

Migration networks in action: Case of Daba Tianeti<sup>1</sup>

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Despite the exciting poor migration statistics, experts agree that the decline in the population of Georgia that started after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, is mainly due to the extensive international migration, which drives thousands of Georgian citizens abroad (Vadachkoria A. G., 2004; Tsuladze G., 2005). Today, financial assistance received from the migrants, that has been steadily increasing and reaching more than one billion USD in the recent years, constitutes an important part in the lives of local communities and families left behind.

For the most part of Georgian labor migrants, the migration can be rather expensive, often illegal and/or undocumented. In such circumstances, it is reasonable to assume that Georgians, who are willing to go abroad for work, will actively use 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 the 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" (Massey D. S., 1999, p. 44.). 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" (Waldinger R., Lighter M., 2003, p. 11.).

Existing studies of international labor migration from Georgia are scarce, fragmented and mainly focus on the migration flows and stocks, socio-demographic and ethnic composition of migrants, their employment abroad and remitting behaviors<sup>2</sup>, but so far almost no scholarly

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<sup>1</sup> Present paper draws on a paper published earlier: Zurabishvili T. (2008). Migration networks of Emigrants from Tianeti, in: *Figuring out the South Caucasus: Societies and Environment*. Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tbilisi. . Pp. 84-106 (In Russian.)

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Vadachkoria A. G. (2004). *External Migration Processes in Georgia (1989-2002)*, Georgian Academy of Sciences, Tbilisi, (PhD Thesis, in Georgian); Gachechiladze R. (1997). *Migration in Georgia and Its Socio-Economic Consequences*, Tbilisi: UNDP, (in Georgian); Gugushvili T. (1998). *The problem of External Migration and Demography in Georgia (1990-1998)*, Tbilisi: Office of the Press, (in Georgian); Tsuladze G. (2005). *Emigration from Georgia, according to 2002 Census*. Tbilisi: CRRC, (in Georgian); Chelidze N. (2006). *Labor*

attention has been focused on how Georgian migrants use the migration networks, and how migration networks of Georgian migrants function. This topic becomes even more important, if we take into account that the international labor migration from Georgia only started after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, hence, we could argue that it took only about several years for the networks to start, establish themselves and start operating.

## Research site and methods

### Tianeti<sup>3</sup>

The choice of Tianeti<sup>4</sup> as a research site was mainly conditioned by three reasons: Firstly, based on the informal discussions with the migration scholars in Georgia, Tianeti, and Tianeti municipality, were named as settlements with one of the highest rates of international migration. Secondly, according to a study, conducted in 2003, Tianeti was one of the poorest regions in Georgia (Labbate G., Jamburia L., Mirzashvili G., 2003, pp. 6-18.) - taking into consideration that the economic situation in the country could not improved drastically by 2006, when the fieldwork was conducted, we had all reasons to believe that Tianeti remained one of the poorest places in Georgia<sup>5</sup>. And, finally, the relative small size of Tianeti ensured the feasibility of the fieldwork.

During the Soviet times, unemployment was not an issue for Tianeti residents - there were various employment opportunities, such as lemonade, cheese and butter plants, a timber mill, asphalt factory. Besides: "Two high schools (including a boarding school), vocational, music and sports schools, a house of pioneers [Soviet youth club], a culture house, a cinema, four

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*Emigration from Post-Soviet Georgia*, Tbilisi: Lega, (in Georgian); Badurashvili I. (2005). *Illegal Migrants from Georgia: Labor Market Experiences and Remittance Behavior*. Paper at IUSSP Conference. IUSSP. Retrieved December, 25, 2006, from <http://iussp2005.princeton.edu/download.aspx?submissionId=51259>; Dershem L., & Khoveria T. (2004). *The Status of Households in Georgia*. Final Report. Tbilisi: USAID, Save the Children, IPM; International Organization for Migration (2001), *Hardship Abroad or Hunger at Home, A Study of Irregular Migration from Georgia*, Tbilisi; International Organization for Migration (2003), *Labor Migration from Georgia*, Tbilisi.

<sup>3</sup> 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 the present paper, Tianeti is referred as a village.

<sup>4</sup> 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. See: State Department for Statistics of Georgia: Retrieved December, 5, 2006 from [http://www.statistics.ge/\\_files/georgian/census/2002/mo-saxleobis%20ricxovnobas%20da%20gansaxleba.pdf](http://www.statistics.ge/_files/georgian/census/2002/mo-saxleobis%20ricxovnobas%20da%20gansaxleba.pdf), p. 47.

<sup>5</sup> Despite the fact that in recent years Georgia has a high rate of economic growth, this has not translated into reduced poverty rates. 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) remain high too. See: Country Program Action Plan 2006-2010 Between the Government of Georgia and UNDP, Tbilisi, 2006, p. 4.

libraries, a museum, a recreation park named after Vazha Pshavela<sup>6</sup>, a hostel for tourists, a hospital, a pharmacy, a post office<sup>16</sup> operate in Tianeti” (Georgian Soviet Encyclopedia, Unit 4, 1979, pp. 678-679).

Today, none of the factories/plants from the Soviet period work in Tianeti. A small part of the population works in public institutions (two high schools, two kindergartens, one technical school, a library, a museum and a hospital, post office, etc.). Some are engaged in agriculture, but due to rather harsh climate, and lack of investments, very few are able to produce more than is enough for the family subsistence. As we heard from our informants, 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 April and September 2006, 23 in-depth interviews were conducted (18 women, 5 men, aged 22-72) with returnees and family members of current migrant workers (Funding provided by the Heinrich Boell Foundation in the South Caucasus) . The in-depth interviews covered such topics as migration decisions, motives, conditions, and migration experience, detailed description of any assistance/involvement from/in the migration networks, communication patterns of migrants with their families back in Tianeti and abroad.

### **2. Census of Tianeti population.**

2006 Census was conducted in late August – early September with the funding from the Caucasus Research Resource Center. 1,062 households were surveyed, with about 200 houses found closed and/or dilapidated. Given the fact that during the 2002 census, 1,237 households were recorded in Tianeti, we can assume that the present census reached over 85% of households. This gives us reason to believe that findings adequately reflect the situation in Tianeti.

Second wave of the census was conducted in September, 2008, in terms of IOM funded project. The research team used the updated 2006 questionnaire, with several modification, in order to be able to see dynamics and changes in the character of migration.

## **Migration from Tianeti: General characteristics**

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<sup>6</sup> Vazha-Pshavela (1861-1915, birth name – Luka Razikashvili) – the great Georgian poet, originally from the village Chargali, the region of Mtskheta-Mtianeti.

When informally talking with Tianeti residents, one gets an impression that there is virtually not a single family left in the settlement which would not have had at least one migrant. The same opinion was voiced many times during the in-depth interviews. Informants also talked about more females migrating from Tianeti than males - surprisingly, because by the time of the 2006 fieldwork, according to the existing statistics or research, it were precisely males who still constituted the majority among the Georgian migrants (Dershem L., Khoperia T., 2004).

However, our census results - both in 2006 and in 2008 - demonstrated that only one in three households had a migrant (in some cases, more than one migrant). But, if we take into consideration that in 2006 and in 2008 the number of migrants we counted was 413 and 396 respectively, and that the average age of the migrants fluctuates around 35 years old, this could be indeed perceived by the local dwellers as an 'exodus' of the population.

The feminization of migration, however, was indeed the case - in 2006 women made 68% of all migrants from Tianeti, and in 2008 - 67%. This, as noted earlier, contrasted the existing nationwide figures, according to which 65% of all Georgian migrants are men (Dershem L., Khoperia T., 2004, p. 45.). More importantly, in the case of Tianeti migrants, women migrants often are independent migrants, who do not accompany their husbands or other male family members. When abroad, most Tianeti migrants perform unskilled jobs. As Table 1 demonstrates, gendered distribution of job is clear, with females concentrated in the domestic jobs, and men mostly employed in construction and repair businesses, in factories and agricultural farms.

Table 1. **Main occupation of male and female emigrants from Tianeti abroad**

<i>Occupation:</i>	2006, n=413			2008, n=395		
	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>n</i>
	female	male	all	female	male	all
Housekeeper, Nanny/babysitter, care-giver to elderly	219	2	221	209	-	209
Construction worker	1	55	56	1	34	35
Unqualified manual worker	9	34	43	4	29	33
Student	20	8	28	11	7	18
Service sector				15	3	18
Unemployed	10	9	19	6	12	18
Other	23	23	46	18	46	64
<b>Total:</b>	<b>282</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>413</b>	<b>264</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>395</b>

Tianeti migrants mainly perform so called 'dirty, dangerous, and demeaning' jobs, despite the fact that many of them have tertiary education, and/or vocational training. We could debate on the quality of the general and higher education systems in the Soviet Union or post-Soviet Georgia, but clearly, most of Tianeti migrants are unable to find jobs that would be appropriate for their qualification. This happens mainly due to the fact that, as mentioned above, most of them have undocumented statuses abroad, and, since they mostly migrate to the Europe, Israel or North America rather than to Russia (Table 2), they rarely speak languages of the receiving countries - at least at the first stages of their migration period<sup>7</sup>.

**Table 2. Distribution of emigrants from Tianeti according to receiving countries (%)**

<i>Country of emigration</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2008</i>
Greece	59	60
Ireland	9	9
Germany	8	5
Israel	5	4
Russia	4	4
US	4	4
Italy	4	4
Spain	2	2
France	2	3
Other countries	3	5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

### **How migration networks work**

In the case of Tianeti, the mere presence of relatives, acquaintances, friends in the particular countries may serve as an important reason when making emigration decision - the fact that in the receiving country there is somebody a prospective migrant can 'count on' and 'rely on' often becomes crucial when deciding to where to migrate. About half of current migrants and half of returnees received some kind of assistance from their friends, relatives or acquaintances networks during their migration experiences. About a quarter of them 'returned' the assistance to their prospective or current migrant relatives or friends. Logically, more often, the assistance is provided either by the closest or distant relatives, pointing to the

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<sup>7</sup> Although after some time, this barrier is usually removed and immigrants learn the local language.

importance of the social networks for the members of Tianeti community per se. When in 2006 we asked potential migrants, if they were getting any assistance from their relatives or friends abroad, 37 out of 57 answered positively, with most of them getting financial assistance (Table 3).

**Table 3. What kind of assistance they provide ?** *(several answers to the question were possible)*

	Frequency
Money	32
Job hunting	6
Will meet upon arrival	4
Visa	4
Moral	1
<b>Total:</b>	<b>47</b>

We identify four major areas, where migrants rely more and/or count more, on the assistance and services, provided by the migration networks.

**1. Financial assistance:** This type of assistance, is, probably, one of the most important, and more often provided by the networks to prospective migrants. In this context, financial assistance may vary between provision of full/partial coverage of migration related costs; no-interest loans to cover migration related expenses, or loans given to recently arrived migrants to quickly pay off debts/interests that they have taken back home to fund their migration expenses. Besides, financial assistance may also include loans given to fellow migrants when they plan to make investments in Georgia - most often, in real estate. As a rule, these loans are either with no interest, or very small interest rate, so that migrants can easily repay them and do not worry about the increasing interests. Financial assistance becomes even more important in the receiving countries, where due to their undocumented status, migrants often do not have access to formal financial institutions, and in Georgia as well, since they do not need to mortgage their houses or borrow from banks/private individuals and pay high interests rates.

**2. Informational support:** Migrants serve as an important source of information for potential migrants. Information that relates to the situation on the job market, employment opportunities, overall receiving country information, and, more specifically, internal policies regarding undocumented and/or irregular migrants . Hence, potential migration already know before making migration decision where it makes more sense to go to. During the in-depth interviews, the informants would talk about '*no jobs for males*' in Greece, and almost no possibility to find an irregular employment in Germany, whether they risk to be deported if police or immigration service stop them, and what are the chances to legalize their status. In this respect, Italy emerged as one of the most liberal country, while Israel - as one of the most

strict, and Greece somewhere in between - it's hard to legalize, but you have more chances of not being deported.

**3. Moral/Psychological support:** Many informants noted that while abroad they experience various kinds of psychological stress. This is not surprising, since for many migrants this is the first migration experience, and the receiving contexts where they find themselves are quite different from what they are used to. They miss their families, and Tianeti- even if as some of them say that their lives in Tianeti were very hard. For many migrants migration is often connected with leaving children behind, and this adds yet another reason to their distress. And yet another reason for their poor psychological state is connected with their - mostly undocumented/irregular - status, which makes their lives in the receiving countries quite uncomfortable and stressful, when each day and/or necessity to go out is connected with the fear of being caught/deported. In such circumstances, migrants note that the fact that they can share their feelings, or get advice with their fellow compatriots, helps them to carry on and makes their emigration experiences less painful.

**4. Logistical assistance:** First and second wave migrants from Tianeti are quite effective in providing logistical assistance to prospective migrants. This could be provision of official invitation letters, and referrals to trusted middlemen, who can guarantee that they get visas, advice on how to deal with the immigration authorities when claiming political asylum upon arrival in the receiving country. With newly arrived migrants, logistical assistance may include provision of accommodation, or help in finding the accommodation, help in finding a job. Moreover, some of informants mentioned that during their migration period, they became ill, and it were their friends/relatives, who took care of them, and literally 'saved them'. Evidently, through logistical assistance migrants compensate their lack of access to social assistance in the receiving countries.

### **Concluding remarks**

The present paper attempts to analyze how migrants from a small migrant community in mountainous Georgia make use of migration networks prior, in the process of, and during the migration. The findings demonstrate that first and second wave immigrants provide financial, informational, logistical and moral assistance to prospective and newly arrived migrants, making the migration process safer, cheaper and more profitable enterprise. Even though the migration en masse started from Tianeti in the late 90-s, we believe that Tianeti migrants have already managed to develop viable chains of migration networks, which not only facilitates further migration, but has a capacity to 'divert' migration flows from one destination country to another one, as it happened in case of Israel/Greece and Italy. Thanks to migration networks, prospective migrants are well informed about the employment opportunities and immigrant policies in the receiving communities, have financial resources to migrate and make the best use of their migration experience.

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