

# Social exclusion of migrant women in Russia. How ethnicity, gender and class work together as excluding mechanisms?

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the gender and class aspects of mechanisms of exclusion and barriers to access to public services for migrants from former Soviet national republics in contemporary Russia, with a focus on Armenian women's practices of using the healthcare and pre-school care services. The author analyzes institutional and cultural barriers to access to services. Institutional barriers are created by legal status of migrants. The absence of citizenship presents a constraint on obtaining public medical services. Use of pre-school care services (kindergarten) contradicts the gender culture shared by Armenian women. These cultural barriers are discussed in the context of migrants' gender culture. Gender culture is conceptualized through the concept of the gender paradigm as a main cultural code providing meaning to women's everyday practices. For Armenian women the gender paradigm is described as patriarchy. Social exclusion and strategies of coping with the patriarchy also have the class dimension. Institutional barriers are overcome using economic and social resources of migrants. The norms of patriarchal gender culture are interpreted pragmatically and are less rigid among educated classes.

**Keywords:** Class, citizenship, gender, migration, patriarchy, exclusion

## Introduction

This article presents the results of a study dealing with mechanisms of exclusion of migrant women in Russia<sup>1</sup>. I primarily focus on practices of women accessing public medical services and pre-school educational facilities for children. I analyze institutional and cultural barriers of access and strategies for coping with them, in an effort to explain the gender and class nature of exclusion mechanisms and inclusion barriers of public service access for migrants from the former Soviet republics in contemporary Russia.

The concept of social exclusion was introduced into academic discourse in order to account for mechanisms of social inequality (re)production instead of more classical terms such as class and status. These terms turn out to be ineffective for the analysis of inequalities in modern societies since they do not explain mechanisms of reproduction of positions located in the lower parts of social hierarchy. (Anthias 2005: 26, Murray 1990) Researchers of poverty and its mechanisms of reproduction highlight the fact that they also have ethnic, racial, and gender dimensions. (Wacquant & Wilso 1989: 16; Morris 2000: 74, Emight & Szelenyi 2001) Poverty cannot be explained solely by class membership or by ethnicity or race. (Fainstein 1987) Women are more likely to run the risk of social exclusion since they are more often financially dependent on a spouse, remain with the children after the divorce, and work part-time. At the same time, the characteristics of the risks encountered by women are highly dependent on their educational level, professional qualifications, and social and cultural capital. (Walker & Walker 2009: 54) Therefore, the scholars who favor the concept of social exclusion see social inequality and its causes as a complicated phenomenon where class, gender, and ethnicity intersect and overlap each other. (Anthias 2005: 24)

The notion of social exclusion entails an analysis of barriers that stand in the way of accessing social goods and services (education, health care, and social support) and economic well-being. From this vantage point, exclusion means not having access to resources: employment, housing, or citizenship. (Anthias, 2005: 26) In general, an individual is socially excluded if: he or she is resident in a society, cannot participate and take advantage of citizen rights, and would like to participate, but is prevented from doing so due to factors beyond his or her control. (Burchardt et al. 1999: 229)

The works on social exclusion can be grouped in two broad approaches: structural and cultural. The structural approach emphasizes attention to the institutional aspects of a society and

opportunities for the inclusion of the representatives of different social groups in the labor market, education and social services. This approach specifically focuses on public policy and labor market structure as mechanisms of either the leveling or the (re)production of social inequalities. The cultural approach pays attention to values, everyday practices and knowledge. In other words, according to the structural approach, individuals and groups are considered to be socially excluded due to the “quality” of relevant institutional opportunities. The cultural approach primarily addresses to the “quality” of people taking up employment, using housing and public services. Even if structural opportunities are provided, individuals aren't able to take advantage of them due to the lack of relevant knowledge, cultural background or values. (Crompton 2010: 144) In this article, both institutional and cultural barriers to accessing public medical institutions and pre-school child care facilities are analyzed.

### **Social exclusion and migration studies**

The issue of social exclusion is actively discussed in context of migration studies. Researchers highlight the fact that gender is a key category for understanding the specificities of migration as well as the nature of social exclusion experienced by migrants. Migration studies have traditionally focused on males. This can be explained by the fact that, originally the majority of migrants were men. (Moch 2005: 97) In the second half of the twentieth century, migration has been acquiring more of a transnational character. (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007) Shift in the scale of migration flows brings significant consequences for female migration, since transnational companies and welfare states of the developed countries started to recruit women as cheap labor from the third world (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2000) and women became actively involved in international labor migration. (Kolarova 2006)

An analysis of global care chains represents an important approach in studies of the specificity of female experiences of labor migration. Feminist authors consider care as a labor that demands not only physical effort, but also significant emotional involvement. Care work is feminized because it is often understood as directly linked with femininity. It is also perceived as natural and invisible what makes it low-paid job. (England 2005) At the end of the 20th century an international care labor market took shape. Women from developing countries made up the majority of the workers in first world markets of domestic labor. Labor of female migrants who provide relatively cheap housework and childcare services allows unproblematic middle class family households functioning, thus enabling women from this group to participate in highly-paid labor and build careers. (Tkach 2009: 141) Global care chains form in this way. At the each end of these chains individuals experience deficit of care. Families in the developed countries compensate the deficit by hiring migrant women from the third world countries, while the families of these women suffer from the lack of mother care. (Yeates 2004, Blair-Loy & Jacobs 2003, Duffy 2007)

Researchers of female labor migration have noted that women are subject to multiple forms of discrimination: as migrants, as women, and as representatives of ethnic or race minorities. Migrants concentrate in labor market spheres of manual unqualified work, domestic servant work, or in the sphere of sexual services. (Moch 2005: 98) Analysts have also pointed out that female's experience of migration is not always related to work, but includes a number of alternative channels and forms of mobility. (Kofman 1999) The masculine model of labor migration cannot be applied to women since they often migrate because of marriage or in order to reunite with their family. Women also migrate as participants of social networks, communities, and neighborhoods. Such forms of female migration need to more sociological attention. (Morrison & Lichter 1988, Shihadeh 1991) This article aims at studying family ties as inclusive mechanisms, as well the gender aspects of exclusion and inclusion. This article shows in how family ties work not only toward social inclusion of migrant women, but also reproduce their secondary and dependent position within the family.

Russian migration studies have been mostly blind to gender. A few works that analyze the specificity of female labor migration constitute a minor exception. (see Tyurkanova & Malysheva

2001, Britvina & Kablickaya 2004, Zotova 2006, Zotova 2007), as well as works that address the everyday life of migrant women in private and domestic spheres (Brednikova & Tkach 2010), channels of female migration such as marriage and family networks (Kasymova 2010), and the risks connected with sexual violence and transmission of HIV/AIDS and STD's (Agadjanyan & Zotova 2011). The female experience of migration in Russia thus remains insufficiently researched. The article aims at helping fill this gap by presenting analysis of women's practices in taking advantage of public medical and pre-school childcare facilities.

Migration is not always imbued with a negative meaning for women, and does it necessarily entail discrimination, poverty, or oppression. The experience of living in countries where gender equality is a cultural norm may lead to a gradual revising of traditional gender relations in families of migrants from countries with patriarchal gender culture. (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992) Russian researchers point out that spatial mobility for women from post-Soviet states often presents them with an opportunity to get rid of the tyranny of the family, to acquire financial freedom, and the freedom to make decisions on their own. (Brednikova & Tkach 2010: 74) Therefore, research in female migration must take into account the complicated nature and the inconsistency of women's experiences, placing it within the context of gender culture of migrant women, as well as analyze its subjective dimension.

### **A study of migrant women in Russia: methodology and materials**

This article is based on the analysis of life stories of three Armenian women: Heghine (27 years old, married, son 5 years old), Zara (37 years old, married, two sons – 4 years old and 2 years old), and Amalia (36 years old, two daughters – 9 years old and 5 years old). Respondents were chosen according to the principle of maximum difference in terms of living place, education, and income. At the same time, all three women migrated as result of marriage and used public medical and pre-school child care services in Russia. The case study methodology allows us to perform deep analysis of mechanisms of social exclusion and strategies for overcoming it through the lens of personal experience of these migrant women, in context of their life stories. I analyze cultural codes and paradigms that engender ways of perceiving biographical events. I look at explanatory models of events and not only at simple facts narrated in the interviews. The respondents, as members of a particular culture share a number of conventions of meaning surrounding marriage, family, gendered division of labor, and possible ways of problem solving. Feminist researches believe that gender order may be understood through reconstruction of a “paradigmatic scenario.” The latter contains “rules that regulate gender and sexual practices of men and women throughout the duration of their whole life cycle.” (Temkina 2010: 130) Paradigmatic scenarios may be realized under certain life circumstances and represent typical behavior in particular situations. (Zdravomyslova 2002: 318) The cultural paradigm determines the limits of normal and acceptable behavior in the sphere of sexuality. (Kandiyoti 1988: 285) Any competent social actor is well acquainted with normative gender scenarios, even if his or her behavior is not typical and does not conform to the norms. Changes in the paradigmatic gender scenario signal shifts in the gender order. Variations and different interpretations of a scenario in interviews with different informants signify class and cultural differences between them. Biographic data allow for the reconstruction of normative gender scenarios shared by migrant women and give access to understanding specific mechanisms of social exclusion in the intersection of institutional rules of the host country and cultural attitudes of the migrants.

Three Armenian women who took part in our research on migration to Russia and at the time of the study (2012) had been living in two cities that are very distant from each other – Saint-Petersburg and Saratov. They have different educational levels – Zara got secondary school education, Heghine graduated secondary school and entered vocational school but dropped out, and Amalia completed a university degree. The interviewee's parents did not have higher education and were engaged in manual labor in different Soviet enterprises. All three families lived in urban areas and received very moderate income. All the informants have brothers and sisters. Heghine's and

Amalia's parents had three children, while Zara's parents had six.

### **Female migration channels: family or career**

The participants were not born in Russia, consider themselves Armenian, and Armenian is their mother tongue. Heghine and Amalia were born in small provincial towns in Armenia. Zara was born to an Armenian family in Azerbaijan, but her family returned to Armenia; therefore, all the interviewees migrated from Armenia to Russia. Heghine and Amalia emigrated as a result of marriage. Zara's migration experience was more complicated, since originally she immigrated into Russia for the purpose of work; however, migration as a result of marriage can also be found in her biography.

Heghine graduated from a secondary comprehensive school in a small town in Armenia and entered pedagogical vocational school. She dropped out after the second year of a three-years program because she met her husband and left for Russia. In her interview, she paid little attention to the period of the study and her professional plans during that period. It can be inferred that this biographical stage was not important to her from the point of view of traditional gender norms presupposing marriage as a priority over professional plans. Heghine does not problematize abandoning her studies as result of marriage. The biographical events are presented not only as natural, but also as quite desirable for a young woman.

After graduating from high school in a provincial Armenian town where she was born and where her family lived, Amalia was admitted to a department of Romance and Germanic languages at a prestigious university in Yerevan (Armenia's capital). She was the only one of her sisters who was admitted to university and obtained a higher education degree. She describes herself as a diligent student who studied well at school and was keen on learning French. In order to be admitted to university, she had to study a lot on her own, since her parents had neither money to pay for preparatory courses or a tutor, nor necessary connections to promote their daughter's admittance. Nevertheless, Amalia successfully passed her entrance examinations and was admitted in spite of high competition and corruption at the college.

During her studies in Yerevan, Amalia led an active cultural life: she attended theater performances, read a lot fiction, was into poetry, and met up with friends. After graduating from college, she had to return to her hometown since her parents required her to reunite with the family. After her return home, she started working as a teacher in a secondary school. At the same time, she was building long-term career plans: she applied for a position in French embassy in Yerevan and successfully passed the first two selection rounds, was waiting for the third round, and expected to get the prestigious position in the capital: "I knew that everything would work out with the embassy, because I had acquaintances there. And they said to me that I had passed competition, and was to work there."

Amalia places her narrative about this period of her life within a doubly meaningful framework. The first is patriarchal gender norms, which expect from a young woman marriage and subordination to elder relatives. The second is the framework of modern gender norms allowing for career and individual life trajectory. The return to her hometown was viewed by her as a temporary period as a concession to her parents' demands. She believed that after returning to her family for a short period of time, she would then be able to realize her professional plans. She was attracted to big city life. The urban environment in Armenia was a space of gender relations modernization in the late Soviet society. Everyday practices of educated urban women were significantly different from the traditional ones. The urban educated milieu was characterized by selective application of traditional rules of gender behavior. In particular, marriage was considered obligatory for women, but professional and career orientation was also allowed. (Temkina 2008: 150) Amalia's ambitious professional plans were not meant to be realized. During that period in her hometown, she met her future husband and moved to Russia, thus realizing the traditional gender scenario.

Anna Temkina describes the paradigmatic scenario for Armenian women, which lies at the core of the cultural code and sets the configuration of gendered practices. According to her,

patriarchal norms form the basis of this scenario. (Temkina 2008: 152) The term patriarchy refers to social system that characterized by male dominance over women, sharp division of sex and age roles and a power hierarchy that entails submission of women to men and younger relatives to the elder ones within an extended multi-generational family. (Hartman 2013: 192) The contradiction of class and gender behavior norms is noticeable in Amalia's case. Having been admitted to a prestigious university in the capital city, she performed upward vertical mobility and found herself in a social class of educated urbanites where tendencies of modernization of gender relations were typical. It may be inferred that the social environment of inhabitants of a small provincial town, to which Amalia's family belongs, is less modernized and demands (explicitly or implicitly) that a young woman acts according to the patriarchal gender scenario.

Zara was born in Baku (Azerbaijan's capital) where her parents had moved from a remote Armenian village. She spent her childhood in Baku. Her family had to escape to Armenia in 1988 as a result of the Armenian-Azerbaijan conflict which began with a pogrom of Armenian population in the Azerbaijani town of Sumgait and eventually led to large-scale military action in Nagorny Karabakh. She graduated from secondary school in Armenia. The forced escape to Armenia acted as a catalyst for further migration of the family and disintegration of its habitual lifestyle. Her elder sisters left the family. For them, marriage was as a channel of spatial and social mobility. Two of her sisters moved to Russia and one to Belarus. After finishing school, she found it impossible to continue her studies or find a job: "In Armenia, we lived in the middle of nowhere... Four kilometers away from the highway, we had to walk, that is, just to reach the bus, and then we had to get on the bus, and it would take us about an hour and a half to reach the town... There was no time to study, let alone work."

Zara decided to visit her elder sister, who lived with her family in Saint Petersburg. In Russia, she found a job as a shop assistant at a video store. Soon her cousin, who lived in Saratov, invited Zara over:

The elder one says to me, take a couple of weeks off and come. We haven't seen each other for 20 years. I remember her as she was little (...). She says, "You'll be a guest, you'll look around, you'll get to know the city. You've been to Saint Petersburg already." Well, I said: "Okay." And she bought me tickets. "Why didn't you get me return tickets?" She says: "Who knows, what if you like Saratov. And if you want to return, you can buy the ticket there."

In Saratov, Zara met her husband and moved permanently. Her life at the time of her move to Russia can be described as a break in her habitual lifestyle, attempting to cope with material and housing difficulties. In an Armenian village, Zara couldn't realize the traditional gender scenario of marriage because of low status of potential partners living there. She also couldn't continue her education or find the job in Armenia; therefore, she decided to migrate to Russia. In Russia, in spite of the new opportunities of independent life and work, she realized yet the paradigmatic gender scenario.

For all three respondents, migration was connected with a change in the marital status. All three women married Armenian fiancées who had moved to Russia for work. Marriage was presented in their narratives as a crucial life course event. Their narratives presented the status of a married woman as having a substantive and unquestionable value, which was far and above the value of career and professional ambitions. Heghine abandoned her college studies, Amalia declined the prestigious job offer in Yerevan, and Zara gave up work that guaranteed income and financial independence in Saint Petersburg.

Marriage is an event that is represented a turning point in lives of all three women. Armenian society is often described by researchers as a modernized patriarchy (Temkina 2010: 153) or neo-patriarchy. (Tartakovskaia 2006: 8) These terms imply gender order transformations. During soviet period, the public sphere was modernized; women gained the possibility to work in the sphere of paid employment and multigenerational patriarchal family started to disintegrate.

(Ter-Sarkisiantc 1998: 144, Arutiunian, Karapetian 1986: 142-143) The Post-soviet period, in contrast, was characterized by restoration of patriarchal norms and reinvention of traditions in family life.

In a society with patriarchal gender order, the role of wife and mother is a status resource for women. The status of an unmarried young woman in the family is rather low. After marriage, the woman moves in her husband's family, within which her status grows with her age and the number of children she gives birth to. (Lytkina 2010: 99) The primary traits of the patriarchy are the following: dependence of the woman's status on the status of her husband and of the elder relatives, significant influence exerted by parents on marriage choices, supremacy of the husband over the wife, and control of female sexuality. (Kandiyoty, 1987: 278; Zdravomyslova and Temkina, 2009: 31) A woman's life prior to marriage is determined by her parents, and after that by her husband and his relatives. (Lytkina, 2010: 102) Marriage represents an extremely important institution, since it acts as a means of status exchange and of maintaining societal solidarity. (Temkina, 2008: 157)

Classical patriarchy does not exist in the post-Soviet space, since patriarchal gender relations were subjected to significant modernization during the Soviet period. In modern Armenia, patriarchy exists as a cultural code that is at the same time subjected to a rather wide interpretation. The limits of gender norms are rather ambiguous and may significantly differ depending on the social environment. (Temkina, 2008: 151)

Although the life stories of the women who participated in this study cannot be completely inscribed within the patriarchal scenario, it is obvious that the patriarchal gender relations represent a reference point for them in their narratives and interpretations of their lives. This explains the fact that stories of their marriage occupies an important place in their narratives. I came across a form of referencing in relation to the paradigmatic patriarchal scenario in Zara's narrative on her need to get married explained by her age. When Zara met her then future husband, she was 33. From her point of view, this is a critical age at which she had to marry the first appropriate candidate: "33 years old – that is it, it's better not to be choosy." At the base of this narrative lies the idea of obligatory marriage for a woman and possible age limit for the marriage.

Another reference to patriarchy as a cultural code is connected to the narrative about the decisive role of elder relatives in matters concerning marriage. Agreements and negotiations between representatives of the families of the newlyweds in making decisions concerning the weddings are mentioned in all interviews. Amalia tells that her mother offered her "to take a closer look" at the future husband, convinced her not to decline his candidacy and even sent a request to his parents that the fiancée "strongly insists" with the proposal. Zara's wedding practically turns out to be organized by her elder cousin. Heghine's fiancée, having acquired her preliminary agreement, asks her parents for permission to marry her.

In all three biographical cases acquaintance with the new husband happens within the context of a potential marriage, and, after the bride's agreement is acquired, the ceremony is conducted immediately. Not more than two months pass between the first meeting, acquaintance and the wedding. All three women got married as a virgin. The wedding was followed by a change in the social status and lifestyle of the respondents. During the first year after the wedding all three women give birth to the first child. All these facts are also inscribed within the patriarchal meaning framework.

At the same time, the marriage stories in these narratives look rather modernized. The marriages, in spite of the participation of elder relatives, represent a result of personal choice and mutual liking. For instance, Amalia speaks of a "mutual understanding" that happened between her and her future husband. Heghine claims that her and her fiancée "liked each other." Zara uses the expression "a relationship started," which implies mutual affection and autonomy of the couple.

As a result of marriage, the participants in the study acquired the extremely important status of a married woman. Their further biographies are to a large extent determined by the life opportunities of their husbands. Amalia married a man of Armenian descent. Her husband, unlike those of the other two informants, has higher education. His work requires high professional

qualification – he works as an engineer at a factory in Saratov. He migrated to Russia with the goal of earning an income, while his parents remained in Armenia.

Prior to marriage, Heghine's husband had lived for ten years with his family in Saint Petersburg. His family runs a small footwear tailoring business that provides them with a stable income. Zara's husband is an odd-job laborer in the sphere of informal employment as a construction worker, a repair man in apartments, and an unlicensed taxi driver. His parents continue to live in Armenia. In general, all three families occupy different social positions. Amalia's new family has the highest level of cultural and educational capital. Heghine's family – of all three – possesses the most in terms of economic capital. Zara's family may be characterized as possessing the smallest volume of both educational and economic capital, in comparison with the other two.

Marriage stories of other women mentioned in the interviews (relatives and friends of the interviewees) show that the marriage connected with migration has been quite typical for Armenian women in the 1990s – 2000s. These life stories are located within the context of post-Soviet transformations of the Armenian society. The political regime change, economic reforms, and ethnic conflicts of the 1990s led to deindustrialization and mass emigration from Armenia. (Pogosyan, 2003) Women often migrated due to marriage. The Armenian society is characterized by the patriarchal gender order, which had been significantly modernized by the time the Soviet Union collapsed. Some gender norms were strictly abided by, whereas others could be subjected to a rather liberal interpretation. In the post-Soviet period, the tendency of strengthening of traditionalism of gender relations prevails. The degree of modernization and freedom of individual interpretation of gender norms depended on people's educational and cultural level. (Temkina, 2008)

### **Away from home: social exclusion and possibilities of overcoming it**

All three women in the study got married and moved to Russia. Each story represents a result of a unique constellation of biographic events. Nevertheless, some common components can be found. These components concern the institutional and cultural barriers that the women have encountered since moving into a foreign country. The primary ones are language and citizenship.

The women speak Russian to a certain extent because Armenia was a part of Soviet Union. Soviet cultural policies included instruction of Russian language in all schools of the republics. Participants of this study had the experience of studying in Soviet or post-Soviet schools. Linguistic socialization in Russia was connected with the acquisition of skills for everyday communication. Acquisition of citizenship represents a problem that is connected not only with overcoming of formal requirements but also with normative prescriptions of traditional gender culture.

Zara's biography diverges from the others because her migration to Russia wasn't connected to marriage. Zara arrived in search of employment, attempting to get out of a small Armenian village, where she had moved as a refugee. She knew Russian quite well since she had studied at a Russian school in Baku. In Saint Petersburg, Zara quickly adapted to the necessity to speak Russian. Her lack of citizenship represented a much more severe problem for her, since without it she could not officially be employed. Thanks to familial ties, she managed initially to find two short-contract jobs. Soon she was able to find a permanent job at a video store. In all three work places she was hired unofficially, that is, she worked illegally. She "did her best" at the last workplace, trying to endear herself to the clients, "so that they would be satisfied, so that they would come tomorrow." Work brought her satisfaction, gave her financial independence, and the feeling of self-respect.

After marrying an Armenian man with Russian citizenship, Zara was able to undergo naturalization. However, this procedure took several years. Her husband did not support his wife's desire to get citizenship, believing that a woman's life must remain within family and private sphere where citizenship does not matter. According to the interviewee, her husband discussed the topic

the following way: "Why do you need the documents anyway? You live like this and keep living this way. You are a woman anyway, you won't work anywhere."

In the end, she received the citizenship. Zara explained long and complicated nature of the procedure overloaded by bureaucratic requirements and protraction. Sociologically this fact can also be explained as an element of pragmatic patriarchy (Kong, Chan 2000) when traditional gender norms are applied if they do not contradict rationality and economic profit. If tradition contradicts rationality, it is subjected to reexamination and modernization. Citizenship gave Zara an opportunity to receive free state medical help (which is especially important for a family living in shortage of material resources), and allowed Zara to count on some social guarantees. For example, it gave her hope to participate in state programs for housing conditions improvement.

Heghine does not mention a language barrier in Russia. Nevertheless, its presence may be inferred. Heghine lives with her husband's family and speaks Armenian at home. In spite of the fact that the apartment inhabited by the family seems overcrowded (aside from the interviewee and her husband, the two-rooms are occupied by her spouse's parents and brother), the interviewee does not complain about the cramped space. The family provides interaction and fills up everyday life. Inclusion in the linguistic sphere, for Heghine, was connected to the beginning of her work in the sphere of paid employment. After her son reached the age of three, Heghine was hired as an assistant to a daycare educator. According to her, the necessity to work was primarily connected with her desire to help her husband's family financially. Heghine found a job on her own after noticing an advertisement at a local newsstand. The fact that she had an unfinished specialized secondary pedagogical degree helped her get this position. By that time she had started speaking Russian rather fluently, since the experience of living in Russia included not only familial communication, but the necessity to communicate in the public sphere.

Acquisition of Russian citizenship in Heghine's narrative is presented as a routine procedure of submitting documents right after the marriage (by that time her husband had already possessed Russian citizenship). Her husband and his family did not try to prevent her from getting the citizenship, nor from entering the job market. This is probably also an example of pragmatic patriarchy, connected with revisiting of traditional gender roles and the attempt to improve the economic situation of the family.

Amalia, the most educated of the three women in this study, started to consider a job of a French teacher after moving to Russia. However, she was worried that she did not speak Russian well enough. We may suppose that the linguistic barrier as an employment obstacle is mentioned as a way of justification. Amalia conforms to the traditional gender norms, but continues to share the values of work and self-realization. Another obstacle to employment was her lack of citizenship. Her naturalization process lasted six years, which was partially caused by the difficult and contradictory character of the formal requirements. Agreement with the traditional gender conventions decreased Amalia's motivation to get the citizenship. Amalia has a double identity. She strives for self-realization and dreams of a job, but she shares the traditional vision of family life and division of gender roles.

The informants came across similar problems that inhibited their inclusion in another society. Each mentioned the linguistic barrier and the difficulties in the procedure of citizenship acquisition. The linguistic barrier was gradually overcome and stopped being perceived as a problem, for example, during job search or communication in the public sphere. Barriers to citizenship acquisition have a double nature: institutional and cultural. Institutional barriers are connected with the specificity of procedural rules of citizenship acquisition. The respondents mention formal requirements and bureaucratic protraction that present an obstacle to getting the citizenship. Cultural barriers are connected to the gender culture shared by the respondents and their spouses: citizenship is viewed as unnecessary for the married woman participated in the traditional gender relations and devoting herself to the private sphere. Therefore, in order to get the citizenship, the women have to overcome not just the formal and bureaucratic barriers but also their own inner attitudes, as well as resistance on part of the family. Nevertheless, the necessity of citizenship has an instrumental significance from the point of view of access to social policy



measures and improvement of the family well-being.

### **Medical services: institutional barriers and strategies of overcoming them**

For the participants decrease in any kind of expenses is an important task. All three families lack material resources. The housing conditions of each family are indicative of income level. Heghine's family is the most prosperous. They are six people and rent a two-room separate apartment in Saint Petersburg. In contrast, Amalia's family consists of four people and rents two rooms in a factory hostel while Zara and her husband and two sons rent just one room at a hostel.

Citizenship gives the opportunity to access free state medical care, which became salient for the participants due to the necessity of regular gynecological check-ups during the pregnancy, childbirth, and subsequent pediatric medical assistance. Their stories represent three different strategies in response to a lack of citizenship. Heghine, as the most affluent, had an opportunity to receive the required medical help for a fee. She registered at a state maternity welfare clinic and paid for the services. At the time of the interview (2012) she was pregnant with her second child. During her second pregnancy she attended the same clinic, but as a Russian citizen with a policy of compulsory medical insurance.

Amalia took advantage of the social networks of her husband's family. For example, "organizing" a place in a maternity hospital for her and an agreement with the medical staff happened thanks to participation and connections of Amalia's husband's relative Ruben. "Ruben always helps, he is our great helper. He says that on Monday we will go there [to the maternity hospital]; he will get there by car and will solve these issues himself. The head doctor is his good friend, and there will be no problems. So we went to the head doctor with Ruben, and he organized everything. I was assigned a ward, and given everything just like it should be: under the supervision of the director, and the head physician."

The interview with Amalia contains numerous other indicators that the family possesses significant social capital despite her family's rather modest economic position. For instance, she mentioned cousins of her husband, who live in Saratov and with whom they maintained intensive contacts. She has multiple cousins and her sisters married men from "large families" which also extends the familial ties. All the relatives are not only well acquainted with each other but are also thought of as "one family."

In her interview, the powerful Ruben appears many times. He solves problems on the highest level. In particular, when Amalia needs special assistance during birth, a "professor" came, and the surgery was carried out by professionals from the "college department of caesarian operation." Through her familial ties, Amalia can effectively solve various problems she comes across. It is possible that citizenship was not an urgent issue for her because of her social capital.

Zara did not possess sufficient financial means in order to pay for her medical services and gynecological consultations. Her family also does not possess the necessary social capital in order to receive medical assistance with its help. In spite of the fact that Zara mentions a large number of relatives in the interview, all these contacts and ties don't include influential persons who are capable of "solving problems." This lack of resources resulted in an impossibility of receiving necessary medical assistance. Instead, she received low quality medical help and even neglectful treatment from the medical staff.

During her first pregnancy, Zara managed to register in a municipal maternity clinic and receive medical services for free. She says that the doctors treated her situation "with understanding" and issued the necessary documents in spite of her lack of citizenship. However, in the maternity hospital she found out that she was to be charged for medical services. Zara had a complicated delivery, so the doctors were "persuading [her] to get Caesarian." This service is provided for a fee: "at the time they asked ten thousand for the caesarean". For Zara, the required sum seemed too large, so she declined the surgery. The baby was born with a birth trauma: "My baby was born – although he weighed 4.220 kg, he was very weak. He had a birth trauma on his head. The head is uneven there; blood was filling the space under the skin. It had to be pulled out

with a catheter.”

Zara was accused of greed and a negligent attitude towards her baby’s health. Greed and negligence was interpreted by the staff of the medical institution in xenophobic terms. Poverty was typified as ethnicity:

I remember the head, that plump man, head of the department... he took me to the cabinet. He is sitting all well-groomed, you should have seen him. And he is lecturing me in front of all these doctors: “You see, you are sitting here in this expensive gown, and you cannot pay 10,000. Expensive gown, and you cannot pay the money. These, women like you, have arrived here, and do not pay the money, and you are walking around being rich, wearing diamonds.”

During her second pregnancy, Zara did not manage to get free medical health monitoring in the maternity public clinic. She was denied because of her lack of citizenship:

I visited the clinic, I went to Ivanova. Ivanova is our district doctor, according to our housing registration. She did not register me in the clinic, because I had no citizenship. I told her, I have a residence permit, she says, this does not give you anything. That is, if you have no citizenship, you are not even looked at. And then, when I went to get an ultrasound at 7 months, I paid for it, and I was asked, where is your initial ultrasound? I said – to be honest, I am doing it for the first time. What a risk-taker you are, at such an age, and seven months on top of that, you are getting an ultrasound for the first time.”

Zara was offered pregnancy health monitoring in the public maternity clinic for a fee, but she could not pay the total amount of the fee for the required medical help. “The paid services – you go once, you go twice. But can you go 9 months in a row? Of course not, where will you get the money?”

The possibility of receiving medical help is strongly dependent on the resources possessed by the family. Lack of citizenship produced an uncertain situation regarding the conditions upon which medical services could be provided. In some cases, the informants mention the possibility of receiving free medical check-ups in public maternity clinics; however, they do not possess the necessary information as to the conditions on which this service can be received. In order to get medical help, they take advantage of economic resources and social capital of their families. If such resources are not available, they risk of receiving low-quality service and prejudiced attitudes from the medical staff.

### **Kindergarten: cultural barriers and redefinition of gender inequality**

While receiving free medical help is the barest necessity, taking advantage of state pre-school educational institutions for children was characterized as an additional service. Use of these services was justified by the fact that they provide not only childcare, but also basic education and the development of certain desirable skills. Cultural barriers represent an obstacle in the way of accessing these institutions. While citizenship is a prerequisite to receive free medical help, it is not an obstacle for accessing kindergartens. In the interviews, the informants primarily discuss barriers connected with patriarchal attitudes – both of the informants and of their husbands.

All three families have gender-segregated role divisions, with men performing the role of breadwinner, and the women are responsible for all the housework, childcare, and child rearing. For instance, Heghine says that in the extended family of her husband, all the housework is her responsibility: “I do it all. I clean up. I cook. I wash. All that is needed.” Sometimes these duties are shared by the mother-in-law, but “they return home late in the evening with the [my?] husband. They work together till late”. As a result, the bulk of the work is performed by Heghine

herself. At the same time, the men (her husband, father-in-law and brother-in-law) “have returned from work, are watching TV, are hanging out with the child (...). They work [in the sphere of paid employment], and they only rest at home.”

In Zara’s family, her husband not only fulfills the role of a breadwinner, but as the head of the family. He personally makes all the responsible decisions. Zara says the participation of men in housework is a strict taboo. It is believed that performance by a man of any work in the private sphere is shameful and degrading because this work is unambiguously labeled as feminine. In much the same way, involvement of women in paid employment is condemned.

Amalia’s family also has a traditional gender role division; however, Amalia witnesses the highest degree of participation of the man in the housework. It could be explained by the educational level of her spouse. As it has been noted above, it is the educational class in the Armenian society that represents the sphere in which the paradigmatic patriarchal gender order is subjected to the most radical reinterpretation, and where deviations from traditional norm are legitimate.

The traditional gender role division means that the issue of placing the child in a kindergarten is controversial, since childcare and child rearing constitute an important part of traditional motherhood. Fathers oppose the idea of kindergarten, since care for the child in a specialized institution potentially threatens to break the traditional gender role balance in the family. In other words, the external childcare potentially strips total involvement of the women into the private sphere of its legitimacy. Consequently, it may be conducive to the woman’s involvement in paid employment, which in turn threatens the man’s patriarchal authority. Zara described her husband’s position about kindergarten in the following way: “He used to resist. No and that is it. What for? You are sitting at home, you are not working, you are sitting at home, so keep your children there.”

Public pre-school institutions are viewed by the women pragmatically. They give interviewees additional possibilities for participating in the economics of the family, and partially simplifies the performance of housework. Kindergarten helps Amalia free some time to successfully take care and bring up the children:

My older daughter was already attending school, and I was occupied with her. For a year or half a year my younger girl and I walked to school with her elder sister. There is no one to leave the younger one with. She is three years old, you cannot leave her at home. So, I take her with me. It’s winter, it’s cold, it’s windy – or not windy, it feels like it, or it doesn’t feel like it, I take her with me, and we walk the elder one to school, and we pick her up from school. Then for the rest of the day we sit together and do homework. And I have no time for her. She sits and gets in our way, of course, demanding attention already. In short, I decided, it will be better if she goes to the kindergarten.

Kindergarten provided Heghine with a possibility to go to work in order to bring additional income for the family: “My sons were two and seven when I started working. I saw an ad, that a kindergarten educator assistant is wanted. I went to talk to the director, and so I was hired. We needed additional money, so we decided this.”

Armenian women justify kindergarten in ways that do not carry a potential danger of destabilization of the patriarchal gender relations in the family. Informants speak of the usefulness of kindergarten from the point of view of the social skills that children acquire there by communication within a group. Amalia underscores the skills of self-discipline and self-organization: “The kindergarten gives a lot. If a child doesn’t go to the kindergarten, he is disorganized, and who goes is well organized. I have read about this. Discipline is formed from a very young age.”

From Amalia’s viewpoint, kindergarten provides acquisition of skills of socialization and communication with children of the same age, which are necessary later in the school life: “My

elder [daughter] attended [kindergarten], why exactly I decided that she should attend? Perhaps I would not do that but I decided that she would go to the kindergarten only to communicate more before going to school. I wanted it precisely so that she would socialize more.”

For all three respondents Armenian is the mother tongue and Armenian is spoken by their families. The participants in the study assign high importance to linguistic socialization. Heghine views kindergarten as the primary institution of Russian language learning: “When our son was born, we were advised not to even try [to teach] two languages. It’s disrupted. Decide, choose one language: Armenian, or you will speak Russian. We decided: first, let’s speak Armenian, and he will go to the kindergarten and learn it there.”

Amalia also believes that kindergarten is a primary institution of linguistic socialization for her daughters: “we did not communicate that often at home in Russian, and she did not speak Russian that well, she understood but could not speak.” Aside from that, Amalia underlines the cultural socialization performed in the kindergarten, transmitting the basic knowledge about the Russian culture: “The elder daughter studied a lot. All the fairy tales. About the Russian folk, Russian fairy tales, she knew them, all from the kindergarten. This is what the kindergarten gave her.”

All the participants of the study attach high importance to the future education of their children. Although only Amalia has university education, all of them agree that this kind of education is necessary. They view education not just as a channel of social mobility but as a guarantee of social integration, and so their children will find a relevant and well-paid job in the future. In this context, kindergarten is perceived by the participants as the first step of the future educational career of their children: acquisition of linguistic skills, reading, mathematics, and Russian culture. A successful school career is the second step on the way to being admitted to college.

As it was noted above, the role of kindergarten as an institutionalized form of care potentially threatens redefinition of the traditional gender role division in the family. In order to send the child to the kindergarten, the respondents had to overcome patriarchal attitudes shared by their husbands. For example, Zara used a trick in order to get her husband’s consent for sending her elder son to the kindergarten: she asked her husband’s uncle to talk to him since her opinion (that of a woman) has no weight in the eyes of the spouse.

In fact, the use of preschool services does not lead to redefinition of the gender division of labor in the family. Thanks to institutional support in childcare, performance of housework duties becomes easier. Even work outside becomes possible. However, this does not change the secondary status of the women and the sharp gendered division of family roles. In this respect, Zara and Amalia’s narratives on purchasing of a refrigerator look quite archetypical. Despite belonging to different educational classes and not acquainted with each other, their stories almost echo each other.

He [my husband] bought a fridge without a freezer. Have you seen a fridge without a freezer? Why would you need one without it? (...) I always tell him (my husband): “How can you buy without your wife.” I don’t like it, I wanted a different one. But he doesn’t care, he only cares to come back and say “I have bought”. (Zara)

He [my husband] can buy without me. For example, the fridge – he went and bought it on his own. We knew that we had to buy a fridge, we needed it. For a month or two we have been deciding which one. I said “Don’t you dare buy one without me, I must see what kind of a freezer it has, I have read a lot.” But he doesn’t care. (Amalia)

Both stories not only illustrate the means of gender labor division in the family but also express women’s regret and dissatisfaction about this. Women strive for larger autonomy, demand

that their authority be recognized, and would like to have more opportunities for negotiations and discussions various aspects of family life and content of gender roles.

In a certain sense, the striving of women to change the conditions of the “patriarchal bargain” is characteristic of patriarchy. In her classic work, Deniz Kandiyoty shows how numerous strategies of active and passive resistance are in face of oppression. The women strive to change the “game rules” of patriarchy to maximize security and optimize life options (Kandiyoty 1988: 274). In case of the respondents from Armenia, migration is connected with moving to Russian society with a more modernized public sphere, in which the role of extended family and home economy is reduced. For the families in question it means the strengthening of the male labor in the sphere of paid employment, whereas the position of women becomes more and more secondary, dependent, devoid of social respect. The feeling of injustice of the gendered division within the family, therefore, is due the fact that the balance of gender roles characteristic of patriarchy is broken. Marriage no longer guarantees for the woman the social respect and social protection. Even institutional support such as kindergartens, which might potentially give additional life options for women, in fact does not improve their position. A situation of “blocked gender revolution” (Hochschild 2003) is formed, when the widening of possibilities of life’s choices for women is not accompanied by corresponding changes in masculinities, and gender inequality is deepened.

## Conclusion

Detailed analysis of life stories of three Armenian women in Russia allows us to demonstrate the constraints they encounter, as well as resources and strategies to overcome them. The main exclusionary institutional barrier is the rules of public service and support provision, which connect the women with Russian citizenship. The cultural exclusion mechanisms are the language and the patriarchal gender norms. Gender norms prevent the women from receiving the citizen status and represent a barrier on their way to accessing services of pre-school educational facilities (kindergartens). Women can overcome institutional barriers using resources of their family (money or social networks). They work out strategies of resistance of the weak (Kandiyoti, 1988) in order to redefine the balance of power within the family. In a situation of coexistence of patriarchal rules of family living and a modernized gender culture, patriarchal gender norms are implemented pragmatically.

Social exclusion and strategies of overcoming it have class dimension. Lack of economic and social resources makes institutional barriers to be almost insuperable. Educated women redefine the rules of the patriarchal gender order in the direction of larger individual freedom, freedom of choice, negotiations within the couple. Therefore, the nature of social exclusion faced by the migrant women is dependent on their educational level, social and economic capital.

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