoi.gr/index.php?SCREEN=show_page&sid=1&id=1) (last accessed 28/8/2010)

the documentary and the films were available for buying just outside the hall. The money collected was going to support the Georgian grassroots. The Greek officials stayed only for the initial speeches and the dances. The audience, besides the officials from both countries was in its majority Georgian families and the very few Greeks attending were married to Georgian women or men (the former was the majority of the cases). The screening was in Georgian with no subtitles.

The film starts with an introduction of Kutaisi and its connections to ancient Greece through the myth of the Argonauts and the ancient kingdom of Colchis. The myth runs throughout the film through the names of the main characters and the central love-story: the daughter who migrates to Greece with her mother is called Mediko (Georgian diminutive for Medea) and the Greek boyfriend and later husband is Jason. These “coincidences” makes the father of Mediko and later grandfather, Bondo, who is the central character and the one who stays back in Kutaisi, to wonder who the Golden Fleece is in his family’s case. The introductory narration in the beginning gives information about Kutaisi, compares its history to that of Greece and underlines the economic and cultural ties of the two regions which, according to the film, have cultivated through the years a fertile ground for the migration of the family. This particular case of migration is represented as deeply rooted in the history of Black Sea, according to Kolelishvili. Furthermore, the film rather suggests that the migration from Georgia to Greece symbolically marks a turn to this history of exchanges and encounters between these two peoples of the Black Sea where the Georgians are forced to migrate to Greece in the way ancient Greeks had done during the period of colonization in the 8<sup>th</sup> BC.

The past as legacy seems to become an important part of the filmic representation. The way it intersects with the life of the characters in the film seems to

be offered as an explanatory framework for the causes led the mother and especially the daughter to Greece. The same historical discourse was used in the formal speeches that opened the ceremony by the leaders of the grassroots as well as the Greek representatives of the local authorities. The similarities in the discursive strategies, though, do not imply the same intentions. The film uses the myth and the historical links of the two countries as the romantic framework in order to develop the love-story between Mediko and Jason. Kolelishvili also underline the shifts in history as a way to explain the waves of migrants who left Georgia. Similar argument was made in the speeches of the Georgian officials who referred to the history of their country in comparison to its current plight. On the contrary, the speeches of the Greek authorities, despite their reference to history, underlined the theme of hospitality, a frequent theme in various migration discourses in Greece and in states where the right of blood (*ius sanguinis*) is dominant in the law of citizenship, setting clearly the boundaries between natives and foreigners.

What seems to emerge from these different takes on history is its translation into politics and policies of migration in both countries. As in the 1990s Greece became a migrant receiving country, the debates about migration policies became central in public discourses, although they passed from different phases: denial, tolerance, integration “under construction”. In this context, macro-structures of migrations legislative frameworks, economic incentives and cultural ties interact with micro-structures, such as family networks and community histories and in this interaction national histories are transfused into migration policies. Despite the “historical” linkages mentioned, Georgia and Greece had in common another human bridge: the ethnic-Greek Georgians. The emergence of the Georgian nationalism and the economic plight of Georgian in early 1990s forced the Greek communities in

migration their historical homeland. Their massive immigration had an impact this time on the ethnic Georgian migrants from Georgia. It contributed to the popularity of Greece as a migratory-destination, as there was not rare for a family to have some connections (acquaintances, friends, co-villagers) that acted as a link with the potential host country. The case of my friend Manana seems to exemplify this path. Her mother was the first to immigrate, as she had an ethnic Greek Georgian friend to help her. This is indicative of the embeddedness macro and micro structures in each other.

Another issue that is dominant in the film is gender. As the film shows, it is a female migration. Although the official data do not show a considerable difference between male and female Georgians who opted for migration (IMEPO 2004)<sup>6</sup>, the unregistered and invisible in many cases labour of women often makes their immigration difficult to be recorded. The film is clear about that. When the family had nothing to pay off their debts after some failed investments, Natela, the wife, is the one who decides to immigrate taking with her the daughter and leaving behind the little son. The excuse for this decision is that Natela had a friend who had already immigrated to Greece working as care-taker of an old Greek couple. The representation of Bondo's life in Kutaisi is quite humorous and in some ways, even sarcastic. The little son did not stay with his father. He was sent to Bondo's mother-in-law, as he does not seem able to take care of him. The little one needed female care, Bondo argues. What does the husband's life in Kutaisi consist of? He is

---

<sup>6</sup> 'IMEPO' (Migration Policy Institute) (2004) *Statistical data on immigrants in Greece. An analytical study of available data and recommendations for conformity with European Union standards-November 2004*, <http://www.imepo.gr> (accessed 24/6/2010)

unemployed without even looking for a job. The film implies that he is supported by his wife and daughter.

He, instead, enjoys a life that his neighbours envy. He wears a plain white T-shirt with the name of HELLAS (Greece) written on the front and shares the products his wife sends with his neighbours. When one parcel arrives from Greece, he immediately goes to the balcony in order to invite his friends to buy some bread and to enjoy altogether the “foreign beer” (pirma), as he proudly underlines. The parcel is full with presents for relatives and friends. The parcel strengthens the husband’s social capital and his status among his friends and neighbours. However, this capital generates also negative results for the reputation of the family and the position of the husband.

As Bondo prepares a little feast for the neighbours, the latter, also jobless males pass their time by playing backgammon and gossip about Natela and what she actually does in Greece in order to earn money. They laugh at the husband’s expense concluding that no doubt Natela was cheating on her husband; nevertheless this does not prevent them from planning, as they admit to each other, to send their own daughters to other European countries so that they could contribute to the family’s income. When Bondo joins them for the traditional and very strictly-structured round of cheers, the first one, which is traditionally dedicated to the host, this time is dedicated to the “otzakhis budzebs” (bread winner), in other words, to Natela, as the neighbours clarify. The comment does not provoke any reaction from Bondo’s behalf that seems to have accepted the situation. Nevertheless, he admits his wife had made a sacrifice in order for the family to be saved.

The socio-political upheavals of the 1990s brought a shift in the gender relations in Georgia that even the Soviet ideology of emancipation of women did not succeed to do so (Sideri 2007). The patriarchal construction of the Georgian family and nation seemed to have been challenged by the economic exigencies of the families and the international labour market that favoured female migration. Georgian women, as many admitted in their interviews, did not hesitate to do the menial jobs that often were offered in order to migrate. They seemed to be more flexible, adaptable and less impeded by “honour” in comparison to their male partners. As one of them told me in one of my interviews in Georgia, “My honour is the survival and the improvement of the life of my children”. These conscientious choices and life-planning are interpreted in the film as a “sacrifice”, something that alludes to women that transcend their gender roles in order to save the family honour reproducing the patriarchal imagination of nationhood as women that become men to defend the family’s social face and not because of their personal motivation or needs. In other words, female agency is marginalized by social emergency.

The jobs in the host country, as the film describes, were often found through family or friends who frequently functioned on a “rotation system” (Morokvasic 2004: 17) so that the position/income will not be lost for either the family and for the wider network of women who acts as family by taking care the interests of each other through sharing the same job network. In this way, ties unrelated in terms of blood, are strengthened in terms of “functionability and efficacy” (ibid: 21). Parcels are sent with gifts not only to family members, but to friends and neighbours and those returning make sure to give news to the families of those who are still away, acting as mediators in order to maintain the “family” ties. Often friends or neighbours act as family taking care of the neighbors’ property or children in the case where the family

members left behind are unable to take care of them, for example, in the case of aged or sick family members. In this framework, we should add another aspect in relation to the idea of movement of the path, that of directionality. Path dependence does not signify, in this case, a movement forward or even in –between. I could have the form of a circle, implied in the rotation system of these women.

However, as the film commented Natela's immigration seemed to be interpreted both as sacrifice, but also as a potential prostitution that threatened to destroy both the male honour and the social order represented by the a latter. This could be a deeply rooted fear that often remains hidden because of the pragmatic family needs. It could also be more than a fear based on stories happened to other friends or family members. These stories circulate, as products and people do, within these transnational networks acting as warnings for what might happen, forcing precautionary measures, such as the monitoring of women both at home and away through the vigilance of male family members. They could demonstrate the existence of these kind of networks that could lead to the crossing of borders (enforced or not).

As Morokvasic (2004) suggests migration is not a magic path that could transform women to independent agents. In many cases, social and psychological control is increased back home with father, husbands or even sons to turn into “protectors” of family honour in the new country. In other cases, this pressure leads to the decision for return. In their return, they often have to face several problems in order to reestablish their relation to their families, especially to their husbands, such as abuse and restraints over their social life. Natela does not seem to be unaware of these fears. In her letters home, she idealizes the situation she faces. For example, she avoids to report anything about the sexual abuse she suffers (represented rather comically and almost innocently in the film) which beautifies the much uglier reality.

The two women, mother and daughter, are represented as hard working. They are both employed at the service industry: the mother takes care of a sick young male and the daughter works in a Greek tavern. The relation to the Greeks varies: from abuse to romance. The young girl is represented to adapt faster: she learns Greek and enjoys Greek music and life. She falls in love with the son of her employer and she becomes pregnant. The young Greek seems respectful of Mediko's culture, trying to learn her language and to speak to his mother-in-law, Natela in Georgian. The family of the boy and that of the sick man whom Natela is taking care of are totally absent from the film.

Natela announces in her letter the news of the love affair and the coming grandchild as a "good fortune" for Medico and the family underlining the mother's awareness of what her husband's reaction might be from this exclusion. The father who is left outside from a central social process that usually reaffirms his power in the family life should find out about this news in a way that will not provoke his anger, but also it will not offend him. This marginalization of the father's role is pictured through a scene where Bondo alone in his empty house in Kutaisi wonders whether he is not like the king Aeëtes, the father of mythological Medea, who was betrayed by her own daughter and her love for Jason. This moment is central for the husband who from that moment onwards is being transformed. He finds his vitality and strength in order to struggle against any obstacle (bureaucracy in the Greek consulate in Tbilisi) that prevents the family's reunification on the occasion of the grandson's christening. In the end he succeeds make the journey and to reach Athens for the happy event.

### **Imagining the transnational families**

Discussing the formation of transnational families and their identities, Bryceson and Vuorela suggest that they are multi- locational and they are developed through various extra-familial networks (“frontier networks” 2002: 19). These networks, for the two social scientists, are based on 1. the original home area networking, 2. the current residential neighbourhood/work areas 3. the transnational realm of residential and cultural choice, and finally 4. the transnational realm of social and cultural choices and morality. These fields are interrelated and cross-cutting each other. They are also internally differentiated in terms of gender, age, generation, class or race. The engagement in these fields entails both confronting with boundaries and relativizing them. Let me study at this point, the formation of these fields in relation to my discussion of the film.

Origin is strongly emphasized in the film, as it is central in Natela’s quest for a job, but also in the screening of the film in Greece, which was organized because of this common origin of the audience and therefore, their common interest for their homeland, but also the similar experience of migration. In terms of the former, the film is rather ambiguous, as despite one scene where Natela is looking for this Georgian friend, when she arrives in Athens with her daughter, other interactions with co-ethnics in Greece are inexistent. Most of the time, Natela communicates with the young man she looks after, her daughter and her son-in-law. She also writes letters to her husband. Personal and community linkages are important for transnational migrations as a way to renew and broaden transnational networks. Nevertheless, their continuity and degree of intensity depends on various factors, such as age or work load and type of activity. For example, Mediko communicates with her father only through her mother.

At the same time, the type of the work could prevent or reinforce these networks. For example, working as full-time care taker obstructs Natela's social life. Even in the case of her daughter's pregnancy, she hardly finds time to go to the hospital and help her. At the same time, these ties could be mediated through various associations, like in the case of the grassroots Saqartvelo, which is the organizer of the film's night. This is a form of a more "institutionalized" link to the homeland which often involves the engagement of authorities (at different levels or ways) of the two states. This form often develops after some time in the host country and when a more significant number of immigrants arrives. There are, nevertheless, other less formal associations, such as sport clubs or churches that could contribute to the preservation of ties with the home area. As a result, the impact of the original area is not static, but it varies in terms of the relations each member develops during his/her immigration as well as the legal framework within which the latter takes place. In this way, the original area's impact should not be idealized, as it is often done, through the metaphor of the nation as family. The internal hierarchies and forms of social control that function in the original area could also put pressure on the transmigrants, like the case of Natela and the rumours about her behavior show.

Similarly, the current residential neighbourhood/work areas both as a choice of destination, but also as a lived space of social relations in the host country (neighbourhood or workplace) play a significant role in the formation of familiness. In the film, the working environment (the neighbourhood is not pictured at all) of both women play a significant role not only in preserving and perpetuating ties, but also giving opportunities to expand the "family". As I discussed in my introduction in regards with the organization of the screening of the film in Thessaloniki, neighbourhood in the sense of residential area, is important as it could create a space

of co-ethnic sociality. The latter is not necessarily an a priori intention or an explicit sign of affiliation, but it could have an economic base. As the case of Ambelokipi shows, many of the Georgian immigrants in Thessaloniki live in the same area, both because of the pre-existing ethnic networks, but more importantly, the low prices of the houses. This situation contributes to the maintenance of ties with the homeland either through the physical presence of relatives (co-villagers and friends) in the same area, but also with the development of various forms of grassroots activities, like the dance group presented during the ceremony. At the same time, it helps the preservation of the language and its transmission to the new generation of the ethnic Georgian children who are usually more exposed to the host society (schooling, peer-groups).

The film stresses the relations of the two women in their work place. The relation of Natela with the mentally-challenged young man she is taking care of is complex. It fluctuates from abuse to tenderness, from exploitation to compassion. The incident of sexual abuse is sketched in a way so that it could provoke the laughter of the audience (when the man caresses Natela's body while she tries to feed him and change his clothes, she leaves him infuriated and he "runs" after her on the wheelchair asking for forgiveness), but at the same time, the incident hints to an uglier reality in the market of domestic services. This reality circulates through stories and rumours between the countries and incites the fears of the Georgian society about their "mother and daughters". The reaction of Natela who fiercely reacts to her employer's advances reaffirms all the national stereotypes about the "proper" behaviour of a Georgian woman in order to keep the family's honour.

The latter is supported by the representation of abuse as comic and innocent misdemeanor of a mentally-challenged man. Furthermore, when there is a brief

description of Natela's duties, the narrator strongly emphasizes that in no case does Natela bathe the man. In this way, Natela is pictures as a mother and wife but not as an individual with sexual needs and rights reinforcing in this sanitized description the national imagination about the Georgian woman. At the same time, however, this young man/employer is the only person that Natela has next to her side, when she waits alone outside the hospital for her daughter to give birth. These two people share the same agony and the same joy. When Natela finds out the happy news, the man tenderly caresses her cheek provoking her gratitude for his compassion.

The findings of a recent research about the domestic labour market in Greece support the complex relation of employers/employees pictured in the film (Papataxiarchis, Topali& Athanassopoulou 2009). As it is argued, the specific labour market, because of the domestic sphere it takes place, is predominantly female and remains invisible behind close doors, often naturalizing as innate element of the domestic space different forms of abuse. Despite the economic and social asymmetry of the relations developed in this form of labour, its role is not exhausted within the opposition of oppressor-employer/victim-employee. Instead, it becomes a field where gender relations and domestic roles and identities are being transformed contributing to the formation of a new social plurality in Greece. What is interesting in the film is the complete absence of the Greek family, something that challenges the stereotype of the closely attached "Greek family". Neither the family/relatives of the mentally-challenged man nor those of Mediko's boyfriend make an appearance in the film reinforcing in this way the invisibility of the specific labour market.

The development of inter-dependent relations that goes beyond the economic sphere in this domestic space illustrates to what degree domestic labour affects the core of the "family space", despite and maybe because of its invisibility. According

to the outcome of this new ethnographic study regarding the different ethnic groups involved in this labour market in Greece, the ways older forms of kinship, which were used to take part in the formation of domestic relations and the distribution of roles this kinship was expressed through, for example mother-daughter, mother-in-law/daughter-in-law, remain significant in the perception of the relations between Greek employer and immigrant employees, how they should be structured and they should be developed. During the professionalization of the domestic space in Greece these perceptions often contribute to the inequalities of this labour market, and the lack of reciprocity, social recognition and economic reward.

However, as the film shows, work relations can evolve to (cognate) “blood relations” through marriage. The case of Mediko, the young daughter, becomes an example of a “good fortune”, as her mother explains the romance to Bondo. Mythological past is becomes a canvas. Kolelishvili uses Medea’s myth schematically in order to emphasize the love story, and in this way, to romanticize the hardships of the family’s migration. On the other hand, it contextualizes Mediko’s marriage within a tradition of exchanges, which often pushed the frontiers and created alliances and ties in the Caucasus<sup>7</sup>. This younger generation of Greeks and Georgians seem to be represented in the film as more susceptible to hybridization which somehow is projected as the future for Natela’s family, but also for this immigration. Both Mediko and Jason appear to mutually respect the cultural background of each other and stay open to the social and cultural challenges of their decision to start a family of their own. This type of families, are not rare, as I underlined, in the grassroots ceremony.

---

<sup>7</sup> Bruce Grant in his *The Captive and the Gift* (2009) shows the various traditions of exchange of bodies in the Caucasus and their multiple transformations through the centuries of colonialism. It would be interested to examine his argument in a more transnational space.

Mixed marriages seem to become exemplified in the film as mutually beneficial transfusion both of nature and nurture, blood and culture, although more research should be done in order to examine the formation of these families and to understand the transformations they convey in terms of social perceptions regarding family in both countries. However, as far as I am could tell from my research, the reception of such union depends. Often families intervene in order to prevent marriage to “inappropriate” partners, such as, people of other ethnic groups. For example, many families choose to send their young girls or boys to the country of origin in order to meet the right partner. The future of such marriages and the path the couples follow (residence in the host country, immigration or permanent return) depends on the ethnicity of the partner and his/her access to citizenship rights or the financial success of the family during their immigration.

The case of mixed marriages shows to what degree these fields of interaction, described by Bryceson and Vuorela, the “frontier networks” are interrelated. Mixed marriages do not constitute only an example of the impact of current residential neighbourhood/work areas. They are also connected to the third network that Bryceson and Vuorela described as “transnational realm of like-minds” (2005: 22), in other words, the social space where transnational families create or take part in, in order to maintain, transform or expand their linkages to either societies (origin and host). This space depends, of course on various factors, such as age and gender and the economic background of each family (for example if they could frequently travel to the homeland) as well as more structural mechanisms, such as, visa regimes, or type of education (mother tongue, multicultural). For example, my friend Manana, attended school both in Georgia and in Greece; as a result, she is fluent in both languages. But at the same time, she had several problems with bureaucracy in both

countries, when she tried to submit her papers in order to get registered at a Greek institution of Higher Education.

Furthermore, the film ceremony indicates the ways the grassroots and the immigrants try to keep up their ties to their country of origin. But I would suggest here, that the presence of this audience in the ceremony does not equate to the development of an organized activism. It could be only a moment of social amusement and relaxation, a moment of “hanging around with friends” which does not lead to another engagement with the grassroots or any other sort of activism. This does not make their presence less significant, as it is a sign that these immigrants have the choice to participate or not to transnational networks. It is this choice that constitutes the “transnational network of mind”. The decision itself constitutes an example of what Bryceson and Vuorella (2005: 22) called “locational and cultural choice that was pragmatically transnational”. Moreover, the presence of the Greek and Georgian officials also suggests the fact that these immigrants become significant social and political force for both countries, Georgia and Greece. Their presence contributes to the transformation of both societies and the gradual realization of transnationalism as a phenomenon that has an impact in both societies. The changes in the legal framework in Greece regarding of immigrants’ rights<sup>8</sup> but also, since 2004 dual citizenship is discussed in Georgia, but it is granted with several restrictions on certain occasions<sup>9</sup>. In this way, it seems that transnational migration affects the politics in both countries involved.

The film’s happy end reunites the family through its renewal and transformation with the new members (Jason and the grandchild) under the auspices

---

<sup>8</sup> Decree 3838/ FEK 49A, 24.03.2010, <http://www.taxnewsgr.com/news/nomos-3838-2010/> (accessed 5/9/2010)

<sup>9</sup> Decree N380, [http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?sec\\_id=234&lang\\_id=ENG](http://www.president.gov.ge/index.php?sec_id=234&lang_id=ENG) (accessed 5/9/2010)

of the Christian religion. Brycecon and Vuorela (2005: 23) argues that very often religion is the privileged space of the development of a transnational “moral universe networking”. The involvement in religious activism or the development and preservation of religious ties plays a crucial role in the transnational way of life (Levitt 2003). It could contribute to the growth of economic and symbolic capital of the family through networking in both countries. However, this is not the case depicted in the film. Instead, the sharing of the Christian Orthodox religion creates a bridge in order for the family to be united and at the same time, to be expanded. In this way, the christening brings back the stability which was tested from transnational migration in the family relations. Religious activities give the opportunity for communities to communicate with each other and to become visible within the wider society (Georgian liturgy or churches in Thessaloniki) and to an extent, they could feel accepted through old cultural and spiritual alliances (Christian Orthodoxy). In order to reach this happy end, though, Bondo went through an Odyssey of bureaucratic obstacles which the film only implies. Dealing with these obstacles could be a painful memory for the majority of the audience but also for the limits of the legal/illegal and could contribute to the moral/immoral (the relation of the two was discussed by another COST) which could be more problematic than the representation or its lack of in the film.

However, the film remains silent regarding the future of the father and the family as well. Is he going to stay? Would the family be reunited? Is Natela going to return? What about the young couple? The heroes face a series of dilemmas which bring them face to face with a number of frontiers (here and there, cultural, economic or moral). If these frontiers are going to become relativised, overcome or not, depend on various factors, strategies and skills that form part of the individual repertoire of

each member and each family. The happy end as resolution for this family's problems rather romanticizes the social reality that each of its members had to face. The happy end reinstates the "order of things" which want the (blood) family united in time, space and in generations. However, as Morokvasic (2004: 9) underlines in her discussion of transnational migration, the latter was in the past mostly about "durability and sustainability of transnational links over time". Instead, what is often missing from the study of transnationalism is the ephemeral aspect of this migration not in terms of the time it lasts, but also the mobility it often involves. What Morkvasic illustrates is that in many of the transnational migrant cases, the latter are often "settled within mobility" (ibid: 11).

In other words, they try to stay mobile as long as they could in order to improve their personal and family situation at home. These issues do not seem to emerge in the film. Kolelishvili depicts the formation of transnational families for his Georgian audience home and away through a variety of representational strategies. The film often romanticizes the Natela's migration picturing it in a smoother way opting for the re-establishment of the family order (its unification), through the film's happy end. However, its heroes face a series of dilemmas: social, cultural, economic, individual or collective which challenge this order and often transform the familiar into unfamiliar, even hostile (in the case of the male gossip about Natela) putting into question the film's happy end addressing the engendered worries of a society that still processes the results of an abrupt and massive migration.

Transnational migration "creates a space of possibilities" (Morokvasic 2004: 5) often transmitted as cultural capital, to the youngsters. For example, my friend, Manana, who invited me in the event, admitted that she was influenced by her mother who was an architect in Georgia, came in Greece and worked as care taker of an old

lady managing in the end, to slowly reunite her entire family (husband, son and daughter). This example, as Manana has confessed, inspired her to put an end to a relationship to a young Georgian and follow her dreams for education and career. She completed her studies in Greece and she looked for a visa to Canada in order to pursue her dream. Her path seems to stem from another woman's example, but it might lead to other routes/roots depending on all these diverse boundaries I examined as well as the repertoire of her personal skills. In this space of socio-economic pragmatism and imagination path dependence is reproduced, but also transformed.

### **Relativizing a life's path**

As this paper underlined, transnational families are relational both because of their dependence on the frontiers they have to overcome in their personal lives as well as their need to be flexible in order to negotiate with the authorities and bureaucracies in different languages and countries and with the hierarchies and constraints, their inter and intra-family interactions. In all cases, there is a variety of social and economic factors that should be accounted for, such as gender, age, distance, policies and politics in order to consider how these frontiers become relativized or remain resilient to any change. It is in this context that, decisions have to be made not only as resulting from a past legacy or only because of wider a critical juncture, but instead, in a series of conjunctures that takes into account this past, but at the same time, they tries to adapt or rather to filter it to the micro-lives, needs and hopes of the immigrants. In this framework, the focus on the formation of transnational families and how the latter are being (re)-constituted and re-shaped could ground these macro-structures (socio-economic conditions, cultural histories, migration policies) and micro-practices (marriage, various forms of communication, participation in activities) that take part in this formation.

The film's representation of Natela's and Bondo's family illustrate that their relation is being tested from the distance between them, the different routine, the daily auto-censorship concerning what information should be given to each in order not to disturb the already strenuous relations, the social forms of control, like rumour and gossip, third persons in their relation. At the same time, Kolelishvili with humour and often with a romantic disposition tries to trace how the heroes work on their relations and feelings: Natela writes moving letters and send parcels and remittances, Bondo support a network of friends and neighbours with these remittances, Mediko falls in love with her Jason and the new baby reunites the family.

Next to the film's representation, there is also the event organized for the film ceremony by the Georgian grassroots. The audience reacted during the screening with laughter and a warm applause in the end for the director. The comments in the end indicated that they were familiar with similar experiences with some people stating that "in reality things are worse". In their life stories the happy end was not an option or did not look like the one chosen by the film. Their separation often had longer duration, could involve many different countries, and the reunion had temporal character. It also unites certain members of families and separates other, or it even expands to include new members.

The "frontier networks" discussed in the paper conceive the challenges that these families face in their every day by focusing on the fields of their socio-economic and cultural interactions. However, as my film analysis showed, they are inter-dependent and embedded the one into the other and in this sense, more relativized in terms of personal experiences and how the latter feed immigrant's ingenuity's in order to face the various constraints, than the two authors suggested. The analysis of the ceremony also points out to how these frontiers involve not only individuals but also

authorities, their mechanisms and histories. If transnational migration produce visions of a better life, a “space of possibilities” which extends beyond national borders, it become a reality only through and often against its bureaucracies of control.

The transformation of this space into an individualized path depends on various socio-economic, cultural factors and life experiences. It is in this crisscrossing that path dependence take place. Focusing my analysis in the way frontiering and relativizing took place in the representation of this family’s transnational experience helped me to uncover national imageries of gender role as well as of historical encounters that produce cultural proximity and could generate potential migratory trajectories. I illustrated to the structural mechanisms and individual capacities that intermingle in the immigration and how they could differ in relation to age or gender.

Using a repertoire of practices (participation in grassroots activities, communication technologies, such as letter, discursive strategies, such as gossiping, idealizing, marriage strategies) frontiering and relativizing contribute to the continuity of familiness through its transformation. These practices do not necessarily keep families together across but they make the process of turning the unfamiliar to familiar the frontier into an affinity- as Bryceson and Vuorela remind us that frontier and affinity have similar etymological roots in Latin (*frontis* and *affinis*) both relating to the concept of bordering- part of this transmigrants life, keeping them motivated and often on the move. The film refers to the past in order to process the decisions that the heroes take not as a given but through specific life stories according to their needs, barriers and hopes, pushing the frontier and (re)creating affinities. Looking up the word path in a dictionary underlines the close relation of the latter to movement. On the contrary, in this space of transformation we should look for the path dependence not as a legacy or a juncture between a before/after but as a reenactment

of macro-processes and structures and micro-decisions and life planning. The movement between the two, and the real and imagined geographies they generate could help us study path dependence in relation to migration. Looking up a dictionary about the meaning of the word path shows the close relation of the latter to movement. I think that considering how this movement takes place (when, how, where and who is moving), in other words mapping its geography would be a fruitful way to study these migrations.

### **Bibliography**

Bryceson, Dandy Vuorela, U. (2002) "Transnational Families in the Twenty-First Century" in *the transnational Family. New Europe, Frontiers and Global Networks*, Bryceson D. and Vuorela U. (eds). Oxford/ NY: Berg, 1-30.

Carsten, J. (2000) (ed) *Cultures of relatedness. New Approached in the study of kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University of Press.

Collier, R., B., and Collier, D. (1991) *Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labour Movement, and Regime Dynamics in Latin America*. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Grant, B. (2009) *The captive and the gift. Cultural Histories of Sovereignty in Russia and the Caucasus*. Ithaca: Cornell University.

Ministry of Macedonia-Thrace, General Secretariat of Returnees and Omogenis (2001) *the main characteristics of Omogenis from the former Soviet Union in the most populated regions of Greece*. Thessaloniki.

Morokvasic, M. (2004) "'Settled in Mobility': Engendering Post-Wall Migration in Europe" *Feminist Review* 77, Labour Migrations: Women on the Move, 7-25.

Sideri, E. (2007) "Crossing the b-orders: From Georgia to Greece. Female Migration" in *Gendering transformations/Εμφυλοι Μετασχηματισμοί*. G. Papageorgiou (ed), Proceedings, Rethymnon: University of Crete, 98-109.

Papataxiarchis, E., Topali, P. and Athanassopoulou, A. (2009) *The worlds of domestic labour. Gender, Migration and Cultural Transformations in Athens of 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Athens: Alexandria.

Vertovec, S. (2009) *Transnationalism*. London: Routledge

---