

GEORGIAN MIGRANTS IN GERMANY: BEING GEORGIAN – ETHNIC IDENTITY, INTRAGROUP AND INTERGROUP RELATIONSHIPS IN IMMIGRATION

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Abstract

The given article presents data analysis from the study concerning adjustment and integration of Georgians in a new social environment after their migration to Germany. Long-lasting political, social and economic instability following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, forced many citizens to immigrate to save their families. Outflow of the population is still the case. The number of immigrants from Georgia increased in the last three years (2014-2016). Migrants changed target countries from time to time. Later, EU countries became more attractive for Georgians. The given study examines intragroup and intergroup relationships of Georgians residing in Germany. The material has been provided by in-depth interviews conducted with the Georgian immigrants living in the host country for at least 10 years. The study examines adjustment to the new cultural environment, which involves the dynamics of the integration process, intragroup and intergroup stigmatization which is based on subjective perceptions, the strategies aimed at the reduction of cognitive dissonance and the maintenance of cognitive identity.

Key words: *migration, Germany, identity, cognitive dissonance*

Introduction

After Georgia gained independence following the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the 90s, migration of Georgians to foreign countries sharply increased because of the long-lasting political, social and economic instability. In 1992-1996 the country's economy was paralyzed due to the shortness of energy resources. As a result, a large part of Georgian population migrated to other countries for a better life. The migration process did not slow down in the 21st century. According to the 2002 general population census, the country's population decreased by about 640,000 and, for the last two decades, by 1, 241 000 (22, 72%) (Rashid, n.d.; *World Bank Report WB*, 1990). The World Bank report (*World Bank Report WB*, 2011) says that over 1 million of Georgian immigrants have been working and living abroad since 2011. Furthermore, according to the data as of January 1, 2015 which is based on the 2014 general population census, Georgian population was 3,729,500 people. Outflow of Georgian population is still the case and the number of migrants who left the country in the last three years (2014-2016) is increasing.

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Georgian migrants changed the target countries from time to time. Due to certain circumstances the post-Soviet space was replaced by Western Europe. In the first decade after gaining independence, most immigrants from Georgia chose the post-Soviet space because of the knowledge of the Russian language, visa-free regime [until 2008] and geographic location. Georgians migrated to Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and other post-Soviet countries. However, the economic embargo in 2006 and the military conflict in 2008 made Russia less attractive for Georgians.

Introduction of visa-free regime with Turkey in 2006 made Turkey one of the main target countries for migration (Chindea et al., 2008; Badurashvili & Nadareishvili, 2012).

Later, the EU member states and the US became more attractive for Georgian migrants. According to "The State of Migration in Georgia", western European countries, especially Italy, Spain, Greece, Ukraine as well as US, have become migration targets since 2011 (Chumburidze et al., 2015). According to "Migration profile of Georgia 2019", most frequently visited countries were Germany, Italy and Greece.

The present article concerns Georgian migrants who arrived in Germany a number of years ago to get education and settled down in the country. The article focuses on the migrants' perceptions during adjustment and integration and their attitudes to modern Georgia.

The Georgia-Germany relations already count 200 years. They started with the migration of (Swabian) farmers from South Germany to Georgia. Germany was the first country which recognized Georgia's independence and established diplomatic relations. The German Embassy in Tbilisi opened in 1992. It should be also noted that in many Georgian schools German was and is still taught as the first or second foreign language (Gorgoshidze et al., 2014). In addition, German Academic Exchange Service provides annual grants to Georgian students to continue higher education in Germany, which also contributed to the strengthening of ties between the two countries. Furthermore, au pair programs have been operating in Georgia for many years. The programs offer Georgian youth the opportunity to stay for one year in a German family, help the family and their children and study German (Gorgoshidze et al., 2014). After this, the young people can continue education in an institute for higher education or develop skills for a job offered by the German State to immigrants and local population.

According to the 2020 statistics provided by the Consulate of Georgia in Germany, Georgian population in Germany makes up 27 315 people, out of which 56,8% are women. The average age is 31,4 for men and 33,0 for women. The largest age group is 30-35 years old, followed by 20-25 and 35-40-year olds.

The purpose of the present study is to examine dynamics of the adaptation and integration of Georgian migrants living in Germany, the perception based intragroup and intergroup stigmatization, the strategies used for the preservation of ethnic identity and reduction of cognitive dissonance.

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Literature review

Moving to a new place of living, adjustment to a new environment or country, and being an immigrant create a lot of problems for any individual. People face new challenges, which requires development of new strategies. Migration takes place within the context of interaction between two or several social groups. Consequently, it is important to know how these groups influence and change each other. These questions are also relevant to the individual's influence on a social group or vice versa. In this case, we need to look at intragroup and intergroup relations (Tajfel, 1974).

Intergroup processes are based on social categorization which starts with the search for general characteristics of objects, events and individuals and ends with the formation of categories by identified characteristics (Tajfel, 1974).

Social categorization plays an important role in ethnic and religious relationships in different countries. When immigrants 'transform' into other groups, people have an exaggerated perception of how similar they are to the members of their own group or how they differ from them. This is important for structuring and organizing social environment in a new community of migrants. Adjustment to a new life and being a migrant often cause problems which new migrants have to deal with by developing new strategies. Adjustment and integration are complex processes and it becomes very important to maintain balance between the preservation of one's own cultural identity and relationship with the host community.

Immigrants choose different ways to live in a new society. Researchers (Berry, 2001; Padilla, 2006; Sam & Berry, 2006; Sammut, 2010) single out a number of factors which help integration (e.g., immigrant's new skills, willingness to learn the new culture and language), adjustment to the dominant host cultural values, host society's tolerance and openness to new members, etc. Researchers (de Haas & Fokkema, 2011) emphasize that social integration has two components: structural integration and sociocultural integration. Structural integration implies the acquisition of rights and status in basic social institutions (employment, living space, education, political and citizenship rights). Sociocultural integration implies correspondence with the host society's values, cognitive, behavioral and attitudinal changes (social relations, friendship, marriage, membership of different organizations and sense of belonging).

At the beginning, migrants find themselves in a conflict situation. This normally happens when they come from a different society because the deeply rooted peculiarities of their own culture need to be adjusted to the new rules established in the host society. Adjustment can be achieved in two ways: through enculturation or acculturation, depending on the stage of their life in the host society (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1980). This depends on the duration of migration, whether they migrate alone or together with their families, the purpose of migration, whether migration is educational or work related and whether the migrant intends to return to the home country or stay in the new environment.

Education received in the host country and socialization are of a great help to migrants during individual integration (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1980). Communication with lo-

cal social environment takes less effort thanks to classmates, schoolmates and university friends who create a better environment for integration. The bigger the share of education (secondary, higher) the easier it is to integrate into the environment. However, the differences between the individual's cultural values and traditions and those of the host society are very important. These differences are automatically reflected in social perceptions and individuals either copy new and unusual rules of the host culture or reject them. They might also look for the members of their own culture to share this kind of experience and make their social life easier. As a result of intragroup and intergroup communication people not only develop norms, but also internalize them into their self.

Some researchers argue (Hassan & El Kinani, 2002) that the new environment significantly influences individuals in the course of migration. Coping with the requirements of the new environment is accompanied by different psychological problems. "The effect of geographical transition on an individual is determined to a large extent by the personal importance of the change." (Fisher, 1990). Breaking routine, changing lifestyle and territory/homeland might provoke somatic and psychological problems (Fisher, 2016). After leaving home, settling down in an unknown environment provokes psychological distress which is called fear (Tilburg et al., 1996). People long for their friends and families, for everything that is linked to their home (Thurber et al., 2007). This is often related to different somatic diseases, depression, psychological distress, etc. (Thurber et al., 2007). According to Fisher (Fisher, 2016) homesickness is related to family, friends, care, the space you used to live in and routine. In such a case, migrants need to use their own strategies they have developed to face new challenges.

In his book "Stigma: Notes on the Management of Spoiled Identity", Erving Goffman (Goffman, 2009) emphasizes that people try hard to present themselves in a positive way, influence others, have a positive image and control their environment. All this creates positive identity contrary to which insecurity feeling plays a decisive role in the formation of negative identity (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1996). Development of identity strategies makes the life of autochthons easier (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1996). According to Camilleri and Malewska – Peyre (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1996), in response to threat to one's own values, people develop identity defense strategies. The authors have singled out two strategies: ontological and pragmatic. The ontological strategy implies loyalty to your cultural values when living in a foreign culture, whereas pragmatic strategy implies adjustment to the dominant culture and sharing its values. There is also 'chameleon' identity, which implies the selection of a suitable behavior depending on circumstances.

According to the authors (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1996), these strategies involve collective and individual strategies. Out of the collective strategies migrants typically idealize one's own culture and develop a negative attitude towards western civilization. Another collective strategy gives priority to human and egalitarian over national. This strategy is related to the values that are common to local and migrant individuals.

Individual strategies involve 'negative' identity (rejecting identity of this or that social object), 'identity maintenance' (reaction to the breakdown of stereotypes), 'differentiated reaction' or 'reactive identity' (reaction to others based on the perception of difference be-

tween oneself and the others). An individual gets free from negative identity by identifying himself/herself with those who are in an advantageous position. She/he transfers devaluing attributes to other members of one's own ethnos and by doing so tries to distance oneself from its members. This substrategy is labeled 'transferred negative identity' (or 'transfer of negative identity'). Another common individual sub-strategy is accepting identity of unobtrusiveness, 'avoidance of being noticed', when an individual tries to stay silent and unnoticed to avoid stigmatization. Another sub-strategy is 'assimilation'. The individual using this strategy tries to be similar to autochthons as much as possible and ignores differences.

Methodology

Students of migration who focus on assimilation, acculturation, integration and adaptation consider qualitative methods most relevant for this kind of research, since these methods enable us to deeper understand what immigrants experience when they start living in a new environment (Kim et al., 2001). Our study used a qualitative method, namely in-depth interview. The interview was conducted in Georgian.

Research participants were Georgian immigrants in Germany. We used a non-probability sampling method – snowball sampling. At least a 10-year immigrant experience was used as sampling criteria. Interviews were conducted in the spaces convenient for respondents.

Field work was carried out in summer-autumn 2021. Fewer people took part in the study than expected. All the ethical standards were considered. The total number of in-depth interviews was 28. Participants were 22 female and 6 male respondents within the age range of 30 – 50.

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Data

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Duration of residence in Germany</i>	<i>Variable</i>	<i>Age</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>Duration of residence in Germany</i>
P1	45+	<i>Female</i>	20	P15	33	<i>Female</i>	10
P2	30	<i>Male</i>	10	P16	33	<i>Male</i>	10
P3	39	<i>Female</i>	21	P17	46	<i>Female</i>	23
P4	39	<i>Female</i>	15	P18	49	<i>Male</i>	26
P5	30	<i>Female</i>	10	P19	39	<i>Female</i>	17
P6	30+	<i>Female</i>	11	P20	34	<i>Female</i>	12
P7	36	<i>Female</i>	14	P21	33	<i>Female</i>	10
P8	33	<i>Female</i>	10	P22	49	<i>Male</i>	10
P9	49	<i>Female</i>	29	P23	44	<i>Female</i>	10
P10	47	<i>Female</i>	23	P24	41	<i>Female</i>	20
P11	30	<i>Female</i>	10	P25	30	<i>Female</i>	10
P12	46	<i>Female</i>	26	P26	66	<i>Female</i>	21
P13	34	<i>Male</i>	14	P27	48	<i>Female</i>	15
P14	38	<i>Male</i>	19	P28	53	<i>Female</i>	15

1/4 of interviews was held using the ZOOM Online platform. Due to Covid-19 regulations, part of respondents refused to participate in face-to-face interviews and agreed only to online format.

Interview questions concerned the issues corresponding to the research purpose. The first part focused on individual self-reflection. Participants were asked to explain what the reason for choosing the host country was and what problems they were facing during integration. The questions in the next part referred to their perceptions and the impact of group categorization on the integration of Georgian migrants into the new social and cultural environment. The third part of the questionnaire focused on ethnic identity, the ways Georgians used to preserve ethnic identity in the host country. This would reveal the strategies they were using to preserve their identity in Germany. Participants were quite open when sharing information about their family, relationships with other people, and integration into local community. They spoke about their perceptions of migration, their past, present and future, and ethnic identity as well as intragroup and intergroup conflicts and their reasons. Part of questions was related to their opinions and attitudes to modern Georgia, as well as their future links with their homeland.

The analysis of interview transcripts singled out the following categories and sub-categories:

Main categories	First rank sub-category	Second rank sub-category
1. Settling down in Germany	Purpose of arrival	Socio-economic and political situation in Georgia Education
2. Identity	Cognitive dissonance	Dissonance related to homeland Intragroup and intergroup conflicts and stigmatization;
	Being Georgian	Motherland, Language, Faith/Religion
3. Perceptions and socialization	Identity strategies	Collective and individual identity strategies

Main findings and discussion

1. Settling down in Germany – Purpose of arrival

Most participants named two reasons for arriving in Germany: socio-economic and political situation in Georgia and continuation of studies in Europe. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the civil war and the war in Abkhazia resulted in economic collapse and young people started to think about the ways of improving their lives, which, in their understanding, was linked with receiving education abroad. The majority of participants arrived in Germany to continue their studies. Those who arrived in that period through 'au pair program', improved their linguistic skills and continued their studies at university. The research participants received education in German universities. Part of them succeeded

in achieving doctoral degree and pursue their scientific careers in universities and research organizations. Others were employed and worked in the fields they had specialized in. The majority of research participants were women, who after receiving higher education worked as social teachers and also taught German at 'integration courses'. Only few respondents decided not to receive academic education and after receiving professional education continued to live and work in Germany.

"There were other opportunities rather than studying and I tried to take them to start working earlier." (Woman aged 47)

Most participants were married. Some of them had Georgian families (mostly men), others – mixed families (mostly women) – German spouses and children.

"Men mostly have Georgian wives, very seldom local Germans. If they are married to a foreigner, she is from a post-Soviet country, Russian-speaking or German, who returned to Germany from the Soviet Union." (Man aged 38)

Part of respondents had been living in Germany for about 20 years. After leaving post-Soviet Georgia "without electricity supply and heating", they were first shocked and later fascinated by organized living conditions in Germany.

"After arriving from dark Tbilisi and travelling by taxi from the airport, the town was so brightly lit... It was the biggest shock I could experience that time." (Woman aged 42)

Part of respondents left later, after the so-called Rose Revolution, when electricity supply and heating was not such a big problem. Part of those respondents said that receiving needed education and living in normal conditions was crucial for arriving in Germany.

"European education was important. I did everything for this purpose. In particular, I was learning the language seriously at school and also took private lessons. That is why I made this decision." (Man aged 33)

All research participants said that they were successful at present. All of them were employed and happy in their life. They told us about different types of relations with local 'host' society.

2. Identity – Cognitive dissonance

Qualitative content analysis of narratives revealed two sub-categories of identity: identity while living in Germany and different perceptions of the preservation of identity related to living far from homeland.

Identity was understood as the triad "Motherland, Language, Faith" (Chavchavadze, 1860). The analysis showed that 'a good Georgian' is the person who preserves the language for their children, preserves religion, has a special space for icons at home and keeps or buys property (apartment, land in a village) in their motherland.

The other aspect of identity – attitude to homeland – was related to return to the country of origin. The time of return was quite uncertain. Respondents linked it to the period of their retirement. It was also revealed in their talks about burial in homeland. Analysis of

these types of narratives points to cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). According to Festinger, maintenance of identity, choice and development of corresponding strategies, is the processes that closely resembles cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957).

In the case of Georgian immigrants, dissonance was manifested in the following cases:

2.1. Dissonance related to Georgia as homeland

Who is a Georgian? The person who was born in Georgia and lives in Georgia, speaks Georgian and is an Orthodox Christian. Georgians consider the following three things as most important: “We have inherited three divine treasures from our ancestors: Motherland, Language and Faith” (Chavchavadze, 1860). These words identifying Georgians are still relevant today. Georgian identity has 3 markers: 1. Territory, labeled by Chavchavadze as motherland; 2. Language, which reflects the national spirit; and 3. Christian faith. Chavchavadze believed that the Georgians’ loyalty to Christian faith was unprecedented (Chkhartishvili, 2013).

Identity is strengthened in kindergarten. According to Collins (Collins, 2015), in any ethnic group ethnic identity is always formed in childhood and is fed by tales, rhymes and sayings about homeland. “Any nation’s homeland mythology will include, among its cultural narratives, certain accounts of its founding that do not simply magnify its achievements” (Collins, 2015). Ethnic identity of Georgians is reinforced by folk poetry and Georgian authors learned in kindergarten and at school. In the consciousness of the Georgian society loyalty to homeland and its love is developed through rhymes and poetry. For example: Rapiel Eristavi’s poem ‘The Home of Khevsur’, which says the lyrical hero will not swap his tall cliffs for the tree of immortality, neither his homeland for a paradise of another country (Eristavi & Tsintsadze, 1974). Another example, Dutu Megreli’s poem ‘The Little Georgian’ says: ‘I’m a little Georgian, the son of the Caucasian Mountains, and prefer to die in my homeland than have a carefree life elsewhere’ (Dutu Megreli, 1932).

These poems which are in all schoolbooks for Georgian children clearly say that changing your homeland (leaving for another country) is not an acceptable behavior and it is better to die in your homeland than have a good life somewhere else, in the paradise of another country. I think that this information which is deeply rooted from childhood has a strong impact on Georgians, no matter where they are, in Georgia or abroad. The immigrants’ perceptions and judgments are most strongly affected when these are related to their homeland and their life in migration. The above creates a ground for cognitive dissonance during development of identity maintenance strategies.

As already said, the research participants were selected by the duration of their stay in Germany which had to be at least 10 years. The narratives about Georgia revealed fear of stigmatization (exclusion) by their group members. The participants feared that their behavior would be interpreted as ‘betrayal of homeland’. In my opinion, the above was manifested in the narratives expressed in the form of compensatory arguments. According to the values taught by school education, leaving Georgia is perceived as betrayal of homeland and the person can leave homeland only in extreme conditions.

When talking about the reasons for leaving Georgia, most respondents emphasized extremely unbearable conditions which prevailed in Georgia at that time. Migration was thought to be the best way to improve their living. The research participants arrived in Germany, received education and then settled down in the country. Some of them married; others pursued their carrier.

When the respondents were asked what the current situation in Georgia was like and how it compared to what it was in the past, most participants said that nothing changed much, that it was still impossible to live in Georgia and that living conditions were still unbearable.

“It is unbearable to live in Georgia. What can you do there? Where can I return as long as the situation is like this?” (Woman aged 52)

“Nothing has changed. The situation is the same as it was at the time when I arrived...” (Man aged 29)

10 years passed for some respondents after their arrival in Germany, while others had been living in Germany for 20 years already. On the other hand, if we look at the objective evaluation of the situation in Georgia by some international experts (*World Bank Report WB*, 2021), it is very different from what it was like in the 1990s, the beginning of 2000 and even 2010.

When, as a researcher, I had meetings with Georgian immigrants in different countries, I observed identical responses which were the following: Almost all of them evaluated current situation in Georgia as unbearable and impossible and named this as the reason for their prolonged stay abroad (Note: They were not asked questions about the time of their return to Georgia. This was discussed when talking about the future). Evaluations made by immigrants were identical irrespective of when they had left Georgia: in the dark 90s or the beginning of the 21st century.

One of the participants of the field study conducted in Germany voiced her fears in the following way:

“Although it is psychologically difficult to live in immigration, anyway you make your life easier by living here. By going out of your comfort zone – you sit there to mute your consciousness (reduce cognitive dissonance) and send money to your close people and family from here...” (Woman aged 42).

In my opinion, it is the result of the cognitive dissonance caused by leaving the homeland. They were looking for the arguments for dissonance reduction to compensate for leaving their homeland (betrayal), as they chose to live ‘carefree’ somewhere else, in the ‘paradise of a foreign country.’

Out of the migrants residing in Germany, as well as respondents in Portugal (2016) and France (2017), only very few admitted that they were in the foreign country to change their lives and the lives of their children. Some of them said that after their children finished education, they would be back to be useful for their homeland. As for their personal plans, they would spend the last part of their life in Georgia, would be back in Georgia after retiring and would be ‘buried’ in Georgia. In my opinion, it is part of the dissonance which links

even a remote plan of returning to Georgia to its reduction as the compensation for the 'betrayal of homeland'.

2.2. Cognitive dissonance – intragroup and intergroup conflicts and stigmatization

In the new environment of intercultural communication, the migrant is looking for its identity defense mechanisms which will protect him/her from stigmatization and, on the other hand, will avoid idealization.

Migrants are stigmatized in two ways (double stigmatization): stigmatization by host society and stigmatization by the migrant group (Tsuladze, 2013).

One of the examples of migrants' perception of outside stigmatization is that Georgians are called criminals ("apartment thieves") in Europe, including Germany. Statistical records in Germany and the information disseminated by the media contributes to this kind of stigmatization. Generalization of these facts to a Georgian identity is very painful for Georgians immigrants in Germany and other countries (Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021). Perceptions of Georgian immigrants are quite biased, revealing different defense mechanisms. One of them is comparison of their own group with the other group.

"So it means that Georgians are criminals? Europe is full of criminals. It was in 2019, when 16 tons of cocaine were brought into Germany... by others. Georgians should not be mentioned when talking about such crime... A Georgian will steal running shoes, at most..." (Man aged 49)

The reasons of turning Georgians into criminals are sought elsewhere; in particular, some immigrants believed that it was part of the 'campaign' against the country.

"Germany publishes criminal statistics once a year. Only 10 questions are asked at the press conference. Out of these 10 questions, one question is always about Georgians. It is the Russian broadcaster "Planeta". The journalist asks one and the same question every year. Results of this press conference are published and disseminated... As a result, a Georgian is always mentioned in these answers, no matter what crime she/he has committed... The police also confirm that Georgian criminals should not be mentioned so often..." (Man aged 49)

To reduce this kind of dissonance related to collective identity, Georgians bring different types of arguments. One of them is using comparison as a strategy to reduce dissonance and preserve identity.

"One of the Polish policemen told me that they were very much ashamed when out of the 25 detainees in the prison cell 24 were Polish. So, we are not exception in this respect..." (Man aged 49)

There are also other arguments:

"The percentage is not as high (means criminal cases) as it seems to be..." (Man aged 55)

Another argument refers to the host society which finds this unimportant:

"In the high society of Germany, intellectual, educated society, they find it unimportant." (Woman aged 46)

However, this difference is given various explanations within the group. If it is discussed in a Georgian group, then different judgments are involved which make the criminal behavior acceptable and explainable in certain circumstances:

“The situation of those who want to gain the refugee status is so awful. I will never say anything about them.” (Woman aged 38)

“I can’t communicate with running boys (i.e., thieves of running shoes).” (Man aged 40)

“For this reason, I try to distance myself from Georgians.” (Woman aged 27)

When judging the identity of their own group, Georgians try to emphasize positive attributes, the positive sides of ‘being Georgian’ and demonstrate that they are not that bad. For instance, Germans who have good relationships with Georgians try to study the Georgian language, which would be different if otherwise.

“Germans in mixed families are trying to speak our language and we do everything to help them. We have Georgian language circles for German husbands of Georgian women and they attend them with great pleasure.” (Man aged 55)

Intragroup stigmatization. A large share of intragroup stigmatization is related to Georgians’ attitude to Georgia. Migrants’ perceptions can be verbalized as love for homeland and ‘betrayal’ of homeland.

The respondents’ narratives show that intragroup stigmatization is segregated by gender. A Georgian woman marrying a foreigner (in this case, a German) is perceived as something negative and deprived of romantic love. It is perceived as a pragmatic step which is mostly related to a way to obtain citizenship. Judgments are different in the case of men. According to respondents, there are not many men who are married to local Germans. If they are married to a foreigner, the women are mainly from post-Soviet space or are ‘Soviet’ Germans (Russian speaking Germans). Georgian migrants have German ‘girlfriends’, but more rarely German wives. As for Georgian women, they mainly have German spouses. Such a ‘behavior’ of Georgian women is negatively evaluated, which is often manifested in the narratives of Georgian female migrants:

“Marrying a German man is considered almost equal to betrayal as if it can’t be a love-based marriage.” (Woman aged 56)

“They experience pangs of conscience and the situation you have is ‘gringo versus jigiti’. It is important why women marry, but why men marry is less important. When girls marry a foreigner or have a foreign partner this always becomes an issue for discussion. It is always a source of conflict in closed groups... If a Georgian girl marries a German it is bad, but if she marries someone of a different nationality it is even worse... A Georgian woman who did not marry a Georgian man is the most vulnerable group here (subject of gossip).” (Woman aged 49)

“The group sometimes discusses this issue, but I don’t mind; I have my own life.” (Woman aged 41)

In addition, integration into German environment is another source of disagreement. Participants argue about their attitudes to the host country, their personal positive or nega-

tive evaluations. Some of them idealize Germany, others harshly criticize the country. This depends on how integrated they feel themselves, which, on its part, results in this type of inner conflicts.

“Integration is a source of conflict. Many immigrants start to reflect. Some of them idealize the country, others criticize it. This insults people and results in conflicts... This preserves identity to some extent.” (Woman aged 49)

Another reason of intragroup stigmatization is the Georgian politics, which often entails conflicts. Migrants are divided into the supporters of the government and opposition and mainly confront each other in a social space. This is not at all related to their living in Germany. Most respondents have a comprehensive knowledge of the processes taking place in Georgia. They might not know what is happening in Germany today, but most of them know where and when this or that political activity is scheduled.

“We also help in Georgia a lot, political actions, social life... All this is accompanied by interpersonal conflicts, misunderstanding, minor disagreements... This is mainly about values, also politics. Conflicts are mostly about politics: supporters of the Georgian Dream, or supporters of the National Movement.” (Woman aged 49)

They blame each other, accuse of supporting this or that political party or opposition and are very emotional, which ultimately results in labelling people.

Even though most immigrants (with the exception of those with dual citizenship) have no right to participate in Georgian elections, they are politically actively involved in social networks and participate in the political actions supporting (or opposing) this or that political party. Respondents note that these polarized positions often develop into conflict, both online and, also, during their rare offline meetings.

In my opinion, it is part of the dissonance related to living ‘somewhere else.’ By participating in political debates and ‘illusory’ involvement in their homeland’s life, they seem to reduce the dissonance caused by ‘living in another country’s paradise’.

The Georgian government’s policy might have also contributed to this kind of involvement by emphasizing migrants’ financial participation in Georgian economy, which, on the one hand, helps the reduction of cognitive dissonance, and, on the other hand, provokes the need of involvement at least in the role of social network users.

However, as soon as a common ‘migrant problem’ emerges, this kind of conflict becomes less important and people unite to do something or help someone.

“We unite as soon as something common happens and agree to help those in need. At this point we forget politics and all that... Then we go back to our values anyway...” (Woman aged 49)

2.3. Being Georgian – Motherland, Language, Faith/Religion

Some researchers (Chkhartishvili, 2013; Gamsakhurdia, 2022) believe that “Language, Motherland, Faith” are fundamental components of the Georgian national identity, as a motto of ‘being Georgian’. At the same time, religion and language are as important

for Georgian identity as homeland. When being a migrant, preservation of the language and religion is an important attribute of 'non-betrayal of motherland', evaluated by intragroup members as loyalty and patriotism. If a person does not reside in one's homeland, but still preserves the native language and religion, it means that she/he preserves the Georgian identity.

Most research participants noted that for many years Georgians were united by religion. At the beginning of migration, Georgians united around the Georgian church. It was not related only to faith; it was a feeling of unity and homeland which was linked to the Georgian church in Germany. Both, research participants and the clergy from the church noted that currently such a unity around the church was no longer observed and people expressed their loyalty to the Georgian language and religion in different ways. Many people still gather in Stuttgart at religious festivals where the Georgian church is located. However, it has to be emphasized that some immigrants became more religious in immigration than they were in their native country.

Responses to the question about the ways the Georgians preserve their identity are homogenous. Respondents mostly mention religion, language and Georgian cuisine.

Georgians differentiate migrants in the following way: Those who try to position themselves as real Georgians using different external markers: a special corner with icons, celebrating festivals with a large number of people, Georgian books, and hanging works of Georgian artists on the walls.

"In various ways. In the case of religion, preservation of 'Georgian' identity is based on icons There are three categories of Georgians in this respect: 1. Has an icon on the wall; 2. Has a lamp, as a sign of being an intellectual; 3. Snobs – exposing works of Georgian artists. Some go to church, try not to change original values, others..." (Woman aged 43)

They did not show it much in interpersonal communication, but when talking about Georgians it was emphasized how well migrants' children speak Georgian. It is worth noting how language and religion are preserved in mixed families. If a mother is Georgian, almost all children speak Georgian. In big towns they take children to Sunday schools if they can. In some families a father is also interested in studying Georgian and they also go to Sunday school. Narrative analysis also shows that in those families where German fathers are not very religious (this mostly happens when they are Catholics) all children are baptized as Orthodox Christians. According to the research participants, it is a form of preservation of the Georgian identity and 'non betrayal' of homeland.

In all families, whether Georgian or mixed, Georgian cuisine was considered the main attribute of identity. They also emphasized the Georgian version of hospitality: inviting a guest to one's home to a Georgian meal with plenty of food and drinks. The narratives emphasize how very special Georgian 'table' is with its abundance of food, which surprises the guests, but seems so natural to Georgians for whom it is a manifestation of a peculiarity of Georgian character.

“When you are invited somewhere here, it is expected that you have already had dinner, because they will serve ‘snack’ and drinks, only. But I can’t do that... I invite guests to dinner. When someone visits me, I should please the guest, right? And this is something Georgian which they love. My husband also loves it and our friends also like visiting us.”
(Woman aged 42)

Khinkali and *khachapuri* which are Georgian markers of Georgian cuisine are well known to everyone who is in touch with migrants. Migrants also perceive them as the attributes of the Georgian identity, of being a Georgian.

3. Perceptions and socialization – identity strategies

Integration of Georgian migrants into the local community is facilitated by different identity strategies. In response to the questions asked during the interview, the research participants talked about the similarities and differences between Georgians and the local society, similarities and differences within their ethnic group, relationships and attitudes.

The research participants who are Georgian migrants living in Germany most often use ‘pragmatic’, ‘differentiated’ and ‘transferred negative identity’ strategies.

Narrative analysis shows that ‘differentiated identity’ strategy is used quite often. When asked about the similarities and differences between the Georgians and Germans, Georgian immigrants in Germany, just like Georgian immigrants in Portugal and France (Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021) see more differences than similarities.

What is the difference between the Georgians and the local society? As mentioned by most participants, it is the distance in relationships in the first place. They also emphasize that maintaining distance is their general trait. They not only keep distance when communicating with immigrants, but in their relationship with children as well. They keep distance in any kind of relationships, including their friends. One of the participants who thought that she was well integrated in local society and as opposed to other Georgians had German friends, said that Georgians and locals were different in their understanding of friendship:

“One of my closest German friends learned from me that her friend, who she introduced to me many years ago, was keen on skiing. She was very much surprised and asked me how I knew that. Differently from us, they do not ask questions. If you do not ask questions, people will not tell you about themselves. As for us, we ask questions. This is what makes difference.” (Woman aged 39)

Difference in the understanding of friendship was mentioned by all respondents. They also tried to explain this by certain circumstances:

“Our friendship is long-lasting, and even eternal. It does not matter where you are geographically, where you live. But those here abolish ‘friendship agreement’. They come to you and tell you that they are moving to another city and that we should stop our relationship as friends... It is shocking for us. This is another thing that makes difference.”
(Woman aged 43)

Our respondents, Georgian migrants in Germany as well as in Portugal and France (Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021) also emphasized a different understanding of parenting style

and parent–child relationship. It is interesting to note that this difference was very positively evaluated by respondents:

“It is true that differently from us they do not hug or kiss their children every minute, but what I like very much is that they talk to their children. All family members sit around the table and ask the children what problems they have and discuss various family and private issues. This is not the case in our culture. Nobody asked us anything when we were children. As if everyone knew everything better than us. I like this and try to do the same in my relationship with my children.” (Woman aged 42)

The research participants noted that when living in Germany they somewhat interiorized German lifestyle and were trying to adopt it. They perceived this as a cultural exchange in the course of socialization, which is a good way to enrich your life and better adjust to the local environment.

The research participants' perceptions depend on their social status in their environment. In particular, Georgian immigrants who were in the university space said that no attention was paid to these differences and the fact that they were immigrants was not considered as something special.

*“In the academia it is not important who you are and where you are from.”
(Woman aged 48)*

However, those whose activity was not related to the academic space noted the following:

“No matter how well you are socialized, you are still an immigrant for them and you feel the difference every single moment.” (Man aged 49)

As for similarity, the respondents noted curiosity as a characteristic that could be found in both host and local societies.

“I thought that they were not interested in anything, but they know exactly who visits me, for how long, what she or he does. I found out this quite accidentally and I was really shocked... So, we are similar just in this way.” (Woman aged 36)

'Transferred negative identity' can be also frequently encountered in respondents' narratives. I think that as a strategy 'transferred negative identity' has been developed to avoid stigma, distance oneself from other Georgians like 'running boys' (the name for those who steal small things), 'thieves' and 'burglars', the Georgians who they reject, from whom they separate themselves in their narratives showing that they have nothing in common or who they try to avoid.

“I can't communicate with running boys.” (Man aged 40)

“I try not to be in touch with Georgians for this reason.” (Woman aged 27)

It should be noted that differently from the Georgian research participants in other countries (Portugal, 2016 and France 2017), the strategy of 'an invisible' is not used in Germany. Contrary to this, they try to be visible and choose the idealization of culture by emphasizing collective identity. They have enough potential for this as all immigrants have

German education and are registered and employed in German environment. This is also determined by the country's policy and education system which gives everyone a chance to receive education. Research participants noted that in the last years Frankfurt Book Fair (Frankfurter Buch Messe, 2020), hosted by Georgia, did contribute to the prominence of the Georgian identity. Many books were translated into German and German society got to know many Georgian authors. The research participants noted that this enabled Georgians to show their positive side. They no longer conceal their identity. According to the respondents, educated circles knew Georgia before because Germany is one of the countries which became interesting for Georgian migrants immediately after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Conclusion

The study aimed to examine Georgian migrants' perceptions and their attitude to Germany. As proved by other studies (Bhugra, 2004; Gäbel et al., 2006; Lersner, 2008), moving to another country might be related to psychological challenges. Psychological discomfort and cognitive dissonance accompany immigrants' lives (Fisher, 1990; Hassan & El Kinani, 2002; Thurber et al., 2007; Tilburg et al., 1996) and their integration into the host society. The given study shows that settling down in a host country and adjustment to a new culture and new society are often a stressful experience, which may have different manifestations. Georgian migrants use different compensatory strategies to cope with cognitive dissonance/psychological discomfort and homesickness, which is expressed at the identity maintenance level. Reduction of cognitive dissonance and psychological discomfort take place at both individual and collective levels.

The Georgian migrants participating in the study are especially scared of stigmatization from their own group living in Georgia, which can be described as a fear of 'betrayal of homeland' by living in the 'paradise of another country'. This is manifested in compensatory arguments and behaviors observed at individual and collective levels. Most study participants own property in Georgia to maintain bonds with homeland. And when they go back to Georgia they will stay at home and will no longer be guests. The respondents emphasize that they want their children, new generation, to grow up abroad, receive good European education and only after that start thinking about returning to Georgia, which means that they are not 'traitors' any more.

The compensatory arguments that are used at the collective level are the following: they send money to family members and close people and help 'Georgia's economic stability' in this way. By doing so they support their homeland and do not 'betray' it.

The narratives show that for the participants born in the Soviet Union, the compensatory strategies used to reduce cognitive dissonance/psychological discomfort and homesickness are more unconscious than for those respondents who were born after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

As for categorization and identity strategies, Georgian immigrants place local, host society into a different category from the perspective of intergroup relationships. These are

judged in terms of friendship, the system of upbringing, parent-child relationship and the relationship between siblings.

Out of the individual identity sub-strategies, the research participants (Georgian immigrants in Germany) most often use 'pragmatic', 'differentiated identity' and 'transferred negative identity' strategies (Camilleri & Malewska-Peyre, 1996). Differentiation from the host society and identity strategies are the same as those used by Georgian migrants in Portugal and France (Pirtskhalava, 2017, 2021). The strategy 'invisible' is the only strategy which, differently from Georgian migrants in Portugal and France, is not used by the research participants/migrants living in Germany. I assume that this might be caused by migrants' social status and the migration policy of the host state. All the Georgian migrants in Germany, participating in the study, entered the country legally, were registered in the country, had legal employment and almost all of them used the opportunity of receiving higher education offered by the German government. This could explain the fact that there is no necessity of using the latter strategy.

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