

Accumulating Transnational Social Capital among the Greeks from the former Soviet Union: Education, Ethnicity, Gender

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Abstract: The fall of the Soviet Union and the political and economic problems that followed the emergence of the post-Soviet republics forced many women to migration in a period of feminisation of migration due to global economic and social shifts. Following the biography of two ethnic Greek women from Georgia and Russia, the paper traces the transformations of their social and cultural capital based on ethnicity, gender and education into transnational social capital. The paper uses the idea of transnational social capital in order to examine the ways past networks and memberships or skills were reassessed and transformed or even expanded as part of the post-socialist family planning.

Keywords: social capital, migration, Greece, Russia, Georgia

In recent decades shifts in the economy (high rate of jobs in the manufacturing sector, ageing of the world population that increased the need for domestic labour, the improvement of the position of women) have led to a feminization of migration. Women increasingly began to undertake 'solo migration projects' with more confidence (Oishi, 2005), and to become bread-winners. In the post-Soviet space where the restructuring of the economy was even more abrupt and sudden, the Soviet ideals of gender equality and the participation of Soviet women in the labour market were integrated into the neo-liberal agendas which forced women to economic survival through adaptability, flexibility and ingenuity ('feminization of survival', Hess, 2005: 32).

Education was always an important push factor for migration. Moreover, in relation to gender, education often acted as a legitimate reason that allowed young

women to leave home, or empowered them in order to take the decision to leave. In this sense, it contributed to great extent, to the migration planning of women (Omelaniuk, 2002). As a result, it should be stressed that education is a form of social capital for both families and individual women. But how does this social capital 'behave' in the conditions of transnational migration or communities? Does it turn into a transnational social capital and if so, then what sort? How does it interact with wider shift to neoliberalism turn in the capital markets?

This paper stems from a comparative work based on two different fieldwork projects. The former is the result of intensive fieldwork undertaken in Georgia over three different periods: firstly in 2003-2004; in 2008 (one month); and then in brief visits in 2010. It will concentrate on the life story of one woman, Savina, now in her 60s, an ethnic Greek Georgian woman who originates from the Greek-speaking village of Tetri-tsqaro.

The latter stems from my participation in DEMUCIV¹, a ongoing project of University of Thessaly-Greece which aims at the creation of the city museum of Volos based on oral testimonies. I conducted several biographical interviews among new immigrants (since the 1990s) from Africa, Asia and Europe. The open-ended questions tried to explore their urban memories and their experience of the city. One of the groups interviewed was the Greeks from the former Soviet Union. Lia, a middle-aged ethnic Greek Russian (in her 50s) from South Russia is one of them. The paper will trace the ways that Savina's and Lia's² life choices helped them accumulate different sorts of capital and integrate with different economic and political systems. In particular, I will concentrate on their education, as it seems that the latter played a significant role in their adjustment in challenging conditions.

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²I use pseudonyms for both women.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ETHNICITY

I define biography in Bourdieu's terms (2000), as a trajectory stemming from the dual and interwoven relationship between agent and structure. In this framework, Savina's and Lia's lives is constructed from their membership of intertwined social networks, such as different ethnic communities, which generated different opportunities and constraints, as well as their own decisions against or despite these constraints. As a result, both the economic determinism and the individualist approaches of biographies, which often overlook the structural prerequisites of the lived experience, have been avoided in order to put the stress on a more cultural and societal history (Paadam and Miller 2006). Savina's and Lia's lives trajectory, in this sense, are singular, but at the same time, dependent on the major social transformations of their time.

In brief, Savina, was born in late 1940s in a small, ethnically homogenous village in multiethnic Georgia. She moved to Tbilisi and then to Russia for her studies. There, she married a Georgian man who died in the early 1990s. She is the mother of one daughter. When I met Savina in 2001, when I first visited Georgia as an MA student, she was involved in the Confederation of the Greek Communities of Georgia. When I returned to Georgia in 2003, she was the head of a Greek cultural association. In comparison, Lia was born in 1958 in Kazakhstan, where her parents were deported by Stalin in 1942 from South Russia. The family returned to Novorossiysk in late 1960s. Lia studied in another city of Russia in the 1970s and returned to Novorossiysk where she got married. After that, she was involved in the Greek grass-roots in her city. She moved to Greece in mid-1990s and she became involved in the foundation of a cultural association that tries to promote Greek and Russian cultures.

I will use the notion of social capital as a vehicle in order to disentangle Savina's and Lia's trajectories. Bourdieu (1986: 243) defines social capital as "the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition". What is important in this kind of capital is the emphasis on resources found and shared in networks, such as the ethnic communities which played an important role in both these life-stories. Analysing the notion of social capital, Bourdieu underlined how much the latter becomes significant in contexts where there is a lack of economic capital, something that describes the situation in the former Soviet Union. In the ideologically classless Soviet society where capital was centralised in the hands of the Party and all Soviet

citizens enjoyed the same degree of equality and rights, social competition took other forms of expression, for example, ethnic or cultural. My paper will try to first examine the ways in which ethnic membership, through the development of family and community networks, provided alternative resources and thus, social capital for achievement in the Soviet Union. It will then consider the post-Soviet period and the opening of the Georgian and Russian markets, as well of borders. In that context, a new horizon of social relations, for example diasporas, but also of opportunities emerged, transforming the social capital into transnational capital.

But as Dwyer et al. (2006) underlined, Bourdieu puts the stress, in his study of social capital, on the dominant class and the reproduction of its power. On the contrary, Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1996, 2000) shift our attention to less privileged contexts where social capital could also play a significant role through different networks, such as ethnic networks. Ethnic networks, through sharing common norms, social experiences and aspirations, often contribute to the pursuit of social and cultural capital, substituting for the lack of economic resources and capital.

However, stressing norms and behaviours in ethnic communities, described as traditional, as their way to create strong ties among their members—something that these members could capitalize socially later on in their life—overlooks the fact that this stress frequently impedes the development of relations with other communities (Evereti and Zontini, 2006). Moreover, the impediments were even higher for women. However, understanding community as a bounded group based on specific norms and ties reiterates the idea of community as a single entity which, especially in the field of migration studies, fosters the risk of methodological nationalism, naturalizing ethnicity. The extent to which social capital contributes to the formation of ties in a community is something that should be studied further in relation to individual courses of action, and taking the idea of community as a question to be examined and not as a given. Emphasizing the interwoven relationships of agent and structure within a biography contributes towards this direction.

At the same time, a new definition of capital should be considered. Zhou argued (1992) that we should change our theorisation of capital from something located in specific groups and networks to something accumulated in process and in relation to different, often multiple factors, such as intergenerational relations, mechanisms of propagation and transmission of certain goals and norms, and the ways these factors can change due to wider political and economic shifts. For example, it is important to discuss Savina's and Lia's biographies in relation to

different generational factors, but also with regard to the ways it was influenced and transformed by the introduction of capitalist structures after the fall of the Soviet Union, when they opted for strengthening their diasporic ties and pursuing transnational migration. Did these decisions lead to an accumulation of social capital and how did it affect the integration of Savina and Lia as well as their families in the new globalized world?

GENDER AND EDUCATION IN THE SOVIET UNION

Savina's family arrived in Georgia from Turkey, from a place on the Black Sea coast known in Greek historiography as Pontos in the 1920s. Her family first moved into a small village in south western Georgia, few kilometres from Tbilisi, where relatives were already living. Savina proudly remembers her father stressing his marriage to a Greek co-villager. Her father was the eldest son who soon abandoned farming, the main occupation of his family, in order to become a Greek language teacher. For this reason, he left the village after his marriage, and moved to Batumi (south western Georgia), where there had been a Greek language pedagogic institute (Tekhnikum) since the revolution of 1917. When he finished his studies, he was appointed first to a Greek school near his village, but he soon moved to the capital in order to get a degree in Russian literature. He then began to teach Russian since Stalin had closed down all minority schools in 1937.

Savina's father grasped all the opportunities given to him by the Soviet Nationality Policy in those years, but at the same time his career path was not irrelevant to the community's ideas about the ideal of education. Moreover, the Hellenisation project, the dissemination and strengthening of the Greek culture after the foundation of the Greek state (1830s) reinforced the idealisation of education. Education was considered one of the pillars of the modernisation of the nation-state (Gellner, 1983). The closed, kinship based, ethnic Greek villages reproduced these aspirations regarding schooling and education in future generations by transmitting these ideals to their offspring, and closely monitoring their implementation. Mother tongue education was also one of the cornerstones of the Soviet Nationality Policy in 1920s, something that led to a furthering of the development, and appreciation of national cultures. Due to the lack of Greek language teachers, many young male and female Greeks were fast-tracked to teachers' education in those years. In this way, the communal and state agendas seemed to strengthen each other. As a result, Savina's father after the beginning of Stalinist oppression shifted to the study of Russian language.

In comparison, Lia's family came from Trebizond in the first decade of the 20th century, as she states between 1913-1915. The reference to this emblematic city due to its economic and symbolic significance often means origin from the vilayet of Trebizond and not the city per se. They moved to Russia, in Krasnodar Krai, some in Novorossiysk and others in Gelantzik. They were merchants. They were involved in the textile and tobacco trade. Her parents hardly managed to go to school (six years her mother, fewer her father) before the deportation of their families in 1942 (see Popov 2007) to Kostanayska oblast (North Kazakhstan), in the village Karabalik (former Komsomolets). In Kazakhstan, the two young Greeks met and got married. The father worked as a builder, her mother does not work since she has to raise five children.

Lia lived her first nine years of her life in Kazakhstan and went to school for two years in Karabalik. The family moved back to Novorossiysk in 1964. Although the family did not have the educational opportunities that Savina's family had, Lia's account underlines how much the family recognized the value of education, especially her mother that she had dreams for further education. Lia believes that that attitude stems from the general appreciation of the society for educated people, people with cultural capital, but also of power and order. In her words, 'It was the culture [kultura]. We all appreciated the teachers, the medical doctors, the policemen'.

In 1950s, Savina's family moved from a rural area to Tbilisi in a period of rapid urbanization. The urban population slowly grew (from 42.4% in 1959 to 55.4% in 1989) at the expense of the rural, although the rural population was still large in comparison with other Soviet republics (D'Encausse, 1978). There was also a growing Georgianisation of the republic, outside the recognized autonomous regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This majority facilitated the development of national networks of affiliation. The national homogeneity of the Georgians within their republic raised their chances of acquiring resources and privileges. Lack of access to these distinctive, nationalised/Georgianised networks, as Savina describes below, prevented her from following the career path she used to desire.

'I had studied like mad. When I went to sit my exams [oral exams before a committee], I was pretty sure that I would get one of the very few places. I answered all the questions but in the end the committee told me that they could not offer me a position in the Academy. I couldn't believe it. I burst into tears in front of everybody. Afterwards, I learnt who got in. They all belonged to Party families. My dad told me to go to Moscow to study arts there. In Russia there was more meritocracy than in Georgia.

As Humphrey(1983)states, a wide network of people at different levels of the Soviet hierarchy was bound into a system of reciprocity through exchange of gifts or services. Reciprocity does not, however, mean equality. Access to resources and services depended on one's position in the networks (Humphrey, 1983; Dragadze, 1988; Mars and Altman 1992; Verdery, 1996; Heyat,2002). As society was gradually becoming Georgianised participation in these Georgian networks became a difficult thing for non-ethnic Georgians, as Savina describes. Her Greek ethnicity deprived her, at this point in her life, from accessing her desired career³.

However, Savina does not condemn Georgia in general in her story. Instead, she pinpoints to the Georgian Party families. A privileged Party nomenclature, which according to the statistics of the period ((D'Encausse, 1978) was mainly Georgian, seemed to marginalise Savina's equal opportunities as Soviet citizen. In order to deal with this impediment, she left Georgia and returned a few years later with a degree in chemistry and married to a Georgian. A mixed marriage breaks the continuity of Greek blood which had been undisturbed in her grandparents and parents.

Endogamy was the main ideal of all ethnic groups living in Georgia, especially in rural areas, even after World War Two, despite the scarce evidence (Fischer 1977). However, for the post-war generations living in cities for educational or professional purposes, marriage with other nationalities of the same religion and educational background (Russians, Georgians and Armenians) was more frequent. In this economy of shortage therefore, the allocation of centralised/state resources and their (re)-distribution were based on personal ties and networks.

It would be over-deterministic to present Savina's mixed marriage only as a social strategy, overlooking the more intimate aspects of marriage. But I believe that her decision was influenced by a context where the Soviet ideology of rapprochement among different nationalities and the ideal of building a new Soviet people created an atmosphere that favoured mixed marriages. They made a reality of the Soviet ideology of the rapprochement of the Soviet peoples: the intermingling of different nationalities. Nevertheless, the existence of these marriages created the conditions for smaller nationalities, such as the Greeks, to participate in networks that transcended the borders of their own nationality. For these nationalities, intermarriage was a way of being included in wider and more

³Another reason for the popularity among the Greeks of Russian Universities were their education in Russian schools which prevented them from being fluent in Georgian.

privileged networks. These networks were interwoven both in national and family idioms, domesticising the nation and nationalising the family through the identification of nation with a kinship terminology, and by reproducing gender stereotypes (see Sideri, 2007). Women were, in this case, bridges between the ethnic community and one enhancing the opportunity of new social capital.

In the 1970s, because of what the authorities started to call a 'demographic crisis', a return to more traditional family values was propagated. Welfare benefits and the child-care infrastructure peaked in the 1980s (Issoupova, 2000) in order to support family planning. During that period, Savina decided to leave her career behind in order to dedicate herself to her daughter and husband. In this way, gender, which in an earlier phase of her life played the role of a bridge between her ethnic norms and Soviet ideology, rather allied with the ideas of emerging nationalism in Soviet Georgia, of which family planning was a central part. Towards the end of the 1980s, ethnic tensions mounted in Georgia. In the 1990s, the Supreme Soviet of Georgia recognised Georgian sovereignty within the republic. The referendum of April 19th 1991 confirmed Georgian independence.

In comparison, Lia, after the family's return in Novorossiysk, continued school. She went for further studies in an industrial city of the Urals. She studied Russian literature, a safe choice for many young Greek girls since it combined higher education with social and gender propriety. Making the comparison with her hometown, Lia underlines that her new place of residence was big, full of opportunities for cultural activities, like theatres and opera. After her studies she returned to Novorossiysk, because her mother insisted and she got a job in the State History Museum, as a guide. She got married, a chapter of her life that she did not talk much..

Until this point in her life, Lia seems to use her studies as cultural capital in order to advance within the Soviet society. On the contrary, her ethnic ties, played an ambiguous role. On the one hand, Lia considers her appreciation of education as a result of her family's views on this issue, especially her mother's, something that complies with the Pontic-Greek traditions, as discussed in Savina's case, as well as the Soviet ideology for the emancipation of women. However, these family ties defined her decision to return to Novorossiysk after her studies without letting her consider other options. As I underlined, ethnic ties often restrain women from the accumulation of social and cultural capital as independent agents. On the other hand, the deportation that the family suffered in 1942 was the result, according to Lia, of their Greek passports. something that must have strengthened the ethnic ties and awareness of the community. The Treaty of Lauzanne (1923) provided

Greek citizenship and passports to many of the Greek refugees who took refuge in Russia before and after the WWI.

The deportations of 1941-1942 were instigated by the Nazi attacks on the Soviet Union, which generated allegations for cooperation of the local population, especially the foreign nationalities, (non-indigenous according to the Soviet system of division of nationalities) with the Germans. In this wave of deportations, that had the character of preventive measures, nationalities like the Romanians, the Volga Germans, the Greeks and in the end, the Crimean Tatars were deported to Central Asia. However, this historical framework seems to evade Lia's memories which trace the cause of the deportation of her family in their citizenship, a reason frequently used by the Greeks of western Georgiana and Abkhazia who were deported after the war in 1949. The most recent emphasis on the legal proofs of the Greek citizenship which was significant for the recognition of the Soviet Greeks as Greeks by the Greek state must have contributed to Lia's interpretation.

On the other hand, what seems to be a very vivid memory of the years in Karabalik is Lia's good relation with her classmates, the Germans, the Russians, the Kazakhs. 'We had a good time' she says, giving us a glimpse to the birth of the Soviet kosmopolitizm (Humphrey 2004), an ideologically driven, multiculturalism of different ethnicities which replaced the tsarist imperial diversity, based on the Soviet Nationality Policy and the Stalinist ethnic cleansing. The historical contextualization of Lia's memory help us explore the different meanings of cosmopolitanism, which was relaunched in the last decade as a conceptual framework of political membership of human diversity, but also, its dark sides which are often connected to histories of human elimination, like genocides and ethnic cleansing, neglected by the envisioning of a new and less restrained from borders, humanism. Raised in this cultural context, Lia's immigration to the Ural's was almost a natural choice in order to enjoy her privileges as Soviet citizen, after the gradual reconstitution of the deported populations since Stalin's death. What seems to change her course of life is the reactivation of her ethnic ties after the collapse of the Soviet Union first by the formation of the Pontic-Greek Association in Novorossiysk and then, her immigration to Greece. Education seems to be used as a means to produce cultural capital and distinction in the former Soviet Union despite the ideology of equality creating hierarchies between ethnic groups and nationalities which antagonize each other for excel and access to limited and centralized resources. As a result, ethnic ties were important, but at the same time, they were regulated through traditions of gender relations that burdened on Lia's and Savina's life.

TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL

If diaspora as a term has a long history in the social sciences, transnationalism emerged in the 1990s as something new. In other words, transnationalism seemed to emerge as a framework to perceive human, cultural and capital movement beyond nation-states (Basch et al. 1994). This first attempt to define the phenomenon brings to the surface two things: first transnationalism seems to concern processes widely available to immigrants as a repertoire which could help them develop multiple social relations within a space defined by their country of origin and the host country. Secondly, the space of in-between-ness becomes pre-eminent, as it generates different social fields within which are immigrants with an almost entrepreneurial capacity to “forge” or “build” relations. Since then, the study of transnationalism has moved in various directions and intellectual fields (intellectual cross-fertilization according to Vertovec, 2003), such as global studies, network theory, migration and diaspora theories, (Hannerz, 1996; Smith, 2001; Vertovec 1999; Doreen, 1999; Levitt et al. 2003;).

One of the outcomes of this shift was that our attention was drawn to the fact that, although transnationalism was often considered to be a new context corresponding to the flows of the economic, political and human capital that globalization made possible, it was very much related to nation states and their regulations. In this sense, the study of transnationalism was forced to acknowledge the importance of boundaries, borders and nation-states (Sokëfeld, 2008: 211). On the one hand, transnational studies should take into account not only the current socio-economic relations that go beyond national borders but also the historical aspects of the latter, the circulations and the routes upon which modern migrations are taken place. On the other hand, transnationalism should also, without downplaying the importance and ingenuity of actors, take into account the institutional nature that forms this transnational space and its networks, such as the diasporic association where Savina and Lia took place in..

As Olwig (2003) argues the emphasis on identity that connects migrants to their place of origin (even a historical homeland in the Greek case) merged the two notions (transnationalism and diaspora) to some extent. Similarly, Sökefeld (2008) considered diasporas a subtype of transnational communities based on the symbolic, such as cultural traditions, which put the stress on a shared identity dispersed in time and in space. But what this paper tries to argue is that the transformation of these symbols ties into social and cultural capital of the utmost

importance in planning for the two women's family life in post-socialist space of the former Soviet Union.

During the turbulent years before the fall of the Soviet Union, as nationalism was increasing in Georgia, Savina had to face another tragedy: her husband died. The passage from the command economy of the Soviet Union to the open market economy of capitalism was accompanied by political instability and organized crime. Savina stayed in Georgia hoping that her late husband's professional networks could help her continue his business, the food trade. But gender discrimination obstructed her from remaining in that business field. She became an entrepreneur. She opened a small café which served a few typical Greek dishes. Her family roots were her inspiration. As Savina confessed, she used all the old recipes of her mother and grandmother. She also used her ethnic Greek networks to attract a clientele. But the introduction of a new political and economic ethos generated instability and chaos on the streets. At the same time, the ethnic roots that supported the little café's existence seemed to become an impediment for the café. As Savina admits, her coffee shop was based on ethnic loyalty, instead of modern management principles. She saw her customers as guests and often did not receive payment.

Similarly, Lia was involved in the formation of a Pontic-Greek Association in her city in South Russia in early 1990s. The association aspired the propagation of the Greek language and culture. Lia contributed to the organization of exhibitions in the Museum where she worked that depicted the Greek presence in the Black Sea. As Anton Popov discussed (2007) these national-cultural societies thrived in that period in South Russia, as they mediated in all bureaucratic processes involved in emigration of the Soviet Greeks, in the reception and distribution of humanitarian help coming from Greece which often fostered various cultural projects. As a result (ibid: 35), 'The Greek organisations have become channels for the transnational flow of ideas and goods as well as people'. As Dominique Schnapper argued (1999:251) the fact that diaspora suggested fluidity brought it "more in harmony with the values and the spirit of the times than the rigidity attributed to the nation-state".

The idea of a Greek trans-nation fed the aspirations of the Greek state in the 1990s when the restructuring of the Greek economy (the opening of the banking and financing sectors); the in-flows of immigrants from the South East Europe (mainly Albania) and the former Soviet Union and the opening of the markets in the Balkans generated visions of economic and political hegemony in the region and pinpointed the dynamics of the ecumenical Hellenism over the

narrower horizon of the Greek nation-state. The emergence of a diasporic space in the form of an ethnic Greek civil society in the former Soviet Union as a space of social and political engagement beyond the inter-state system should be considered as one of the by-products of these changes. But as Mary Kalvay (2003) argues, there is not one civil society but many, which consist of different groups and agendas. Savina's work in the charity is a good example of this multiplicity. The charity was sponsored by the Greek state and other Greek agencies, especially US-based Greek NGOs. It produced a place where local actors and intentions met with the political agendas of the historical homeland, but also the agency of other Greek diasporas, generating a much wider idea of a Hellenic culture than the formal national one.

At the same time, engagement with the civil society had not only a symbolic character, but was invested with very practical expectations. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the political and economic plight of Georgia fuelled an immigration wave to Greece as in other similar cases of emigration from the collapsed Soviet Union in the same period, for example, Israel or Germany (Müntz and Ohliger, 2003) and was supported by policies of return (bureaucratic facilitation for visas, education and welfare benefits). In this framework, the engagement in civil society dominated by ethnicity produced the emergence of some privileged gatekeepers who had access to the formal networks of the Greek administration and the other Greek diasporas, the know-how to negotiate with all the complicated processes of repatriation, and information about potential resources of financial help and benefits. These transnational ethnic networks, which were represented as civil society, generated the necessary social capital for Savina and Lia.

The former became head of a Greek diasporic cultural association and she got married to a Georgian artist. The latter capitalized her participation in the Pontic-Greek Association by immigrating first to Athens, a quite easy process as she remembers and then, to a town of Central Greece where she first worked as domestic labour, but soon, she got married to a co-patriot from South Russia and gave birth to two boys. Now, she is doing administrative work for a Greek organization and she is engaged in a new cultural initiative, an association that promotes the Greek and Russian historical ties. Lia turned to her ethnic Greek ties at the same period that Savina did as well. However, she lacked the necessary social capital that the latter had due to her husband who belonged to the ethnic majority of Georgia. Moreover, Savina lived in a country where in the 1990s one of the biggest Soviet-Greek communities resided and therefore, it attracted, to a greater degree, the attention of Greece both due to the political exigencies and the

geopolitical interest of the Caucasus resulting in the engagement of Savina to a more significant position in the Greek nation-cultural associations of the post-Soviet space. In addition and more importantly, the political plight that generated a massive migration from Georgia to Greece did not apply in the case of South Russia. As a result, more Greeks with similar skills to Lia's were at the Greek authorities disposal.

Due to these reasons and a personal loss, Lia immigrated to Greece and she had to find a job which did not correspond to the cultural capital she accumulated in the previous years of her life since this capital became depreciated due to Cold War stereotypes and misconceptions or ignorance regarding the life behind the Iron Curtain (Sideri 2006). At the same, the difference in the economic infrastructure of Greece and its education system in relation to that of the former Soviet Union made many of the skills and specialities of the Greeks from the former Soviet Union to run obsolete in their new country. Domestic labour was not Lia's ideal work. However, Lia treated this experience as a formative period.

She learnt better Greek and started to appreciate her own strengths and independence. As she admits, 'in Greece, I realized that I am still a woman and have things to do in my life'. Breaking free from family constraints, she rediscovered herself as individual agent. The connection of immigration to women's emancipation, although it should be contextualised, is often underlined (Morokvasic 2003, 2008) since the process of mobility and independent labour often are connected to women's autonomy. However, in Lia's case this autonomy was produced from a job with less cultural capital than the one she left behind in Russia but with more financial benefits in the economic context of that period and access to a new pool of social ties beyond the Pontic-Greeks of Novorossiysk. However, the latter continued to play an important role in her personal life. She got married to Pontic-Greek from Russia and as she confided in me she cooked Russian food and listened to Russian music and spoke Russian at home.

The gradual economic and political improvement of Russia and the corresponding recession of the Greek economy offered Lia an new opportunity. Her Russian background and her university degree contributes now to the improvement of her social position in her town in Greece. Her involvement in the Greek-Russian association which promotes the Russian culture in Greece through cultural activities, for example, a theatrical festival or language courses, is connected to the gradual importance of the Russian tourists and investors in Greece as well as the increase of appreciation of the Russian language as an instrument for a better positioning in the job market in Greece or even for

potential emigration from the country to the Russian speaking world which could result to the accumulation of economic and cultural capital.

Ghodsee, studying capital transformation in coastal, post-socialist Bulgaria among women engaged in tourism, argues (2005) that the transition from a socialist to a capitalist oriented society did not erase these women's past, but caused them to reassess it in order to adjust to the prerequisites and opportunities of the new system. I believe that a similar process took place in Savina's and Lia's case. They managed to transform the social and cultural capital they had accumulated in the Soviet years, multiplying it through the transnational circuits of the post-Soviet period.

At the same time, Savina managed to send her daughter abroad to study. Her daughter attended a Greek university in Greece, studying English literature, because English is an international language. Education is one of the reasons why many young Georgian women emigrate (Melashvili 2008). The opportunities soon emerged in the form of a grant given by the SAE-Americas for Regina to attend a summer course in the USA. Regina then worked for a short-term program of the General Secretariat for Omogenis (special department of the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs for the Greek diasporas). Despite the family's expectations, the programme was not renewed and Regina returned to Georgia where she found a job at a private English speaking college in Tbilisi through her step-father's relatives, who had connections with the new administration after the Rose Revolution in 2003.

The aggregation of resources through different networks (Greek, Russian and Georgian) could be multiplied through the expansion of these networks beyond national borders and the mobility of actors in and beyond them. Transnational social capital underlines exactly this dynamic and also more fluid increase of capital beyond the national territory which generates actual or imaginary possibilities in terms of life planning. It is gained through networks that extend beyond national borders, such as diasporas, and is invested in various places, for example, the homeland, the host-country or other third countries but also, in time and the economic and social structural transformations take place.

Educational mobility, like other forms of migration, follows certain patterns from developing to more developed or to a fully developed country, from east to west, from non-English to English speaking countries, but it also follows global economic shifts which signify today an emerging reverse process from West to East and local economic and historical interconnections, like the ties of Greece to Russia. In Regina's case, this migration was connected to the transnational social

capital that was accumulated by her mother in previous years. Savina's contacts with the Greek diasporic space, and not only the more restricted national space, helped Regina to immigrate first to Greece, by facilitating the bureaucratic procedures and giving access to information about the possibilities of educational grants, and then to the US with funding from the Greek-American community. Similarly, Lia teaches her two sons Russian, 'we all speak Russian at home', as she says, because 'you never know how things turn in the future'. Moreover, as she started up teaching Russian, she confides in me how an adult student of her found a job in a Greek island within a Russian wealthy family due to the Russian classes she took. She herself makes plans for the development of a small family business in the sector of cultural tourism between Greece and Russia. Her participation in the association will help her accumulate the necessary social capital.

It seems that cultural capital, in the more institutionalized form of educational qualifications, according to Bourdieu (1986: 243), is relatively more transmutable to economic in the market economy of globalisation that shifted to the third sector and favoured the feminization of migration. Western education and moreover, US-education, increased the value of Regina's educational credentials in the job market both in Greece and in Georgia since it indicated, according to Waters (2005, see also Collins, 2008), "fluency in the English language as well as less obvious qualities, such as confidence, sociability, cosmopolitanism and possession of valuable social capital". Moreover, the reshaping of the Georgian economy that fostered the privatization of traditionally state-dominated sectors such as education, gave Regina the opportunity for a prestigious job in a private college in Tbilisi with tuition for elite students. Despite the connection of education to the democratization of societies and efforts to combat poverty, it is also connected to elite reproduction and social inequalities and supporting or even deepening hierarchies in post-socialism (Mandel 2002, Mihaylova, 2004). It is not insignificant that Regina's placement in the college was supported by the Georgian relatives of her step-father's side. Post-independence Georgia strengthened the value of Georgian networks, but of those networks which were well-placed in the new political scene in Tbilisi. Political and economic differences deepened in the city after the independence, something that provoked the reactivation of older networks in Regina's case, as well as her transnational capital.

At the same time, the learning of the so-called less well known languages, like Russian seems to privilege Lia and her students in the shrinking market of Greece providing them extra job opportunities within the country or abroad. In this framework, Lia from a labour migrant turned into a cultural broker of a capital that

becomes more and more popular in Greece privileging her in-between position between Russia and Greece and making her reasserting her Russian cultural background by instrumentalising it through her involvement in the association, a reverse process to what happened in her life in early 1990s. To conclude, Savina and Lia took part in an emerging transnational public sphere that seemed to be created due to the political shift and new structure of a global system and the reposition of nation-states within it by trying to transform themselves into transnations through different ways, such as double citizenship, diaspora politics. At the same time, older forms of identification such as ethnicity and its networks still take part in the reshaping new hierarchies.

Savina's and Lia's experience entailed a space of individual inventiveness and innovation as well as a space of social networking in a transnational sphere produced by deep and sudden political and economic shifts. Savina and Lia appeared determined to pursue personal and family needs and interests which could improve her everyday life through networks that in the past were forbidden or not needed (contacts with Greece and other Greek diasporas), but with the same ingenuity and adaptability. In this sense, old practices, developed in the Soviet period of political and social action, were interpreted, as Shami (2000) argued, through the new imageries of global and transnational networks, generating in their turn new expectations and possibilities.

Although Savina herself did not emigrate from Georgia, her involvement in this transnational space intensified her accumulation of social capital and gave her daughter the opportunity to develop cultural capital in terms of educational skills and diplomas. On the contrary, Lia's emigration to Greece made her renegotiate her ethnic ties gaining in individual agency, but without eliminating their influence. In both cases, the process of accumulation various forms of capital is continuous intra-generational and connected to wider political and economic structural transformations. In the cases studied, this process of accumulation produces a path dependence of mobility and encouraging the undertake of new ventures often rooted in older experiences and networks .

Transnational social and cultural capital is tightly entangled with the production of economic capital in the conditions of neo-liberalism, where culture, knowledge and social relations are highly commodified and quantified by global markets. However, these types of capital are fashioned in collaboration with older categories of membership, such as ethnicity, gender expectations, and inter-generational relations, especially in a young open market such as Georgia, Russia and to certain degree Greece, where the public and the domestic are still highly

interwoven. As a result, transnational social capital is flexible and highly convertible in neo-liberalism, but is still well connected to the social-cultural traditions of the past. What seems, though, to stand out is the proliferation of possibilities and imageries that augment engendered individual ingenuity.

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