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# **Dynamics of migration, consumption and gender:**

**The case of Ukrainian migrant women in  
Sweden**

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## Abstract

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How do practices of migration, consumption and gender mutually shape each other in contemporary society? In this thesis, I am trying to partly address some aspects of this question by examining the consumption practices of Ukrainian migrant mothers in Sweden. Drawing on conceptual frames of gendered geographies of power and employing a practice theory as a meta-theoretical approach, I conducted fourteen semi-structured open-ended interviews with Ukrainian migrants. The thesis tentatively argues that among Ukrainian middle-class females decision-making process concerning migration to developed world is highly saturated with consumption-bound practices and ideas. Migration to Sweden was described by the respondents as a step to unlimited consumption opportunities for themselves and their children, access to developed markets and unfamiliar consumer identities and lifestyles. It is further argued that migrant mothers tend to construct their ideas about the nation-state they reside, its politics and regime, based on their gendered experiences of consuming welfare support, medical services, public spaces, schools etc. Finally, the thesis suggests that, as evident from this research project, structuring the consumption practices as the focal point of the sociological research is a rich, beneficial, and theoretically insightful analytical approach for examining gendered dynamics of power on the international scale, which will consequently lead to more nuanced, systematic and sophisticated understanding of the dialectical unity of gender, consumption and migration in contemporary western society.

Key words: skilled migration; gender; consumption; practices

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# 1. Introduction

The early migration scholarship had been affected by a gender bias and was based on the male migrant as the prototype (Curran et al., 2006). In the reviews of migration in Europe (Collinson, 1993; Fassmann and Munz, 1994; King, 1993; Miles and Thranhardt, 1995), the absence of any profound debate on the gender aspect of various forms of migration and the tenacity of traditional theoretical models remained puzzling. Yet, analysis of gender is crucial in the migration research. Even though migration theory has been traditionally at the forefront of sociological science, it has often failed to address gender-specific migration experiences. However, since mid-1970s the scholarship on the migration of women, children, the increasing feminization of migration and transnational motherhood, has contributed to overcoming this bias. These literatures have rendered visible the particular experiences of migrant women and have inspired further research into migrant parenthood. Moreover, nowadays many migration scholars argue that migration itself should be approached as a gendered phenomenon that calls for the development of more complex theoretical and analytical instruments than is needed for studies of sex as a dichotomous variable (Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Porter & Poerwandari, 2010). Therefore, it should be noted that in the contemporary social studies scholarship ‘gender’ is no longer conceived as a strict binary, but as a product of social structures and practices. This aspect is also addressed in the research on the reciprocal re/production of normative masculinities, femininities and models of parenthood in the context of migration (Lutz, 2010).

Even though, the research on gender and migration has essentially enhanced and transformed during the last decades, the respective scholarship, and studies of motherhood in particular, remained primarily focused on the experiences of disadvantaged, uneducated, low-class, marginalized and often stigmatized migrants: foreign seasonal laborers, refugees, asylum seekers, mail-order-brides, sex-workers, victims of human trafficking etc. For example, Arlie Hochschild, a pioneering feminist labor scholar, has developed a foundational scholarship on the social inequalities caused by the “globalization of motherhood” and “global care chain” (Hochschild, 2003), building her analysis on the experiences of care workers from the developing countries and their families. Hochschild positions domestic responsibilities in the structures of global political economy, demonstrating how the organization of private households is inseparably connected to global large-scale transformations. According to the scholar, domestic workers from developing countries have filled the “care deficit” in countries of the Global North where the necessity for care has increased as welfare support for it has

diminished in the result of neoliberal reforms (Hochschild 2003, 39). Barbara Ehrenreich (2003) and Nicole Constable (2003) in their turn have developed an intrinsic study on the globalization of sex work, human trafficking, sex tourism, transnational mothering etc.

Regardless of the fact that the investigations mentioned above have played undoubtedly paramount and crucial role for the development of gender studies, the significant, often pioneering and trend-setting group remained invisible and underresearched: those are highly skilled female migrants, who are frequently described as privileged, professional, well-established or middle-class. According to Eleonore Kofman (2000), it is nearly impossible to find a sustained discussion of women or gender relations in studies of skilled or middle-class international migration. Despite the availability of numerous critiques of dominant theorisations and empirical studies undertaken by feminist scholars (Ackers, 1996; Bjerer, 1997; Morokvasic, 1984), the rise of recognition of the importance of gendered approach to the skilled migration and middle-class transnational parenthood is painfully slow. Where women and migrant mothers are included in studies of international migration, they are still largely treated as “secondary” migrants, whose decision-making depends on the will of husbands or other male relatives. Yet the study of skilled female migration and parenthood is becoming more crucial as households rely more and more on two incomes, as women have entered higher education and gained a greater degree of independence and as the number of single parent families continues to grow.

Moreover, numerous scholars have argued about the urgent need to challenge the common myths and misconceptions depicting white middle-class educated heterosexual families as being homogeneous, gender-egalitarian, prosperous, sustainable, reliable and socially “unproblematic” role models for less privileged parts of the population (Heiskanen, 1971; Jones & Brown, 1994; Linden, 1978). Joan Acker (2006) argues that class processes are shaped through gender, race, and other forms of domination and inequality. Her research outlines a theory of class as a set of gendered processes in which people have unequal power relationship, control over and access to the necessities of life-processes including production, distribution, and paid and unpaid labor. The studies of Holtzworth-Munroe et al., (1997), Anderson (1997) and others proved that gender violence, patriarchal dominance and family abuse take part across all social and economic classes and, thus, highlighted the critical necessity to problematize the celebration of heterosexual middle-class family as a social ideal. This argument is particularly relevant for the migration studies due to the proven facility of migration to challenge, negotiate, contest or, on the other hand, reproduce and strengthen

existing gender relationship, family structures and normative practices of parenting (Hochschild 2002; Ehrenreich, 2003).

In order to investigate the middle-class migration as a gendered phenomenon I propose to use the conceptual framework promoted to be the fundamental, paramount and undeniably predominant practice in the contemporary capitalist society – consumption. An obsolete definition of consumption was primarily focused on the purchase of goods or services. Nevertheless, this narrow economic understanding of consumption should be perceived only as a point of departure due to the fact that diverse theoretical and empirical improvements contributed to the establishment of complex and sophisticated approach to consumption. Contemporary sociologists argue that consumption should be perceived as foundational process in creating of meanings and practices, identities, and social order in ways that far exceed oversimplified economic principles of supply and demand (Miller, 1995; Pugh, 2009; Warde, 2005).

In classic sociology of migration, consumption was for a long time viewed as simply not a relevant analytic category, because the scholarship was penetrated by the theories of capitalist production. Notwithstanding, during the last three decades academics have progressively situated practices of consumption to the very foundation of the research aimed at investigation of economic inequality, spatial development, identity, gender relations and performativity, media and even welfare. According to the Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman (2013), societies are no longer organized around the act of production, but instead, around consumption. Thus, consumption is intersected with issues of power and inequality and should be approached as fundamental to social processes of meaning making, situated within the sociological debate surrounding structure and agency, and a phenomenon that connects the micro-interactions of everyday life to larger-scale social patterns and trends including relationship of power, gender, family, class, sexuality, political economy and state.

Therefore, it is this preposition of significant, yet contradictory, changes in the theoretical landscape in the studies of migration and consumption, within the context of an unequal world-scale gender relationship and turbulent displace of the normative constructions of parenthood under the effect of globalization, which has led me to approach the gendered character of migration with the particular focus on consumption practices.

## ***1.1. Aim of the thesis, research questions and disposition***

The aim of this explorative thesis is to grasp the role of consumption practices in the gendered experiences of skilled female Ukrainian migrants in Sweden, a group which has not been previously studied. In order to probe the interconnectedness and dialectical unity of the consumption, gender and migration, I propose to explore the consumption practices and experiences of female migrants, which are constitutive for the dynamics of their gender: consumption of the marriage market, job market, welfare services, medicine, education and parenthood, commodities, services and spaces. I aimed to approach the migrants, who have resettled from the state that differs from their destination country by two central criteria: first, the extent of the development of market economy and, second, state gender politics. In order to do so I decided to turn to female migrants from Ukraine to Sweden as far as these two countries differ quite significantly in the terms mentioned above. Thereby, I hope to gain a deeper understanding of how the intersection of migration, consumption and gender operates at the individual level, in order to theorize how these categories relate to one another at a more general level of the state and transnational space. Moreover, by examining gendered practices of consumption I hoped to encounter ideas on how gender is constructed, experienced and performed throughout the migration process.

In order to reach these multiple purposes, I formulated the orienting research question:

- How do social phenomena of gender, migration and consumption mutually constitute each other in contemporary consumer-capitalist society through taking hold at the private level of parenting and consumption practices?

I am addressing this question through the investigation of Ukrainian female migrants in Sweden, who have already encountered motherhood in heterosexual middle-class couples. In order to develop more detailed and understandable framework for answering the core research question, I worked with the following sub-questions:

- What is the role of consumption in the pre- and post-migratory decision-making processes of Ukrainian female migrants?
- How consumption is incorporated into the daily gendered practices of job seeking, mating, child-rearing, family care, leisure and education in Ukrainian migrant families in Sweden?

- How Ukrainian and Swedish normative regimes are produced and reproduced in parenting consumption practices of the migrants?
- How do migrant women construct the notion of Swedish nation-state through their gendered consumption experiences?
- How do migrant mothers mediate the integration and acculturation processes through their family care and consumption practices?

In order to address the research questions, semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian female migrants, who have already encountered motherhood, are scrutinised. Paying attention to common gendered practices of consumption as well as to the materiality and marketization of the normative parenthood in contemporary consumer-capitalist society allows to counteract common romanticised picture of family as the last place free from the rational calculus of value. The here problematised example is thus used to illustrate how the daily practices of consumption are constitutive for the constructions of gender, space and state. This study thus stresses that ignoring the consumption as foundational practice of the contemporary society prevents to sufficiently understand social phenomena of gender and international migration.

After the introduction outlining the significance, the aim and research questions of this study I will now proceed with the previous research review, which will present an overview of the scholarship on the intersection of gender, migration and consumption, as well as scholarly contributions within this specific topic that are of special importance for the thesis. Thereafter, the theoretical framework is presented by first discussing the application of theory of practices in migration and consumption studies in order to situate the empirical material of the thesis. After this, the methodological framework will be presented through the discussion of applied methods and the three sets of material, consisting of 1) semi-structured interviews with Ukrainian female migrants, 2) the observation materials of the households of the respondents; and 3) of the selected online material of the Facebook group, where the recruitment and primary communication with the respondents took place. Thereafter, we turn to the core of the thesis, consisting of three analytical chapters, in which the empirical material of the thesis is analysed and related to the theoretical framework and to previous research. Finally, some concluding remarks are presented.

## **2. Research review**

This chapter positions the thesis in relation to existing research on the intersections of consumption, migration and gender. The section examines the development of the sociology of consumption that was significantly influenced by the interdisciplinary studies from the anthropological and ethnographic perspectives. Then, the chapter considers existing feminist studies research on gender and consumption, the field that has got a substantial academic attention during the last decades. The section situates the thesis in relation to the previous research on the effects of consumption throughout the migration process and spatio-temporal norms of gender.

### ***2.1. Sociology of consumption***

According to Alan Warde (2015) and Peter Corrigan (1997) in the later 19th century classic sociology has already started to indirectly examine some aspects of consumption. The early developments in the scholarship of consumption have been largely utilitarian and caused by the political need to take control over the social changes in general population and to implement the first welfare policies in Europe. The processes of extensive urbanization and industrialization have been followed by the increase of indebtedness, homelessness, spread of diseases, orphanhood etc. In order to take control over these social phenomena, the first studies of household consumption have been conducted. Using the first findings, the policy makers in United Kingdom have established a minimum acceptable standard of living, or in the other words, an acceptable level of consumption for all deserving citizens, which was a prerequisite of a democratic political order (Warde, 2017).

Many classic sociology scholars have contributed to theoretical foundation for the sociology of consumption. For example, Karl Marx's (1844) concept of "commodity fetishism," suggesting that the social relations of labor are obscured by the relation of consumer goods, is still widely and effectively used by the scholars. Émile Durkheim (1893), in his turn, demonstrated the important role of material objects and commodities in religious contexts around the world. Finally, the classic works of Max Weber (1905; 1919; 1922) provided a much-needed foundation for the construction of scholarship on the relations between class, status, culture and consumption. Thorstein Veblen's discussion of "conspicuous consumption" (1899) has been greatly influential to sociological display of wealth and status. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) research and theorizing of the role of consumption in the reproduction of cultural, class, and educational differences and hierarchies, is a very foundation of contemporary sociology of consumption. Thus, the very foundation of the

sociology of consumption laid in the need for provision and delivery of welfare services and exploration of the effects of consumption on the relationship of class, status and culture. And only very lately sociology of consumption became associated with shopping and purchase of goods and services.

Consumer research, as we know it today, was born about a half of century ago. According to Nicosia and Mayer (1976), for a long time consumer research was unreasonably narrowed to the market activity exclusively and the limiting definition of consumption as a pure act of purchase. Therefore, the early consumption studies were focused primarily on the study of the decision-making process of an individual consumer and psychological effects of commodities. In Daniel Miller's (1995) account, consumption was long neglected as an analytical framework precisely due to the domination of the discipline of economics, with its narrow perspective to consumption as to the set of individual, completely rational and independent activities. However, starting in the early 1960's, some scholars noted that marketers and consumer researchers could effectively make more use of sociological concepts and could have much to gain from testing and expansion of sociological theories (e.g., Felson, 1976; Nicosia and Witkowski, 1975). Since then, the field of the sociology of consumption has significantly transformed and expanded, and today the literature on consumption is vast, interdisciplinary, and mind-boggling. Conceptually rich, insightful and systematic approaches of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Zygmunt Bauman and others have set the foundation for the qualitatively new scholarship on consumption that far exceed rational economic principles of supply and demand, steps beyond negative assessments of consumer society and calls for a new definition of the phenomenon as operating in local and global contexts. Nowadays, sociologists illuminate fundamental and inseparable connections between consumption and systems of political economy, social categorization, identity, gender and others. Therefore, I would like to locate this study within the contemporary frame, where consumption is intersected with issues of power and plays a key role within the sociological debate surrounding structure and agency as a phenomenon that relates the practices of everyday life to larger-scale social processes.

## ***2.2. Consumption and migration***

The introduction of consumption as an analytical framework in migration studies that took part in the late 1990s can be seen as the result of theoretical and methodological challenges emerging in the field caused by the continuing cultural globalization and marketization of the society. Firstly, some social scientists formulated a critique of the reluctance of migration

studies towards the importance of consumption for people's decision to migrate within and between states (Bauman, 2007; Urry, 1990). According to consumption scholars, this invisibility was the result of a "productivist bias" within social studies, where the analytical focus is nailed to the production process without any recognition of the wider societal processes including consumption (Bianchi, 2009; Miller, 1995). Taking consumption into consideration in migration studies was vital, significant and forehanded step that enabled the feasibility to show how power structures, which operate at the level of consumption, are linked to the political economy and the unequal world-order (Hartwick, 1998; Urry, 1990).

For a long time the scholarly work on consumption in the field of migration has been dedicated primarily to the role that remittances play in the social and economic relations of migrants' origin communities. Many researchers have been assessing how international remittances influence household's consumption composition in the both short and long run. Some studies from Global South have proved that remittances have a positive impact on housing, consumer durables, total expenditures, and educational consumption of migrant families, enabling asset accumulation and investment in human capital (Sosa & Medina, 2006; Quisumbing & McNiven, 2010).

On the other hand, some studies on the intersection of migration and consumption has been devoted to consumer acculturation (c.f. Jamal and Chapman 2000; Worlu & Lindridge, 2010; Samaluk, 2016). Consumer acculturation may be defined as "the general process of adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country" (Penaloza, 1994:33), which involves learning and performing of "consumer behaviours, knowledge and skills specific to and existing within a specific culture" (Lindridge, 2010:445). Early consumer acculturation studies viewed assimilation as a linear gradual process (Berry, 1980), and often hoped to measure consumers' level of assimilation by examining their consumption practices. However, later on this oversimplified approach to consumer acculturation was challenged. For instance, O'Guinn et al. (1986) argued that the acculturation process does not take a linear path from complete "otherness" towards assimilation, and can follow multiple directions simultaneously. Other scholars supported this notion stating that Berry's linear model (1980) does not cover heterogeneous acculturation experiences (Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983; Mehta & Belk, 1991). I agree with this line of critique and aim to make a focus on the heterogeneity and differentiation of migrants' consumption practices and strategies throughout the further analysis.

### ***2.3. Consumption and gender***

Consumption has also successfully proven itself as analytical framework in field of gender and women's studies. Some studies have been focused on the role that marketing, consumption and gender play in the formation of identity, and the impact of identity upon consumer behavior (Kerrane, 2017; Roseman, 2002; Zannella, 2017). In consumer research, gender identity has been proven to be significantly linked to several different consumer variables (e.g., shopping behavior, recycling practices, leisure activities etc.) (Gentry & Doering 1977; Gould & Weil, 1991; Palan, 2001). In the same time, during the course of gendering consumer research, the very conceptualization of gender and its theoretical approaches have undergone considerable development. Mapping the introduction of gender to consumer research, Bettany et al. (2010) distinguished between the studies focused on 'sex difference' research and gender research. In the first, gender was considerably essentialized and viewed as reducible to biological differences. Gender research, on the other hand, challenges the notion of sex difference as essential and has made significant contributions to understanding gender as socially constructed, performative and non-binary phenomenon.

Additionally, during the last decades consumption has got extensive attention in the studies of gendered practices of family, parenthood and childhood. According to Rothman (2004), Clarke (2002), Kopytoff (2004) this due to the increasing commodification of kinship and marketization of childhood in contemporary western societies: "consumption plays a crucial role in the social production of infants and mothers alike, who are "made" through a multitude of objects and social exchanges" (Clarke, 2003:71). It feels safe to emphasize that in contemporary society infusion of consumption and care is practically unavoidable for parents or caregivers, since the very image of "happy childhood" together with "good parenthood" is built through the chain of consumption practices: starting from pregnancy and ending with leisure and education.

### ***2.4. Consumption, migration and gender***

The complex and multidimensional intersection of consumption, migration and gender has unfortunately gained not so significant academic attention. Nevertheless, some studies should be discussed as the first courageous steps towards the development of this research field. For example, Mary Beth Mills (1997) has investigated the consumption practices of female labour migrants in Thailand as complex cultural processes through which women negotiate their identities and resist their marginalization within the society. Mills argues that "commodity

consumption is a central goal in gendered process of migration decisions...” (1997:54) and views migrants’ consumption as not simply a result of consumer interest or fulfillment of economic needs but as a gendered process, influenced by powerful discourses on family, labour and modernity.

The very commodification of female migrant workers has also gained considerable amount of research interest in post-colonial and critical studies of gender. Some scholars argue that women from developing countries have been historically racialized, sexualized, “othered” and consequently dehumanized and utilized as desired commodities (Ehrenreich, 2003; Samaluk, 2014). This topic has been particularly well-researched in the dimensions of international marriage migration (Wang, Chang, 2002; Constable, 2009), domestic work (Ehrenreich, 2003; Parreñas, 2000) and sex work (Seabrook, 2001; Poulin, 2003; Scoular, 2004).

Also, consumption was studied as an important factor in the developing feminization of international migration and transnational motherhood in particular. In vast and diverse studies of global care chain, consumption has been recognized to be an important tool for maintaining and negotiation the emotional ties between mothers and children and a feature of distanced care practices: mothers tend to use consumption instrumentally to compensate the lack of their presence in children’s daily life and also to motivate children to succeed in their studies or extracurricular activities (Silvey, 2006; Rivers-Moore, 2010). In the same time consumption in migration research has been proved to effect family and gender roles in both sending and receiving communities (Hochschild, 2000; Ehrenreich, 2003).

For this thesis it is important to emphasize that even though the studies of the intersecting particularities of gender, migration and consumption seem to be diverse and far-reaching, they have been profoundly critiqued for the abuse of victimizing approach to female migrants viewing those as lacking agency and self-consciousness in their migration experiences (Agustin, 2003; Pessar, 2003). Therefore, in this study migrants will be approached as knowledgeable and skilled agents and practitioners. Moreover, this study will address the practices and experiences of important and often pioneering (in migration trends) group of highly educated and skilled female migrants that has been continuously overlooked due to feminist scholarship emphasis on the unskilled and disadvantaged (Kofman, 2000). Thus, this thesis will mobilize the previous sociological research that situates consumption practices at the vanguard of gendered power relations, negotiations of identity, class, citizenship and status as well as spatio-temporal dynamics of family, culture and society.

### **3. Theoretical and Methodological Framework**

The objective of this chapter is to present the theoretical underpinnings of this study to explain how chosen approaches are utilised in the analysis. Practice theory is used as guiding meta-theoretical framework of this study as it has been proved to perform efficiently and insightfully in the fields of migration and consumption (O'Reilly, 2012; Warde, 2005). Declared aim of the thesis - to bridge consumption, migration and gender analytically – requires to re-negotiate and nuance the practice theory, as these three categories are for the most part approached and theorised separately and exclusively. To formulate a coherent framework for the study, this chapter is structured into two parts, of which the first is dedicated to discuss practice theory and its application in consumption studies. While the second part of the chapter presents conceptualization of migration and gender as research categories in analytical frame of gendered geographies of power (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). Bringing these parts of the chapter together will hopefully provide a theoretical basis that allows us to understand how the interviewed migrants' consumption practices reflect large scale dynamics of power, gender, market and state(s) in Ukraine and Sweden.

#### ***3.1. Practice Theory Approach***

Providing an exhaustive state of the practice theory is well beyond the scope of this thesis. Here, I trace relevant previous and current debates on how to apply and conceptualise the theory of practice in multidimensional consumption-focused research project approached in frame of international migration.

In the context of long-lasting discussions in social theory about the structure-agency relationship, recently many academics have acknowledged the usefulness and theoretical richness of so-called theories of practices for approaching this theoretical duality (Halkier et al., 2011). Practice theories include an array of theoretical and methodological accounts that focus on practice as “an exhibited regularity that underlies and undergirds social action according to explicit norms or rules” (Rouse, 2007:529). Practice theory is rooted in the philosophical works of Heidegger and Wittgenstein (1953). Prominent social scientists such as Bourdieu, Giddens, Foucault and Butler have significantly contributed to the development and diversification of practice theories. Famous for his theorising of practices Bourdieu nevertheless did not achieve a goal of developing a consistent theory of practice. Within his contributions, practices are utilized as a means of approaching his more central problem: analysing habitus – a concept which according to Bourdieu embodies composition of practical

consciousness and of normative rules of conduct, aspects that other scientists argue to be part of practices themselves (1977). Notwithstanding, the contributions of Bourdieu were evidently insightful in importing concepts of practice into the theoretical debates of the 1980s, including that of Foucault and Butler. Their improvements have been recently mobilized by Theodore Schatzki (1996, 2001, 2002), who composed philosophical ontology of practices. Additionally, Andreas Reckwitz (2002) has lately presented practice theory as an ideal type, a conceptual alternative to other forms of social and cultural theory. Therefore, it feels safe to argue that recently 'practice theories' or 'theories of social practices' have come to bridge salient theoretical and conceptual gap across the classically modern types of social theory dominating the science after the 'interpretative turn' of the 1970.

In order to grasp the essence of practice theory it is favourable to start with Anthony Giddens' (1979, 1984) 'theory of structuration'. Giddens successfully provided one of the clearest accounts of how theories of practice give the possibility to overcome the classic dualism of structure and agency. Evidently, Giddens acknowledges that "the day to day activity of social actors draws upon and reproduces structural features of wider social systems" (1984: 24). Thus, central attention should be brought to the questions of how practices emerge, evolve and disappear. Accordingly, Giddens (1984: 2) argues that the domain of the social sciences ". . . is neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any form of social totality, but social practices ordered across space and time". Arguing so, Giddens' purpose is to explain the value of the processual understanding of structures: structures do not exist as immutable, invariable or stated at any place and time, there is mutual becoming rather than a being and this process is based on practices and performed through practices of everyday life. What is crucial in this understanding is that structure then becomes situated and shaped by practitioners in time and among spaces, which is determinative for the research in migration and will be demonstrated further in the analytical chapter of this thesis. Giddens' approach also highlights the role of agency in the production and reproduction of structure(s). Through his model of structure Giddens strives to show how action is the product of knowledgeable and skilled actors — practitioners. Only by actively utilising a model of the agents as reflexively monitoring their practices, according to Giddens, will the scientists be able to account for how the society is functioning, changing and reproducing.

Schatzki (2005) in his turn also emphasises that practice approach is neither individualist nor holist. He defines practices as embodied, materially enabled sets of human activities organized around shared practical understandings of social world. His fundamental argument

is that ‘both social order and individuality . . . result from practices’ (1996: 13). Additionally, Reckwitz displaced the very focus of practice theory to the routinized character of practice. Reckwitz (2002: 250) argues: “A practice is thus a routinized way in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood”.

Finally, according to Alan Warde (2005), a turn to practice significantly influences the types of research questions guiding the consumption research. Warde argues that social scientists should first of all analyse what types of practice are prevalent, and what range of the available practices do different individuals engage in, as well as what are the typical combinations of practices. This is particularly relevant for the migration research sensitive to the class, gender, race, ethnicity and other aspects of consumption practices. Moreover, there is a question, particularly urgent in the migration context of this thesis, of how different practices affect one another, as far as motivations, knowledge and orientations transmigrate across boundaries.

### ***3.2. Consumption and practices***

Moving closer to the framework of the present research project, it is important to note that in contemporary capitalist society most practices of daily life require and entail consumption (Miller, 1995; Schatzki, 2005; Warde, 2005). In what follows I therefore try to emphasize the implications of explicitly and determinedly using practices as a theoretical avenue for analysing consumption practices.

During the 1990s, social science inquiry to the field of consumption was almost entirely focused on the symbolic and communicational aspects of consumption, its effects on identity formation and with substantial remaining interest in market exchange and purchasing commodities. Later, Alan Warde (2005) had argued that sociology of consumption has to move beyond the market place, to consider the social organization and consequences of consumption. Such broadening out of consumption research appeared to be meaningful to academic community partly because of the growing interest in mundane and routine character of consumption. Therefore, systematic consumption research might benefit from the features of a theory of practice, including its independence from presumptions about individualist understanding of consumption practices, whether of the rational action type or as expression of personal identity. Such a view is coherent with an approach to consumption as the routine, conventional practices of daily life. It is also coherent with the view that practices should be viewed as internally differentiated as far as agents in different situations approach practices differently.

In his early works on ontology of practices Schatzki (1996) had already approached objects and services as outcomes of practices. His argument was that practice “necessarily depends on the existence and specific interconnectedness of these elements, and which cannot be reduced to any one of these single elements” (2002:250). Reckwitz clearly states that objects and their use are foundational to the performance, and thus the reproduction of practices in daily routines. Moreover, the particular attention to consumption practices in the present research project is required due to the well documented fact that artifacts play a significant role in this stabilization and naturalization of social relations (Latour, 1992; Winner, 1980). Artifacts embody social relations, thereby representing a sort of materialization and crystallization of relations of power, gender, class etc. (Miller, 1995). Accordingly, Berg and Lie argue that gendered relations are certainly among those social phenomena that artifacts embody and convey (Berg & Lie, 1993). Since 1990, feminist scholars have illuminated how gender is imprinted into objects through advertisements, instructions, colours and associations with gendered symbols and narratives (Hubak, 1996; Oudshoorn et. al, 1996). Therefore, gendered artifacts can contribute to the maintenance of gendered social relations, especially relations of power (Berg & Lie, 1993; Cockburn & Ormrod, 1993). This urgent call for taking into consideration the role of objects and commodities in the production and reproduction of social order is fulfilled in the analytical chapter of the present research, where particular attention has been paid to the products and consumption practices implemented into the gendered family relations, childcare and leisure. Thus, theories of practice provide some new insights into how consumption is organized and how it might best be analysed (Schatzki et al., 2001).

Allison J. Pugh (2009) in her turn has also contributed to the contemporary understanding of consumption by researching family lifestyles and developing the concept of ‘pathway consumption’. Pugh argues that it is necessary to put childhood in a context that considers consumption as a kind of care. Pathway consumption, according to Pugh, is a system of spendings of parents on the opportunities that shape their children’s lives and trajectories, where parents consume various contexts (neighborhoods, schools, extracurricular activities, summer camps) trying to socialize and educate their children so as to have better futures. This conceptualization is particularly important for the present research project as far as international migration from a “developing” country to a “developed” is often a classic example of pathway consumption. Welfare and state disinvestment, according to Pugh, is principal factor for intensifying the differences in education, medicine and child development in different countries. Additionally, Pugh emphasizes that pathway consumption plays active

role not only in future trajectories, but in everyday practices, forcing parents and children to negotiate their daily routines: “yet contexts do more than mold the future; they shape the present...” (Pugh, 2009:180).

Thus, by approaching consumption as a form of social practice, I follow Pugh (2009), Warde (2005), Reckwitz (2002), Schatzki (1996) and Daniel Miller (1995) in arguing for a contextual and contingent analysis of mundane consumption practices, focusing on the hierarchies of practices and well as their role in producing and reproducing of social order(s). I define consumption broadly in the present research project in order to signify respondents spending for the present and the future. Accordingly, consumption plays a role of social instrument mobilized by the respondents for different purposes: post-migration integration, negotiation of their gender, social class and status, building block for constructing their children future trajectories etc. Consumption also involves knowledge and skills required for understanding social, political and cultural contexts of consumption practices and for their appropriate performance, interactions between individuals, groups, welfare actors, political agents etc. (Campbell, 1995). Thus, analysis of consumption in the present study includes not only purchase of goods and services, but also public spaces, welfare services, hegemonic discourses and cultural practices and understandings. Importantly, consumption practices should be analyzed as based upon various social norms, cultural stands, political factors, dispositions imposed by the state, race, class and gender. Consequently, this broader understanding of consumption reflects numerous innovations within the sociological inquiry that have occurred in the last few decades.

### ***3.3. Citizenship and consumption***

For a long time consumption and citizenship were viewed as opposing spheres of private and public, associated with competing norms, practices and orientations. While the centrality of consumption practices to the relationships between individuals and social groups has been a feature of consumption research over the last three decades, only recent work has begun to approach more critically the problematic concept of the consumer and its relationship to ideas of citizenship as shaped by the individual and civil institutions. In the last decade, the dominant antagonistic picture ‘citizenship versus consumption’ has been subject to challenges and revisions from several related directions. In 1996, Pawson emphasized that little was known about how state and other public institutions influence the citizens ‘consumer choice’. A decade later, significant amount of scientific works with the focus on the state regulation of

consumption have been published. Even though there still seems to be not enough attention given to the questions over the nature and governance of consumption as an aspect of citizenship (Clarke and Bradford, 1998), it is reasonable to diagnose a shift in perspective and evaluation: citizenship and consumption have moved closer together. Their overlap and interaction were finally put to the focal point of researchers and policy makers. Numerous scholars (Ehrkamp and Leitner, 2006; Staeheli and Nagel, 2006) offered a suggestive and nuanced approach that re-position consumption as focus of politics and state building, showing convincingly that consumption may never be fully extracted from state policies and national economies. This shift reflects major political, economic, cultural, and academic reorientations of the last decades. With older production-oriented politics and scholarship in crisis, political energy and legitimacy have been moved more easily to consumption as an instrument of action and mobilization. In academia, research on citizenship and consumption has been influenced by the rise of gender and women's studies, which reassured the historical agency of the female consumer as a primary caregiver and citizenship reproduction agent, what is particularly important for the present research, where female migrants are analyzed as ones responsible for raising 'future citizens' – their children.

The examination of consumption practices attached to public spaces and welfare services is particularly insightful for the research on migration and migrants subjectivities. This is due to the fact that migrants interact with their sending and receiving countries through consumption of welfare, state-provided services, government bodies, migration agencies, clinics, schools etc. Therefore, migrants might translate their consumption experiences into the manifestations of the state(s) (receiving or sending) they are interacting with and construct their actions and understandings of power, culture and politics accordingly (MacLeod et al., 2003; Yeoh, 2005). Therefore, consumption practices in the present research project are perceived as processes that tie individuals to larger systems of state, power and politics linking private and public worlds. In further analysis I will examine consumption practices of the respondents in Swedish and Ukrainian clinics, schools, urban spaces and other public institutions aiming to provide a useful additional perspective for our understanding of the dynamics between citizens and the state, consumption and migration, politics and daily routines.

### ***3.4. Theorizing gender as practice in migration research***

For gender, the framework consists of a combination of constructivist thought by Robert Connell (1987) and poststructuralist thought by Judith Butler (1990, 1993). The framework is complemented with Mahler and Pessar's (2001, 2003, 2006) notion on gendered geographies

of power, as the concept is relevant for examining gender relations and consumption in migration research.

In recent decades, gender and migration scholarship, under the stimulus of constructivist thought and its view of gender as a social product, has moved from the traditional essentialist conception of male and female as a dichotomous variable to a view of gender as a continuous social practice. Respectively, gender began to be viewed as constantly performed, redefined and negotiated in the daily practices; individuals 'practice gender' and, therefore, contribute to the construction of gender by engaging in multiple processes of reciprocal positioning. The first explicit development in the analytical framework of 'doing gender' was made by West and Zimmerman, who defined gender as "a routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment" embedded in everyday interaction (1987:126). In early 1980s Robert Connell has also significantly contributed to practical and processual understanding of gender by arguing that gender studies would widely benefit from a theory of practice. Connell defined practice as "what people do by way of constituting the social relations they live in" (Connell, 1987:62). Connell argues that masculinities and femininities are configurations of gender practices, which are impacted by various structures: power relations, production relations and cathexis (gendered aspect of sexual desire and emotional commitment) (Connell, 1987). Connell's theory enables individual agents to negotiate the structure of gender while still acknowledging the limitations of agency, and the mutually constitutive relationship between agency and structure, which is also determining for Giddens' theory of practice and structuration (1984). Additionally, as far as Connell theorizes gender as socially constructed within the frame of larger social structures, feminist migration scholars get an opportunity to examine the fluidity of gender power relations as they change under the influence of macro-structures such as global labor markets, nation-states' politics, welfare regimes etc.

The 'practice turn' in gender and migration theory has been also widely influenced by poststructuralist thinkers (Schatzki, 1996). Wittgenstein and Foucault in their works have already expressed an awareness of language being tightly bound with practices. More recently, in defining practices as "a set of actions", Schatzki has emphasized that "the actions that compose a practice are either bodily doings and sayings or actions that these doings and sayings constitute" (2001:48). Additionally, using poststructuralist thought, Butler (2006) aimed to deconstruct the binary of men and women in order to diversify and deepen the understanding of gender. According to Butler and other postmodernist thinkers, gender should be understood as a series of acts, repeated over time, active processes of doing, practicing,

performing gender. Instead of perceiving the (sexed) body as a 'Tabula Rasa' upon which culture inscribes its gendered norms, Butler defines gender as the process, the stylized repetition of gendered practices, words, objects, and gestures that gradually gives the actor the feeling of coherence of the body, sexuality and identity that is required in contemporary western societies. Thus, Butler illustrated the performative nature not only of gender but also of sex (1990, 1993). Similarly to West and Zimmerman, Butler also argued that "gender is always a doing", but she highlighted that it is not "a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed", because identity "is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990:33). The question, therefore, is no longer whether one can resist practicing gender (West and Zimmerman, 1987) but what kind of practice or performance is enacted and whether the practicing of alternative performances (homosexuality, gender non-conformity) is able to challenge the dominant gender in respective society.

As discovered, this thesis makes use of various schools of thought on gender, but emphasizes particularly poststructuralist thought. Yet, for the means of analysis it is meaningful to discuss men and women as dominant social groups of gender, applying adjectives of male and female to these groups respectively. The research interest of this thesis lies in cis-men and cis-women, both of which are terms for an individual who relates to the biological sex assigned to them at birth and its respective gender identity. In following, I will try to provide splendidly detailed vignettes that demonstrate precisely how the empirical study of consumption and gender can illuminate big questions about power and social relations. Research on transnational migrants, I hope, will help to explore how images, meanings and values associated with gender, consumption, modernity and "the family" circulate within the global cultural economy (e.g., Appadurai, 1990; Featherstone, 1990).

### ***3.5. Gendered geographies of power***

As evident from the previous section, feminist migration scholars dislocated their focal point from women to gender, approaching gender as a system of practices which is mutually influenced by migration. In the same time, gender scholarship has also documented the mutually constitutive process of gender formation and national identity, exploring the different pathways that bind specific gender order to a particular nation-state. Relations of gender and sexuality play crucial roles in "the formation of ethnic and national subjectivities and collectivities" for both men and women (Alonso 1994:386; see also Chatterjee, 1993;

Yuval-Davis 1993, 1996). The mutual production of gender and national identities requires the involvement of both public and private spaces. In contemporary societies, public and private domains are controlled and penetrated by the institutions and interests of the state(s) (Heng, 1997; Yuval-Davis, 1993). Households and families are observed, instructed, disciplined and punished by the respective institutions and power structures of the state, such as education, medicine, police, taxation, welfare services etc. Consequently, as people produce family and household they practice gendered scripts which enable the nation-state to reproduce its power over citizens. The present research project is aimed to test whether this analysis can be joined productively in the study of gender as it is lived by migrants embedded in two or more nation-states. In order to accomplish this task I suggest to mobilize newly emerged theoretical developments laid out by Mahler and Pessar (2001, 2003), namely “gendered geographies of power”.

In geographic studies of migration, gender is frequently analyzed in relation to localised spatialities of power. Feminist scholars have contributed to the development of the study of interplay between place and identity, and the socio-spatial construction of borders. For example, Mahler and Pessar (2001) investigate the transnational landscape of gender and power by localizing gender practices within not only a social scale that includes the intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class but also a context of tempo-spatial place and historical background. This is due to the fact that gendered systems of power cover the global span, but are not distributed evenly or proportionally among the states. When gender is practiced within and across different states and transnational spaces, one can often observe examples of contradictions and inconsistencies. For instance, when women migrate between different patriarchal systems, they may find new barriers to their agency and autonomy in the host country (for example, deskilling, employment limitations, xenophobia etc.); nevertheless, they also find new opportunities and gain benefits or additional power from the gender system of the host country. Therefore, the framework of gendered geographies of power spotlights the diversities of social and spatial locations derived from intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and how do they influence gendered experiences of migrants. In other words, this conceptual model is mapping the historically particularistic conditions that a particular group of people (particularly, migrants) experience, and enables the researcher to analyze them on multiple levels (Mahler & Pessar, 2001:447).

The current research illustrates that the state (sending as well as receiving) plays a central role both in the gendered lives of migrants and in the production of everyday practices (such as

education, healthcare, leisure, consumption etc.) that reproduce or challenge social reality. State-specific assemblage of gendered inequalities, norms, understandings, practices, and relations to authority take place within households, and as factors of family relationships, mating, and marriage, even as these activities and relationships extend transnationally. Care as a central element of welfare state regulation is at the core of the organization of gender (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1996) that directly influence the lives of citizens and migrants. This notion is particularly relevant for the study of migration from Ukraine to Sweden, as far as welfare regimes of these nation-states differ significantly and influence the practices of citizens in various ways, what will be demonstrated and analyzed in depth in the analytical chapter of the present research.

In summary, cross-discipline debates have contributed to the development of migration scholarship which conceptualizes gender as a practice that is imagined and lived across multiple social and spatial scales. The disciplining power and seeming permanence of any given state-specific gender regime is reinforced through repetitions in the practices in which gender is embedded and reproduced. In the same time very important and urgent questions emerge when geographic scales are distributed across transnational space. Does gender as it is practiced across the borders of nation-states sustain gender divisions, hierarchies, and inequalities? Does this inconsistency and dispersal of gender practices contribute to the reinforcement of prevailing gender ideologies and norms? Or in the other way, does international migration create opportunities to question hegemonic notions of gender? In this short thesis, I am able only to establish some of the groundwork to answer these questions. To accomplish this, I will draw on the Ukrainian women experience of transnational migration to Sweden. Using practical approach to gender and consumption and analytical model of gendered geographies of power I will try to uncover the reproduction, negotiation and transformation of gender and consumption relations as a result of the migration process.

## **4. Methods, data collection and material**

In order to grasp the experience of female Ukrainian migrants in Sweden and to explore how they interplay consumption, gender and migration in their daily practices, I decided to conduct semi-structured open-ended interviews with fourteen female migrants, who have already encountered motherhood. In this chapter, I elaborate on the methodological underpinnings of these interviews. The first section describes the applied methods of the research. Then, I reflect on the process of selection of online material and data from the observations, followed by a discussion on the conducted semi-structured interviews. Finally, the research ethics and the limitations of this study are addressed.

### ***4.1. Methods of the research***

According to Giddens (1984), theory of practice as a meta-theoretical approach does not dictate the use of any particular method or technique. Nevertheless, he also acknowledges that structuration theory (as a basis of practices approach) views agents as knowledgeable, obtaining agency and responsibility of their actions and practices and therefore requires to pay significant scientific attention to agent's stories, views and beliefs as they also constitute the body of practices. Numerous examples of the migration and consumption studies that relied exclusively on quantitative methods demonstrate unproductiveness and inefficiency of this approach, because the application of quantitative methods require significant resources and in the same time does not guarantee the understanding of interacting wider processes, underlying assumptions, motives and views of the agents in their daily practices (Miller, 2012). Moreover, the very definition of practice includes not only actions, moves, objects and subjects, but also understandings, treatments, know-hows and mental activities (Reckwitz, 2002). Therefore, O'Reilly (2012) argues that a theory of practice directs to seek more answers from qualitative data due to the fact that qualitative methods such as interviews and ethnography are likely to bring the researcher closer to the deep and profound understanding of practices. It is also well-known that analysis of practices requires understanding of wider contexts such as agents' life stories, cultural and educational background, complex interplay of political, religious, gender and social experiences. Thus, qualitative research that pays attention to both wider structures and the understandings, positions, thoughts and feelings of agents, within the context of action, would seem to be the most efficient and insightful approach (O'Reilly, 2012).

Among the variety of qualitative methods I preferred to use semi-structured open-ended interviews due their potential to cover both factual and meaning levels of the research problem (Kvale, 1996). Conducted conversationally with one respondent at a time, the semi-structured interviews utilize a mix of closed- and open-ended questions, often accompanied by follow-up why or how questions. Thus, open-ended questions enable the interviewees with chance to elaborate and explain particular issues through the course of the conversation. Moreover, semi-structured interviews provide the researcher with a potential to narrow down some areas or topics that lay in the very core of the research problem. A completely unstructured interview opens the risk of not eliciting the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions (Rabionet, 2011). Also, open-ended questions among the closed-ended provide me as an inexperienced interviewer with the opportunity to be flexible and demonstrate sensitivity in exploring attitudes, values, beliefs, and motives of the diverse respondents (Dörnyei, 2007). Meanwhile, semi-structured format of the interviews allows avoiding the difficulties with coding, structuring and further analysis of the research data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). It also makes the interview data comparable and equipotential in contrast to unstructured in-depth interviews, life-story or narrative types of interviews.

Additionally, the participant recruitment method applied in the research – the announcements in the Facebook group "Ukrainian Mothers in Sweden", from where the majority of the respondents were recruited – enabled me to include the online materials from the respective online group to the scope of research materials. Analyzing the content of the respective facebook community, I selected the postsings and discussions relevant to the research problem (migration, consumption and gender) and incorporated them into the follow-up questions of the interview-guide as well as directly to the analytical chapter of the thesis. Particularly insightful appeared to be the themes of selling and consumption of second-hand clothes and furniture, practices of sharing information on migration procedures, discussions of local Swedish holydays and preparations to them. You can find the detailed analysis of the mentioned practices in the analytical chapter of the present research project.

Finally, as far as some of the interviews were carried out face-to-face in the participants' homes or other preferred locations (cafes, workplaces) and in the presence of their children, I utilized the opportunity to conduct some observation, take the notes and include them into the scope of research materials. Considering the focus of the research project on consumption practices, I put significant scientific attention to the objects and commodities that reflect those practices: clothes, make-up, accessories, devices, toys, furniture objects, and interior design

were taken into consideration. Other interviews were carried out by Skype or other video calling services, which also provided opportunity to observe the interior organization of respondent's homes. I had a very positive response, asking the research participants to show their interior design solutions or favorite toys of their children on video. Being informed about confidential character of the research project, the participants were happy to share approaches to home organization and creative approaches to children care products. This data has been included to research materials and analyzed in depth.

## ***4.2. Data collection and analysis***

Research reported here is based on in-depth interviews collected during the period of March-May 2018. Participants were recruited from a variety of different geographical areas in Sweden. The process of participant recruitment was longer and somewhat more difficult than had been anticipated at the outset of the study. Wherever possible, face-to-face interviews were carried out in the respondents' preferred location (usually their home, but sometimes at a café or a library). Some interviews were carried out by Skype or other video calling services. I took a pragmatic approach to remote interviewing, in response to limited financial and time resources and participants' preferences (King & Horrocks, 2010). In conducting this research I have drawn upon my academic training as a sociologist and my cultural background as a native Ukrainian and Russian speaker and Ukrainian citizen. The respondents were primarily recruited through the Facebook group Ukrainian mothers in Sweden (“Українські мами у Швеції”) and a snowball technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). The participants had been living in Sweden between one and 23 years. The range of age was 26-53 years.

As the recruitment was made possible via one social media group and social networking, it is highly possible that all participants shared similar class position, lived experiences, and characteristics. While research on migrant families tends to focus on low paid, racialized and uneducated female migrants, this study contributes a different perspective: all the women in the sample were white, heterosexual, highly-educated, most identified as middle class. Consequently, being highly-educated, heterosexual and middle-class, the participants may not be representative of all female Ukrainian migrants in Sweden, where the study was conducted, thereby restricting the generalisability of the findings. Nevertheless, having participants from different age, professional, social and cultural backgrounds provided a myriad of valuable insights to the research topic and added considerable richness to the data. Moreover, studying the experiences of privileged migrants is important, because it contributes

to challenging the normalization of privilege as primarily based on competences, neglecting the aspects of social and cultural capital (cf. Favell, 2008). Reinforcing the knowledge of how heterosexual, middle-class, highly-educated, white migrants experience various gendered geographies of power can help to negotiate the notions of meritocracy as based on skills, knowledge and qualifications.

The interviews were mainly explorative in connection with the topics mentioned, as little was known from current literature about experiences of Ukrainian female immigrants in Sweden. I had a very positive response, most mothers I approached were actively willing to participate in the research project, despite the fact that many suffered from a lack of time. In most of cases, I started out the interviews by presenting myself and my general interest in Ukrainian immigrants' migratory experiences. Then, I was asking respondents to tell me their story – 'from the beginning'. According to some scholars, such an open question helps to create 'autobiographical spontaneous narratives' which should be allowed to unfold without undue interference from the interviewer (Andersen and Larsen, 2001). The semi-structured open-ended interviews covered consumption practices related to migration, gender and parenthood. As my interviews were semi-structured, I was mainly sticking to my interview guide's question formatting and order, but in order to conduct the interviews in a flowing manner, I sometimes followed some topical trajectories and also both presented some additional and advanced questions and explained my questions in more detail if needed. As data collection progressed, the tendency became apparent that throughout the course of interviews, respondents were talking about their upbringing and experiences of education and socialization to make sense of their experiences of migration, consumption and motherhood. These exploratory, deep and emotional conversations served for the further development of the interview guide for subsequent interviews, and enabled me as the inexperienced researcher to find new, unexpected and insightful themes that were emerging in the process of data collection (Belk et al. 2013:40). Towards the end of the interviews, I was going through a checklist of factual questions to make sure that all necessary questions have been answered.

The interviews were conducted in Ukrainian and Russian languages, ranged in length from 1 to over 3 hours, audio-recorded and fully transcribed. Then, I content analyzed the transcribed data, my notes from observations and data from Facebook group utilized for recruitment by using a thematic approach. I was gradually identifying, analyzing and reporting emerging themes emerged throughout the interviews and observations (Arnould and Thompson, 2005; Braun and Clarke, 2006; Spiggle, 1994). I decided to use thematic content analysis due to its

relative transparency and simplicity of use. Thematic analysis also enables a researcher to report meanings, experiences, practices, impressions and the reality of participants, while not weakening the value of an individual's responses (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Moreover, to some extent this approach has a potential to provide theoretical flexibility and openness due to the fact that rich and detailed data accounts are not limited or constrained to a pre-existing coding frame. Each interview was listened several times, supplemented by observation notes and transcribed as soon as possible, always prior to the next interview taking place.

In order to ensure reliability of the analysis I mobilized the inductive or "bottom up" approach (e.g., see Frith & Gleeson, 2004) to thematic analysis described in the content analysis framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). According to the scholars, inductive analysis requires the researcher to code the data "without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher's analytic preconceptions" (Braun and Clarke, 2006:12). Thus, it feels safe to conclude that this form of thematic analysis could be identified as datadriven. Following the analytical framework, the interview transcripts and observation notes were read repeatedly, to allow the researcher a holistic understanding of data in order to map it logically (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Next, the materials were closely examined for thematic patterns. I gradually generated the codes to identify and structure specific ideas. In the subsequent phase of the analysis, the codes were collated in order to introduce representative themes (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The data collection and analysis were taking place simultaneously, what allowed probing the ideas or themes that emerged in earlier interviews throughout the course of subsequent conversations. This approach contributed to richness of the gathered data and consequently deeper understanding of the research problem.

### ***4.3. Research Ethics***

To ensure ethical, safe and sensitive character of the research I followed the ethical guidelines of the Swedish Research Council. Before each interview, I provided the interviewees with the consent form, where I explained the general purpose of the research, research topic, the voluntary nature of the participation and the anonymity and data confidentiality of the study. Also, the respondents were informed about their full right to interrupt, pause, postpone or stop the interview at any moment without any negative consequences for them. I also assured participants that interviews' format would be closer to the 'conversation' about their experiences than to a formal interview (Belk et al., 2013:35). Therefore, they could share as much or as little as they feel comfortable to. Consent to participate was gained from all

respondents via signed a written consent form, or in cases where interviews took place via Skype or other video calling services, by verbal agreement. Permission was sought to digitally record the interviews. All respondents were also given my contact details for obtaining further information or notifying if they wished to (dis-)continue with the research project. In order to protect the anonymity of the interviewees, I will not give biographical information of each and every one of the people I interviewed. Instead, I will proceed with a general description of the interview sample provided in the previous section. Participants' identities were anonymised according to Data Protection Act 1998: individuals' names and precise details have not been disclosed, and data was stored securely. The participants' confidentiality is additionally protected through the use of pseudonyms. Throughout the course of the study the participants were treated with full dignity and respect.

The vulnerability of the research participants, which sometimes included an unstable or precarious legal, employment or family-related situation in Sweden, has laid the groundwork for the method I approached quotes from the interviewees in the analytical chapter of the thesis. In terms of the quotes, I will try to disclose very scarce information about the respondents. Most often, in order to refer to the person I quote, I will only use the neutral words "the interviewee/ participant/ respondent". Nevertheless, in cases, where some details about the research participant is crucial for the reader to grasp the meaning or context of a certain phrase, the necessary information will be provided if it is not considered to be harmful for the interviewee. Moreover, the question of the vulnerability of the interviewees should be addressed. In some cases, the respondents shared very private and difficult experiences with me, such as cases of parental abuse, domestic violence, psychological health threats etc. Acknowledging my reluctance to exploit the pain of others, in some cases I decided that it is unavoidable to carefully reproduce the aspects of these experiences in order to clarify the arguments and logic of the participants. However, in most of cases I was willing to provide only brief descriptions of what the interviewees told me. By doing so, I aimed to reach a moderate balance where I avoid exploitation the painful experiences of others, but still keep their narrative logical in order to fulfill the analytical purposes of the research project.

#### ***4.4. Limitations***

The design and scope of this study results in a set of limitations, which are addressed in this section. The first challenge I faced within the course of the study concerns my position as a researcher due to the fact that I share several common aspects of background with my

research participants, such as ethnicity, mother tongue, educational level, cultural origin etc. In feminist research there has been extensive discussion on the importance the social position of the researcher has for the research result. Therefore, crucial task for me is to reflect on potential biases and presumptions emerging in the course of the study. Bias is commonly understood as any influence that provides a distortion in the results of a study (Polit & Beck, 2013). In order to minimize the potential influences of my position I am following the guidelines of DeVault and Gross (2006:181): “feminists must maintain a reflexive awareness that research relations are never simple encounters, innocent of identities and lines of power, but, rather, are always embedded in and shaped by cultural constructions of similarity, difference, and significance”. However, I found commonalities in social and cultural origin of me as a researcher and my respondents to be also beneficial to some extent. Because they enabled me to follow the principle of cultural relativism, according to which an individual’s beliefs and activities should be understood by others in terms of that individual’s own culture (in our case, Ukrainian). Conducting the interviews in Ukrainian and including Ukrainian online sources allowed for increased access to informants and material.

It is also important to note that theoretical and methodological framework of the present research project is focused on interrelation of gender and consumption dynamics in migrant families. What means that additional value to the research could be gained from interviewing partners, relatives and children of the respondents. Additional and more precise empirical data could be also gained from the extended participant observation focusing on gendered consumption practices of care, family leisure, cultural participation etc. However, due to the limited time and human resources of the study, I was not able to interview larger amount of people. Therefore, I would like to highlight that more conducive settings of the study would provide an opportunity to examine the dialectics between the consumption practices and gender dynamics of migrant women, men, and their children more precisely and conduct more holistic and nuanced analysis of the construction and reproduction of self, gender, consumption, and state with the transnational terrains.

## **5. Analysis**

An exploration of the empirical material is outlined in analytical chapter which has been structured into three debates, each divided into sub-sections. At the core of this analytical discussion is the diversity of gendered experiences and practices of the interviewees, collected to grasp the patterns of consumption and migration dynamics, which are of sociological interest. In the first section I use empirical examples to illustrate how consumption-related ideas and fantasies are incorporated into the migration decision-making process as well as post-migratory gendered experiences of mating and labour market participation of the respondents. I demonstrate how migration influences highly skilled women's experiences of encountering host country labour market resulting into their transition from position of "producer" to primarily "consumer". In the second section, empirical data is utilized to discuss different practices of pregnancy and childbirth in Ukraine and Sweden in their relation to gender politics, state power and constructions of consumer citizenship. In the third and concluding debate, pre- and post-migratory child-rearing consumption practices of the interviewees are outlined with scientific attention focused upon ideas of education and development prevailing in Ukraine and Sweden.

### **5.1. Migration as consumption: gendered aspirations and consequences**

Previous research on middle-class migration has documented its links to consumption and gendered geographies of power (for example, King et al., 2000; Mahler and Pessar, 2001, 2010; Williams and Hall, 2002). Migration of highly skilled middle class individuals, within the contemporary consumer society, is a life project, part of the reflexive project of the self, which is often interlinked to the set of consumption-framed practices and ideas. Therefore, in this section the insights offered by sociological theorists (e.g. Mahler and Pessar, 2001; Giddens, 1991) are considered for the analysis of the respondents' practices of mating, marriage, job seeking and consumption in frame of migration.

#### ***5.1.1 Consumption and/at marriage market***

To understand aggregate patterns of partner selection, researchers use the concept of a marriage market. People operate within a marriage market where each individual considers a set of potential spouses. Socio-structural approaches explain differences in mate selection criteria as the consequence of the set of class and gender inequalities and power relations

(Eagly and Wood, 1999; Jackson, 1992). In other words, gendered social structural context in which people are situated in society significantly influences mating preferences and further coupledom experiences. Migration contributes to transformations in the ways people think about their potential and suitable mates (Pessar & Mahler, 2003). Migrants tend to become particularly aware of the contextual nature of gender as they face social dynamics that may differ significantly in different places they move to (see e.g. Donato et al., 2006 for a review). Therefore, how migrant balances or weighs the cultural forces and gender norms of home and host marriage market may vary within different migrant groups and change over time. Migrants from the countries of the former Soviet Union are particularly barely studied in this respect, which is inappropriate in the context of the gendered nature of the official ideology of the Soviet state and following it highly gendered process of transition from a centralized economy to neoliberal market capitalism (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Thus, it is important to examine how lived experience of the specific gender ideology influenced Ukrainian respondents' marriage market practices in the context of migration to Sweden.

Both respondents, who have been married or single at the moment of migration to Sweden, have noted significant changes in their perception of (potential) partners. Some women explicitly stated that they were attracted to Swedish men because of their perceived difference with local Ukrainian men who were commonly portrayed as 'tasteless' or 'unsophisticated'. Several women have emphasized their surprise and overall approval of men in Sweden actively engaging in self-care and fashion activities in comparison with Ukrainian men:

*"You know, Ukraine is full of well-groomed women and absolutely ugly men... They (men) never pay attention to their style, perfume, skincare. But here (in Sweden) everything is different. It seems that they care a lot about their appearance, haircut, style. I admire that..."*

Seemingly, the respondents have noted that males in Sweden might purchase grooming products and services, which are reserved as female or feminine in Ukraine, such as cosmetics, fashion style guidelines, manicure etc. Ehrenreich (1983) suggests the loss of the breadwinner role was one of the factors that prompted men in a consumer capitalism society to emphasize their role as autonomous consumers concerned with their body images. Simpson (1994) expresses the idea that the more emancipated women become, the less masculine (in traditional sense) men become. He argues it was the influence of feminism in consumer capitalist societies which prompted the change in hegemonic masculinity from the 'macho' to metrosexual notion.

Through the observation of Swedish men engaging in traditionally ‘non-masculine’ activities some respondents conclude on flexible gender expectations of ‘manliness’ and widening spectrum of ‘masculine’ behaviors in Sweden:

*“Here you can be well-groomed, stylish and neat and still nobody is going to question your ‘manliness’. In Ukraine it does not work this way...”*

Thus, it seems safe to conclude that for Ukrainian female migrants the consumption of male grooming holds and services plays an important role of an indicator of acceptable and expected gender images and behaviors in the destination country. However, there is a widespread consensus that the traditional notion of men as ‘producers’ and women as ‘consumers’, which is considered to be largely irrelevant and outdated in modern Western societies (Dholakia, 1999; Bakewell et al., 2006). According to Kacen (2000), nowadays the construction of consumer identities both promotes and requires all individuals to participate in the consumer ethic. Indeed, the limitedness of such a dualist approach is inconsistent with a society which “turns both women and men into consumers, consumer identities into individual compositions and gender into another consumption object” (Kacen, 2000:348). With such a shift in the consumption-production duality, consumption should no longer be perceived as exclusively feminine activity, but an active aspiration for males (Firat, 1993).

Nevertheless, the male produces/female consumer duality is still very relevant for Ukrainian context according to the Ukrainian female migrants’ perspective. One of the respondents described her view point on Ukrainian couple/family consumption in the next terms:

*“To be honest, in Ukraine males’ purchases are usually women’s job. We (women) buy everything for them (men): from underwear and shampoo to office costume. Men seem to be not even interested in how they look like... That’s why a lot of them end up looking horrible”*

Moreover, some respondents associated self-determined consumption performed by men in Sweden with matureness, responsibility, self-sufficiency and independence:

*“Ukrainian husband is like a baby: you have to cook for him, buy him shoes and clothes, go with him to a barbershop... Ukrainians (males) are not able to care for themselves. But Sweds are different. They know how to arrange their life. They do not need a women to babysit them!..” (Sasha, mother of two)*

According to Beagan & Saunders (2005), “concealing the fact that they care about their appearance at all” is one of less visible practices that help men to produce masculinity in highly patriarchal societies. Since Ukraine culturally represents a mixture of patriarchalism and a socialist modernization project, Ukrainian men’ apathetic and even ‘avoiding’ position

towards consumption could be a consequence of their gendered socio-structural position in the context of transition to capitalist market economy and exposure to the Western cultural patterns, including masculinity notions, through the globalization.

The other theme that emerged in the discussion about changing mating preferences in immigration is the attitude of the potential partners towards children and division of domestic labour. Many respondents have noted that they have been amazed by the level of involvement of Swedish fathers into parenthood and childcare and have started to consider it as a valuable criteria for partner choice. They have been constantly comparing their impressions newly gained in Sweden with their own lived experiences both as mothers and/or daughters in Ukraine. One interviewee pointed out with bitterness and sorrow in her voice:

*“In Sweden fathers really care about their children comparing to Ukraine... At home (in Ukraine), father is always next to the TV, but never in children’ room”*

Throughout the interviews there was no mention of gendered reciprocity in Ukrainian families. I heard little mention of women’ own interests and comfort. A lot of women comparing Swedish and Ukrainian families described gendered organization of family in Ukraine as being ‘comforting’ for fathers. A mother of two married to a Ukrainian told:

*“You know what? In Ukraine a husband is the main child in a family. A mother should keep kids being quiet, polite and healthy only for one reason - to not disturb a dad!”*

One of the respondents, who migrated to Sweden being single, explained the shift in her mating practices in the next terms:

*“Before moving here, I could not even dream about my future husband being caring and actively participating dad for our kids. After the migration, this became a norm for me. A father MUST care about children! No other options”*

The other respondent has reflected on her experience dating with Ukrainians and favored Swedish men due to their readiness to share domestic chores more equally:

*“While cohabiting in Ukraine I have been always arguing with my boyfriends about the home chores. Even though I was working long hours as well as my partners did, they expected ME to do everything: cooking, cleaning, shopping, laundry... This is not acceptable. With my Swedish husband we do everything together”*

The phenomena of ‘double burden and ‘absent fathers’ encountered in the course of the interviews are well-represented by the researchers of Soviet and Post-Soviet gender order. In Soviet Union fathers’ role was symbolically and materially appropriated by the state and banished to the margins of the new Soviet family. In the case of women, their role was

defined as worker-mothers who had a duty to work, to produce future generations of workers, as well as to oversee the running of the household. The politicisation of motherhood, and relative neglect of fatherhood, undermined the position of men within the family (Reid, 1998; Issoupova, 2010; Kukhterin, 2000). Although particular aspects of gender agendas in post-Soviet states may vary due to local political, economic, cultural, and religious situations, the Soviet heritage is one of the important common reference points in the process of establishing new gender relations in families in the independent Ukrainian nation-state. Ukrainian men might be expected to welcome the new opportunities offered by collapse of communism: the state is no longer monopolising the patriarchal role, theoretically leaving men free to resume their fatherhood position within the private sphere. The key question, however, is whether Ukrainian men are ready to resume their paternal responsibilities. The answer based on the data of the present study is “no”. The female respondents perceive Ukrainian men as being indifferent and ignorant towards everyday parenting practices and childcare. Moreover, according to the respondents, there is no gender reciprocity in the division of domestic labour. Some respondents have motivated their decision to migrate and/or choose Swedish partner as an attempt to escape pressure to conform to gender norms or to escape gender discrimination.

Summarizing the data of the interviews, it is safe to state that mating practices of women depend on the cultural and structural gendered social context, including prevalent consumption practices in the respective society. For Ukrainian female migrants the consumption of male grooming holds and services plays an important role of an indicator of acceptable and expected gender images and behaviours in Sweden. Some participants associated self-determined consumption performed by men in Sweden with maturity, responsibility, self-sufficiency and independence. Additionally, female respondents stated that women in their home country (Ukraine) face numerous cornerstones such as ‘double burden’ and scarce participation of fathers in parenting and childcare. Most respondents wished a more egalitarian division of household labour and asserted themselves more openly in marital decision-making. Thus, women’s desire to escape gender-specific discrimination could be considered as an additional determinant for their migration. Several studies have proved that perceived gender discrimination forms a strong and highly robust incentive to emigrate (Ruyssen & Salomone, 2018).

### ***5.1.2 Consuming “proper” childhoods through migration***

Nowadays, the ideal of childhood in contemporary western capitalist culture is defined as an entertaining, safe and abundant space — face-to-face with the precarious realities of

childhood in many developing states (Horton, 2008). Childhood, imagined as an idyllic, tender and flourishing stage of life was organically incorporated into neoliberal discourse. Globalization of media, commodities, ideas and migration has contributed to the worldwide spreading of images of a commercialized childhood (Fass, 2007; Stephens, 1995). Such ‘ideal childhoods’ were incorporated in mothers’ imaginings of life in the Global West, forming part of a “global imaginary of consumption” (Suárez-Orozco, 2004) that stimulates migration. Dominate moral discourses saturated with normative ideas about children reject the possibility of “happy” childhood in developing countries due to the lack of resources, undeveloped markets and limited consumption capabilities of parents (see Parreñas, 2005). In the same time in patriarchal ideology the life of mothers and children has been always portrayed as inseparably united (Malkki and Martin, 2005). Consequently, the mothers’ decisions to migrate are often strongly shaped by ideals of commercialized childhood, ideals often construed as diametrically contrasting to experiences of childhood in the developing countries (Stephens, 1995).

The present study participants’ migration decisions were significantly influenced by a commercialized ideal of childhood as a unique phase of life to be comfortable and free of any want. Because this standard of childhood was seen as unreachable for many mothers in Ukraine, they made a decision to migrate to Sweden with hope to provide “safer and brighter” life for their children. When respondents reflected in their own arguments for migration, memories of ‘lost childhoods’ often played a key role in their vision of the “happy” childhoods they believed migration would allow their offspring to experience. The ‘lost childhoods’ they narrated were structured by unsatisfied desires and wants; the respondents often talked about them being exposed to ‘unsafe’ environments such as streets, unfinished buildings, garages. Nataliia, for instance, remembers her childhood as a ‘horrible time.’ She remained ashamed of the fact that her parents have had alcohol addiction and have been spending biggest part of family budget on alcohol drinks, while Nataliia often did not have proper clothes, shoes and even necessities for schooling (books, pens, notebooks etc.). Meanwhile, Olga, who had grown up as the oldest daughter in a family with five children, recalled that her childhood ended at the age of ten. When her father left the family, Olga was pressed into service as a substitute mother for her younger siblings. Her mother was rough and cold-blooded woman, who believed that Spartan conditions, limited consumption and strict discipline would guarantee her children with obedience, self-control and other valuable character traits. Olga remembered:

*“The mother ruled us [children] with a rod of iron. She was never tender or responsive with us... I have never had a beautiful dress or colorful toy from her.... I had to send my little siblings to school and cook for them. It was not a childhood... It was survival”*

Similarly, Katya, whose parents were village school teachers with low salaries, describes her childhood as time of ‘hardship and inferiority.’ She viewed her limited consumption capabilities as harmful for her self-esteem and quality of life in general:

*“I have never had cute dresses or shoes. No makeup, no accessories... Only necessary minimum. I felt ugly and unattractive due to this... It was really painful for me - to go to school in the same old and pitiful outfit everyday”*

For many migrant mothers, the ‘better’ childhood they hoped to provide for their children in Sweden was in fact predicated upon the ability to buy material goods and consume safe public spaces. Toys and playgrounds indeed featured prominently in immigrant mothers’ narratives of the better life they hoped to provide their children. One mother said of her two young children:

*“Yes, their life is better here because they have colourful and new toys, shoes, their little notebooks, various candies, colourful and safe playgrounds, amusement parks... We did not have anything like that in Soviet Union”*

Mothers bought clothes and toys for their children, they said, largely because they could. Alla, mother of 12 years old daughter, said:

*“Yes, when we go to the store, and if she has her eye on something, I'll buy it. I buy her everything I couldn't have... If it will bring her some joy and happiness, why not?”*

Some mothers achieved great emotional gratification when shopping for their infant. They expressed a level of pride in being able to shop for clothing for their infant for pleasure as opposed to need, likening the action to an expression of love for their child specifically and the family unit more generally:

*“I feel almost proud I guess... My lovely little girl is going to wear her cute little items of clothes...I guess that it is a way of displaying love for your child”*

As evident from the empirical data, the respondents viewed migration as a way to gain the access to developed markets, various commodities and services for their children. Their newly emerged ability to consume big amounts of (often) unnecessary goods was perceived by migrant mothers as a sign of “happy” family characterized by freedom from want. Unrestricted consumption in this case is clearly related to the ideas of ‘good mothering.’ Immigrant mothers like Katya and Alla could easily depict the idealized childhoods they

wished to provide their children, and felt that migration is a way to come closer to the “ideal”. Their explanations included concrete signs of such progress — in contrast to their own experiences as children, their Sweden-raised children were able to eat candies, afford fashionable and stylish clothes and shoes, and buy all the trivia wished to. It is not surprising then, while the contemporary Western ideal of childhood formally separates children from economic exchange relations (Fass, 2007:239), immigrant mothers’ visions of ideal childhoods were overly saturated with consumption fantasies. Thus, the idealized childhoods such mothers strove for illustrate the way a secure childhood in highly capitalist societies has become a commodity and consumption dependent, which strongly influences the migration decision-making process and after-migratory consumption practices of the mothers.

### ***5.1.3 Consuming labour market in migration***

A lot of migrant families experience a significant shift in gendered organization of family after the fact of migration. Even though, developed world residential migration tends to be associated with ideas of betterment, a number of commentators note that migration to ‘the West’ does not unquestionably lead to gender equity and career prosperity. Some scholars argue that developed world ‘migration’ is a patriarchal practice; it is ‘androcentric’ (Bradley, 1989). In this sense, disparate patriarchal structures are produced through the practice of migration (Giddens, 1979, 1984). Examination of the employment experiences of professional women suggest that migration often results for them into downward occupational mobility, de-skilling, feminization, re-domestication and compromised careers (Iredale, 2001; Salaff & Greve, 2006; Yeoh & Willis, 2005). The analysis presented in this section contributes to this scholarship by illustrating the challenges Ukrainian migrant women faced while consuming skilled labour market in Sweden.

All study participants entered Sweden not only with a higher education (at least master’s degrees from their home country) but also with a strong intention to enter Swedish employment market. The respondents, with no exception, were not only highly educated, but also skilled and experienced in various professional fields. There was a range of the previous occupations in the sample, from the vaunted position of engineer to communications manager. The majority of women were not prepared to experience downward social mobility, particularly the fact that their professional and other societal level qualities were devalued. Not being aware of the fact that their high social positions had been strongly connected to their home country, many respondents believed that their professional skills and education

will be in high demand in Sweden. Next, however, the study participants faced various challenges trying to enter Swedish labour market. Majority of the respondents have gone through repeated job application rejections. As a Ukrainian project manager Yana, put it:

*“With my education (in social sciences) it was very difficult to find a job and compete with the locals”*

Similar to Yana, the other interviewed women reported numerous difficulties while trying to restart their professional careers in Sweden. When the study participants were unable to reenter the labour market, they became perceived as remaining at home by their friends and family. Some scholars emphasize that international migration actually reinforces gendered inequalities and contributes to re-domestication of professional women (Yeoh and Willis, 2005). Several migrants explained that the gendered identity of ‘housewife’ was put upon them. Oleksandra, the economist, described her re-domesticated schedule:

*“I was just cooking, cleaning, ironing... Day after day... So boring. So miserable!”*

This quote is very illustrative, because most of the respondents reported feeling of loneliness and uselessness associated with the repetitive chores of housewifery. They were scared of the unwanted status of ‘just housewife’. This fear was most clearly voiced by Nataliia, a communications manager from Kyiv:

*“[After arriving in Sweden] I had such a big project with a house and child and ... I was to decorate the house and garden, so everything looked good. And after I thought: ‘Okay, what next?’ I mean – how do I go on with my life? I became ... Nothing... Being in Ukraine I was persistent in my career, I was highly valued. I am sure that in Ukraine I could move up to the top of the corporate career ladder! But here... Who am I? A housewife?.. This is not the life I was dreaming about...”*

It is evident from the empirical data, many respondents were terrified with their housewife status. They treated the housewife role as insufficient and "miserable" in terms of social, professional and intellectual satisfaction. This undesirable re-domestication happened due to the difficulties of labour market functioning in Sweden. The empirical data shows that some women reoriented their ambitions and energy towards different activities and occupations. Some women have started to perceive their ‘intensive mothering’ as a substitute for full-time job and career development they have been engaged in Ukraine. For example, Olga, mother of three, who arrived to Sweden as a marriage migrant following her Swedish husband, has started to research various practices of babywearing (in slings or wraparounds) and newborn sleep management. Eventually, she turned her Facebook page into a kind of ‘baby blog,’

where she broadcasts her mothering practices and newly gained knowledge to her subscribers. Here is how Olga explains her shift from ‘intensive career’ to ‘intensive mothering’:

*“I am used to be very active person: both socially and in terms of career. Through the whole life I have been civil activist, business woman, volunteer in orphanages and clinics. Super intensive life, you know... But here in Sweden, I have suddenly found myself locked in the house. My friends, my church, my career - everything was left in Ukraine. And I have started to feel extremely bored and... useless... Thanks God, I have got my kids! They are active; always need your energy and attention. My children turned into my buffer...my life and... yes, even a job”*

As the quote illustrates, Olga realized that even though she has had education and working experience from her home country, her access to the profession that for years had been her support and a central element in her identity had disappeared. However, she consciously directed all her energy and enthusiasm into intensive mothering, which consequently became almost an ‘alternative full time job’ for her.

Olga’s, Nataliia’s and other migrant women experiences of post-migration demonstrate the interconnectedness of migrant women’s paid and unpaid work and the ways in which they balance the often competing needs of both. Moreover, their stories show that career disruption or damage, and the intensification of domestic responsibilities, can come about as a result of an inability to enter the labour force at an appropriate level (Liversage, 2009) or from a complete or partial withdrawal from the paid workforce as a consequence of beliefs about being a “good” wife and mother. These career changes and losses were accompanied by often painful shifts in identity, from career women or professional women to housewives, and from financially autonomous “partners” or “producers” to economic dependants and family “consumers”.

The illustrated in this section study results suggest the emerging need for a richer understanding of the geographies of gender relations, one that exceeds easy binaries that equate modernity and gender equality with ‘the West’ and traditional patriarchal authority with ‘the Rest’ (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). The analyses presented above show that immigrant women who, overwhelmingly, came from middle-class background used transnational migration to escape not poverty, but patriarchal gender relations in the home countries. Nevertheless, many women in this research project have experienced unexpected downward social mobility, career damage and other phenomena theorized as de-skilling, feminisation and re-domestication. By spatialising and specifying patriarchy, and exploring how new gender relations grow out of the social disruptions of migration, it seems possible to contribute to the first steps in the development of gender sensitive settlement policies that

better facilitate migrant women's and men's transitions into new labour markets and communities.

## **5.2. Consuming pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood in Sweden**

How do motherhood and consumption shape and constitute each other in contemporary Western society? This particular relationship is at first glance paradoxical. Motherhood as a social institution of intimate relationships based on care is supposedly antithetical to the calculated instrumentality of the consumer marketplace. However, motherhood and consumption as ideologies and social practices are intertwined and in constant tension in a context of commodity capitalism (Rothman, 2000; Clarke, 2004). Women are reborn to a new status of 'mother' and simultaneously as a new kind of consumer of goods — goods in the form of (state) services, consumer products and even welfare state. The section consists of the analysis of the study participants lived experiences of the tension between the experience of pregnancy and childbirth, and the social constructions placed upon mother as a member of the nation-state(s) and as a newly emerged parenting and caring consumer for the market(s) of Ukraine and Sweden. The chapter explores the culturally determined practices, strategies and expectations of migrant women towards pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood in order to gain an understanding of how such practices affect their understanding of motherhood as well as their constructions of Swedishness and Ukrainianness.

### ***5.2.1. Theoretical models for maternal health: Sweden vs. Post-Soviet Ukraine***

Although popularly conceived as a biological and personal experience, pregnancy and childbirth are also cultural and political phenomena that are both embedded in and consequential for gender relations (Davis-Floyd, 1992; Rothman, 2000; Oakley, 1993). Theoretical models for maternal health care practice are important both as tools for guiding daily practice and for explaining the philosophical basis for care. Theoretical models for maternal health care practice are require analytical consideration both as structures for framing daily practice and as indicators of the prevailing discourses of care in the respective society. Nowadays, there are two key schools in maternity care: 1) a physio-social midwifery and 2) a medico-technical approach. The first states pregnancy and childbirth to be approached as normal, social and medical event, not dangerous for a pregnant woman or fetus; and which should not be unnecessarily disturbed. With the medico-technical approach,

on the other hand, pregnancy and birthing are viewed as a risk needing medical interventions and considered normal only in retrospect. Health care systems that are based on normal physio-social birthing and midwifery models are globally rare, and have been described as “lighthouses in an ocean of over-medicalized care” (Davis-Floyd, Barclay and Tritten, 2009:1). According to this model, the midwife is in partnership with the woman in a non-authoritarian, personalized way assuring relevant treatment and safety in childbirth. Feminist praxis requires that women be squarely at the center of any reproductive policy debate. Due to this caring and compassionate maternal health care practices aimed to empower and respect their patients’ needs are widespread in states that emphasize gender mainstreaming and implement feminist welfare politics, e.g. Nordic countries, and Sweden in particular.

On the other hand, Post-Soviet states are known for their highly-medicalized maternal health care practices (Rivkin-Fish, 2005; Shchurko, 2012). Building on Michel Foucault’s notion of biopower, Rivkin-Fish traces former Soviet Republics’ medicalization of childbearing to the Soviet emphasis on medical expertise and institutional authority that transformed natural processes of pregnancy and birth into medically managed pathologies. In Soviet Union pregnancy and childbirth have become gradually perceived as pathological processes that require extensive medical help and surveillance, and usually include a high degree of technological intervention and frequent visits of pregnant woman to clinics and hospitals (Rivkin-Fish, 2005). Rivkin-Fish highlights that doctors in post-soviet states rejected women’s self-determination.

According to feminist scholars, the expansion of political and cultural authority of medical profession was mobilized to redefine childbirth as a dangerous, pathological event, what served as a basis for the legitimization of extensive medical intervention to pregnancy and childbirth (e.g. Ehrenreich and English, 1973; Oakley, 1980; Sullivan and Weitz, 1988). Thus, medical professionals became the full coordinators of reproduction, pregnant women epistemic privilege was undermined and they were assigned passive roles in their own pregnancies and births (e.g., Freeman, 2015). Some feminist researchers argue that medicalization of pregnancy and childbirth practices reflects the ‘ideology of technocracy’ and prioritization of doctors’ comfort over that of pregnant women (see especially Davis-Floyd, 1992; Rothman, 1989). The medical procedures are also argued to be rooted a patriarchal discrimination of women’s bodies, and the tendency to separate the foetus/newborn as a ‘second patient’, which needs the protection from their mother (Rothman, 1989; Hubbard, 1990). Some aspects of the medicalization of pregnancy do not directly

involve medical procedures and technologies: often pregnant women are expected to regulate and monitor their eating, drinking, fetal kicks, weight gain, sleeping position, emotions, physical, sexual activity, and many other aspects of their lives according to standards established by medical professionals (Kukla, 2005).

The contrasting approaches to women's health and childbirth in Post-Soviet Ukraine and Sweden described in this section will serve as the context for the following discussion on migrant women's experiences of pregnancy, childbirth and motherhood and their interconnectedness with consumption and gender ideologies.

### ***5.2.2. Ukrainian pregnancy and childbirth in Swedish settings***

Giving birth in a foreign country is an experience that provides little access to the normal context-specific conditions in terms of consuming welfare help and medical services. The standard of perinatal care in the host country, varied medical practices and models of communication between doctors and patients that have been claimed to play one of the most important roles in the experiences of pregnancy and childbirth among migrant women. Thus, the study of experiences of Ukrainian migrant women provides an opportunity to explore the culturally determined expectations, strategies and consumption practices of migrant women towards pregnancy, childbirth and parenthood in Sweden.

Not all the migrant informants in the present study had experienced routine antenatal care in Ukraine, but all (except one respondent) had participated in the Swedish antenatal care program. Describing how did they perceive their experiences of childbirth in the migrant situation the interviewees were demonstrating their knowledge about maternal healthcare practices from their home country, Ukraine. All respondents were definitely aware and particularly cautious of the highly-medicalized maternal health care practices widespread in their motherland. While explaining their fears, expectations and emotions related to pregnancy, they have constantly been referring to their own and their family members' and friends' experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in Ukraine. The informants have been very emotional and angry explaining their view on how the functioning of system of women's healthcare work in their home country:

*“You know how it is happening at home: horrible women's clinics, long queues, rude gynecologists, expensive analyses, negligence... Exhausting!”(Alisa, mother of two)*

When becoming aware of their pregnancy a majority of the women expressed satisfaction and joy about this fact. Parallel to these positive feelings, the women also reported anxiety and

fear regarding the expected change of their lifestyle, daily routines, diets and healthcare practices due to pregnancy:

*“One of the things that bothered me, when thinking of pregnancy, was the fear of all these strict... rules and instructions for pregnant women: specific diet, no sports, no hanging out with my friends cause I have to go to sleep early, no interesting projects because they are usually stressful... These all scared me...”*

This quote is very illustrative in terms of the medicalized notion of pregnancy adopted in Ukraine. The combination of the imposed healthcare practices, diets, limited physical activities and other behavioral restraints provided the respondent with the impression that pregnancy is a disruption of normal healthy condition and the process that requires the intensive surveillance and control. The respondent demonstrates concern and sorrow caused by the perceived medical imperative to change her lifestyle and habits for the sake of healthy pregnancy and wellbeing of the fetus. In the same time she is not ready to take risk and challenge the system, seemingly due to the strong belief that over-medicalized and limiting approach to pregnancy is the only and unavoidable way to ensure safety and health for both mother and future child.

A majority of the informants shared the similar to described above notion of pregnancy and childbirth before engaging into maternal care system in Sweden. Nevertheless, all women expressed satisfaction with their experiences of care provided in Sweden purely describing it in terms of consumption and service quality:

*“When I got involved into Swedish midwifery system I was shocked! No bureaucracy, no queues, no rudeness and panic. Everything was very quiet, calm and welcoming... I was extremely pleased by the respectful and sensitive treatment”*

Some respondents emphasized their surprise and appreciation of high quality and hospitality of Swedish healthcare services and midwives in particular:

*“I was very lucky with my midwife. [She is] so kind and empathetic woman! She was very helpful and supportive...” (Ira, mother of 1,5 y.o. son)*

The quotes provided above illustrate deep shock of Ukrainian women caused by the calmness, empathy and respect demonstrated by the Swedish midwives. The respondents did not expect the reciprocal and sympathetic practices of communication between medical personnel and patient. Their experience could be described as a reaction to an exceptional experience: ‘exceptional’ in comparison with highly medicalized Ukrainian norm that favors the comfort and power of medical professionals over patient’s emotions and experiences. According to

Rivkin-Fish, the problem of Post-Soviet medical practices lies in a culture of birth that is expert-centered rather than patient-centered (Rivkin-Fish, 2005).

Even though the positive experiences were prevailing among the Ukrainian respondents, some, however, explained that they did not understand why the antenatal care practice in Sweden was so “relaxed and slack”:

*“For a long time I could not understand why there are so few hospital check-ups, blood tests, ultrasound... Most women never once see an obstetrician during their pregnancy. Almost everything is on midwives. It was weird... I thought: maybe they save on money me?...”*

Another woman expressed mistrust to Swedish health care due to the absence of strict diet and physical activity instructions:

*“They told me: ‘Yes, you can eat whatever you want to. You can do whatever you want to. Just do everything you are used to’. I thought: How is this possible? What kind of doctors are they if they allow me to do whatever I want to?”*

The last quotes illustrate deeply internalized idea of pregnancy as disruption of normal healthy life of a woman. The respondents could not believe that a pregnant woman can have agency to choose what to eat and how to exercise on her own. Ukrainian women expected strict healthcare guidelines, frequent hospital check-ups and blood tests. Hyperbolized control, surveillance and deep medicalization were associated by the respondents with the norm and expertise of medical profession. Due to those expectations the informants were unsure about the professionalism and knowledge of Swedish midwives.

Nevertheless, post factum the majority of the respondents reported the change in their approach to pregnancy and maternal health care:

*“Yes, at first, I was angry at them [midwives]... But afterwards, I realised that everything was all right. Here, in Sweden they think that being pregnant is just ok... A woman should not change everything in her life because of a child” (Katia, mother of 2 y.o. daughter)*

Interestingly, many women have started to associate their positive experiences of pregnancy and childbirth in Swedish clinics with the ideas of Swedishness and Swedish culture is general. Sasha, mother of two, explained:

*“Here in Sweden people just respect you... Nurses, midwives, doctors, all people. They know what ethics is. They are civilized and kind people”*

Another woman has generalized the sensitive and empathetic communication practice in hospital to the cultural standard of human relationship in Sweden:

*“Yes, Sweds are like that. They really care about you! About your feelings, your pain, your problems, your comfort... It starts from the moment of childbirth and ends on the graveyard. They just value human beings. It is like a rule here”*

In the same time the respondents have generalized their knowledge about Ukrainian maternal healthcare system into the notion of Ukrainianness and Ukrainian state as well. But in contrast to experiences in Sweden, a common attitude was that in Ukraine surveillance appeared to be going dehumanizing, abusive and disrespectful. They demonstrated compassion towards other women who (have to) go through pregnancy and childbirth in Ukraine and struggle to navigate a system that neglects their needs:

*“I feel really sorry for those women who have to give birth in Ukraine. This country is gonna abuse them and their children. No care, no attention, no respect, no normal conditions... No woman deserves this kind of treatment”*

Thus, the last quotes illustrate how women tend to translate their daily routines, healthcare practices and experiences of interaction with medical systems into the constructions and ideas about nation-state they reside. Both negative and positive experiences contribute to the constructions and understandings of home and host countries’ gendered regimes, politics and norms. In the same time women themselves reproduce normative relations between patient and medical system (which embodies market and/or state) through their expectations, actions and evaluations of medical practices. This example is a profound illustration of Giddens’ ‘duality of structure’, where “structures are constituted through action and... action is constituted through structures” (Giddens, 1976:161).

### ***5.2.3. Mom and the city: space(s) and gender politics***

It is now generally recognised that space is socially constructed and in its turn, once bounded and shaped, influences social relations. As Urry (1981) has recently argued, spatial relations “are themselves social, socially produced and socially reproducing” (p.458). Lefebvre in his turn understands space as an inherently political entity that is tightly linked to state, hegemony and power (1991:11). Ferguson and Gupta (2002:983-184) argue that the spaces are “metaphors through which states are imagined” and the urban social practices are extremely important for understanding how state power is spatialized. In other words, the political power of the state is displayed through the organization of transport, urban space, housing standards, public spaces, clinics, prisons etc. and is embedded in everyday practices performed in the decorations of space and time. Furthermore, much of the feminist scholarship became focused on the ‘urban’ as the spatial context of women’s everyday lives (for example, Tivers, 1985; McDowell, 1983). Particular emphasis was placed on the ways

that urban land-use patterns and transportation systems created mobility barriers for women with young children, reinforcing gendered inequities in access to employment, and, overall, helping to maintain traditional gender roles (Mackenzie and Rose, 1983). Thus, the division of urban space both reflects and influences the gender relations including sexual division of labour, gendered organization of family, and the separation of home life from work that developed in the period of capitalist industrialisation. In the rest of this section, a number of examples of the migrant mothers' lived experiences of consuming urban spaces in Ukraine and Sweden are outlined and analyzed in terms of negotiating gender and imagining the state(s).

For the young mothers in the study the meanings they attach to the city, state and their urban experiences are derived from their identity as mothers. For example, cafes and libraries, household shopping, parks and leisure centres are all featured as public spaces and sites they utilize both for leisure and for obligatory day-to-day mothering practices. Katya, mother of 2,5 years old infant, has emphasized the transition in her experience of city which was caused by her newly emerged role of a mother:

*“Only since I have got a baby I actually realized how important comfortable transport, ramps, elevators are... Before pregnancy I did not even pay attention... But now I am extremely happy to be a mother here, in Sweden. Here I can go with my child wherever and whenever I want. In Ukraine it would be a huge difficulty”*

Comparing urban organization of mothering in Ukraine and Sweden, many informants highlighted that in Ukraine the structures of public spaces are exclusive of mothers with little children due to their low mobility. Public transport, crowded city centers, buildings of hospitals, cafes and libraries are often inaccessible for women with strollers or baby carriers due to the lack of infrastructure (elevators, ramps, properly equipped public transport). Recollecting the experience of being a mother in Ukraine, Sasha angrily stated:

*“Having a little baby in Ukraine means to imprison yourself in your own house for couple of years! No elevators, no ramps... You cannot do anything on your own! That's why a lot of mothers go crazy while sitting at home with their kids!”*

Olga, mother of three, also has emphasized that mothers with children are restricted in their mobility not only infrastructurally, but also socially:

*“Nobody cares about your little children in Ukraine! Nobody wants to see them in parks, cafes, museums, pools and beaches... Because kids are kids! Loud, fidget, messy... And people do not want to compromise their comfort due to kids. They are never welcomed in public places...”*

In fact, women's preferences for family public spaces may be shaped, in part, by the ideas attached to 'good mother' ideology, a position increasingly distinguished by child-centeredness (Valentine, 1996b). In Ukrainian context for being a 'good mother' in eyes of the society for woman it is seemingly better to keep her children at home. For example, Oleksandra argues that women with children are perceived as disturbing and annoying by the rest of the society and thus often become the targets of social pressure:

*"Our [Ukrainian] people get annoyed and angry because of you. They are like: "Where do you shove yourself, woman? You have got a baby now, so know your place: sit at home and take care of the family!"*

In the same time the informants perceive their daily practices in urban spaces as a display of Swedish state being safe, caring and family-friendly. Many women expressed their joy associated with public spaces in Sweden. Descriptions often emphasized social aspects of favored places. As Katya said:

*"Here [in Sweden] I feel welcomed with my children. Many libraries have rooms for kids. When dining out with my friends or family, most cafes and restaurants will provide a high chair for babies. Practically all public toilets have changing tables, so I do not have to think about this when going out with my friend... In this country they think about mothers and children. They respect you and your needs"*

The majority of respondents agreed on the notion that in the context of Ukrainian cities mothers and their infants are marginalised and relegated to domestic spaces. In the rest of the spaces, they are basically structurally unwelcome, what is evident both from the lack of infrastructure as well as from the reported reactions of general public towards mothers and children. On the other hand, the respondents described Sweden as 'welcoming, caring and responsible' country, where the urban life is organized with thoughtfulness that helps make it family-friendly. According to the informants, Sweden has a lot of family-friendly public areas and features: from pram ramps to playgrounds and dedicated park sections for children.

Following the cue of feminist perspectives on mobility (see Uteng and Cresswell, 2008; Hanson, 2010), journeying of mothers with infants brings to fore the gendered dimensions of family and urban life. As Hanson (2010:6) writes, gender and mobility are 'completely bound up with each other, to the point of almost being inseparable'. From this perspective, care is conceived as a practice, and aligned with subjectivity. Throughout the data analyzed in the present section it is possible to observe how experiences of place are highly enrolled in the constitution of diverse gendered parenting practices (Chase and Rogers, 2001). The study findings are illustrative in terms of the role of spatiality and urban policies in the understanding and constructing of the image of host country by the immigrant population. It

is evident that gender-sensitive and inclusive urban policies have a significant importance in structuring the mothering practices and experiences of migrant women, which in its turn contributes to the perception of differential gender relations rooted in the context of historical and cultural circumstances of Ukraine and Sweden.

### **5.3. Consuming education and development in Sweden**

Nowadays popular childrearing literature continue to assume that mothers, living within heterosexual nuclear families, have primary responsibility for childcare, and that this entails raising healthy, disciplined, well-balanced citizens (Marshall, 1991; Richardson, 1993). Richardson (1993) goes further and argues that mothers have now acquired an additional responsibility, namely the intellectual development and education of their children. Mothers' attitudes towards educational childcare provision are shaped within local childcare cultures where mothers, have different cultural and material resources. The purpose of this chapter is to show how mothers' attitudes to their children's education and development and their strategies for providing both parental non-parental educational care are jointly shaped within the context of a local childcare practices. In outlining the central features of the local mothering practices I am not trying to suggest that these practices are uncontested or static. Some people reject or challenge such ideas in the dynamic recreation of the local childcare culture. Similarly, if some of the features on the local childcare culture change, so too will the local practices of mothering.

#### ***5.3.1 Teaching "Classic" first: materiality, development and gender***

The birth of a baby most often signals a significant change in the parents' consumption and the makeup of the home in terms of its social relations and physicality. The nursery, a room given over to the nurturing of infants is seen as such an integral part of 'proper' child rearing in the context of Western culture. The nursery is perceived as an essential space for the correct instruction of infants, and its hygienic, thoughtful decoration was viewed as an instrumental part of this endeavor. The middle-class mother is expected to oversee its decoration and provisioning (Clarke, 2004). As far as some of my interviews took part at the homes of the respondents and their families, I have had a chance to observe how the birth of a child influenced spatial and aesthetic arrangement of the households: many living rooms and bedrooms were transformed into nurseries.

The nurseries and playrooms at homes of my respondents have taken on a meaning more indicative of an idealized, child-centric culture described by contemporary scholars of childhood (James, Jencks and Prout, 1998). Although such areas are not formally designed into most of the informants' homes, almost all of the households I have visited have had a kind of nursery-organized area in the apartment. For example, Sasha and her husband (both originally from Ukraine) do not have the house of their own. They rent a spacious apartment in Uppsala. The walls in the room of their 2 years old daughter are white with pink floral wallpaper. Pillows, blankets, and rugs match to the secondary colors of the wallpaper: hot and pastel shades of pink and violet. Teddy bears, barbie dolls and colorful kitchen playsets are all around. Meanwhile, Nataliia and her Swedish husband Johan own three-bedroom house in suburbs of Stockholm. Since the conception and birth (almost 3 years ago) of their son, Nataliia has transformed one of their bedrooms into a fully-equipped nursery. Wallpapered and carpeted in bright shades of blue, the nursery contains a large cot, a range of toys, a small table and a cheerfully colored blue wardrobe. The décor incorporates stylized pictures of toy-cars and animals. Nataliia played a role of a taste supervisor in the process of decorating the nursery, which is crucial to her understanding of 'good mothering' and appropriate development for her son. When I asked Nataliia why she have chosen the blue and white color schema for the nursery decorations, she explained that according to her taste blue is very suitable for boys, according to her blue is "very strong and adventurous".

The examples of these two families are illustrative for the larger part of the research sample. In the present research, the children's environments of girls and boys were observed to be globally different. The differences were reliable for toys as well. The differences observed are strongly related to traditional gender stereotypes: pink versus blue, or dolls, fictional characters and furniture versus vehicles, tools and sports equipment are readily associated with female versus male genders. Particularly interesting is the contrast between the consistency of the mothers' behavior in choosing sex-typed toys and decorations and the low importance they assign this factor when they discuss their consumption. Perhaps the sextyping of material objects is such a basic given factor in clothing choice that it literally 'goes on its own.' Given other research in this area (e.g., Serbin, O'Leary, 1973; Wallston, Devellis, & Wallston, 1983), parents probably are completely unaware of the effort they put into maintaining a convincing and consistent sex label and thus consistent sex-typed treatment of their children.

Since mothers in the present research project view themselves as the main providers of toys and design choices, they are particularly important participants in this unequal distribution across gender. Interestingly, while answering to the questions about interior design, toys and books she has chosen for her 2 years old son, Nataliia also expressed her concern about the “tendency” of parents in Sweden to “mislead” their children’s sexual orientation and gender behavior by buying them cross gender toys, clothes and books about sexual minorities:

*“I have seen those children's books about LGBT in Swedish stores and libraries. Also some parents give their children those (cross gender) clothing and toys... No-no, I am not homophobic, but... you know... I do not see the need to complicate your child's life. When children are exposed to the materials about LGBT, when boys play with dolls and wear dresses, they... lose the focus. They do not know what to do and whom to love... They can feel lonely and depressed. That is why I think that we should teach our children the Classic first: boys should be with girls, and girls — with boys”.*

In the quote, the mother indicates her and other parents’ actions in encouraging and discouraging various outcomes regarding the child’s gender and sexuality. Her comments underscore that Nataliia hopes her son will not be gay and her consumption choices demonstrate that her child’s gender performance is carefully policed and managed: with the help of ‘gender appropriate’ toys and nursery decorations Nataliia is working actively to ensure her son’s heterosexuality. These comments and consumption practices suggest that the parent does not view masculinity and heterosexuality as something that naturally unfolds but rather as something she feels responsible for crafting, described above caring practices could be identified to be heteronormative. Most mothers in the sample of the present research presume that their children are heterosexual. This unarticulated, usually unthought, assumption steers much of the heterosexualization of young children. In recent years, social scientists have conceptualised heteronormativity — the mundane, everyday ways that heterosexuality is privileged, taken for granted and seen as natural, ordinary, persistent, and without need of explanation. Jackson (2006) argues that heteronormativity “governs” both gender and sexuality and operates through multiple dimensions of social life (e.g., structure, meaning, everyday practice, and individual subjectivity).

The analysis presented in this section suggests that mothers mobilize their consumer agency in order to construct heteronormative and gender-conforming understandings for their children in early childhood. I argue that mothers reproduce heteronormativity in and for their children through their consumption practices that directly influence materiality of children’s environments. It is important to note, however, that mothers are constituted by the very heteronormative context that they then reconstruct for their children. According to

structuration theory, this context shapes mothers' practices and strategies as they parent (Giddens, 1984; Hays, 1998; Singh, 2004). I am not suggesting that parents' actions will shape or predict (or not) a child's sexual identity. Rather, this section examines how heterosexuality may come to be understood as normative in early childhood. While a few researchers have begun to examine the production of heteronormativity in everyday life (e.g., Kitzinger 2005), there is little research on how heterosexuality is reproduced and then normalized on family level, and I argue that this subsection contributes to the scope of literature in this field.

### ***5.3.2 Consuming play, leisure and normative parenthood***

Children's activities of daily life, and the conditions in which they take place, provide the curriculum for children to socialize and learn how to become competent members of the respective society (cf. Harkness et. al, 2000; Stewart et. al, 1999). Parental involvement in and control over family leisure and family vacations can also be seen as important processes through which ideologies of the family are constructed and reconstructed (Schulze et.al, 2000). Furthermore, while many of these ideals of parenthood are connected to social norms about gender equity, the unequal division of the work associated with family time means that family leisure functions to reinforce and recreate gender disparity as well. This section attempts to examine post migration changes in family practices, and in particular leisure and play, of Ukrainian migrants.

The respondents of the present study have reported to perform active and deliberate parenting role. For them, family time is something that needs to be planned, organized and 'constructed' so that it has a particular value or quality. Activities, outings and vacations are typically selected, organized and managed for the sake of the children. However, this is done not simply in terms of whether the children are expected to enjoy the activities, or whether the activities are deemed to be age appropriate, but also what the children will learn from or gain from their participation. When talking about their leisure activities with children before and after migration, Ukrainian mothers have noticed tangible differences between the approaches to family leisure in Swedish and Ukrainian societies. Reflecting on their premigratory observations and experiences, the informants described normative parental leisure behavior in Ukraine as being "disregarding", "unengaged", "stern", and "over prohibitory". As Alexandra, the mother of two put it:

*“In Ukraine children are not allowed to have fun! Children are always expected to be obedient, quiet, diligent and perfectly clean... I have seen numerous cases, when children were punished for staining their clothes or shoes during the play”.*

Another respondent, Nadia, the mother of two girls (11 and 5 years old), described significant changes in her and her husband level of parental involvement into children’s play and activities in Sweden:

*“In Ukraine parents are never involved into the play of their children. In the best possible case, they stand next to the kids and “guard” them, while those are playing. But here adults do everything together with their children: run, jump, ride on a swing, climb up trees, play board games... It is so much fun!”*

Alisa, young mother of 2 years old girl, also emphasized the importance of sports and outdoor activities parents organize for their children in Sweden:

*“You know, in Ukraine children are like dolls: packed in three layers of clothes they stand outdoors for 15 minutes and then go home to the TV and videogames. In Sweden everything is different: children go to the woods, swim in the lakes, run, jump and storm all around. And parents actively participate in all this craziness together with their kids. I am totally fond of this custom! I know that my daughter will grow strong, active and healthy!”*

The respondents also explained that the change in leisure practices has affected their consumption practices:

*“After moving here I have stopped to buy fancy dresses and fair skirts for my girls. I know that they are going to play with sand, jump in dirt, climb trees, whatever... Princess’ dresses do not fit to this kind of rough play. That’s why we have switched their style to slightly more comfortable, sporty and long-lasting. So, darker colors, durable materials, flexible fabrics - this is what we usually shopping for now”*

When I asked the respondents what do they think about the differences in the normative parental leisure behaviors in Ukraine and Sweden, they have explained that the whole infrastructure of family leisure is organized differently in Sweden:

*“Here everything is built for families, not only for kids. Everywhere adults can have fun together with their children: playgrounds, cafes, amusement parks, swimming pools... Me and my husband basically can “fit” everywhere: seats on a swing, tunnels in an aqua park, underground passages - both adults and kids can play there. Infrastructure is very involving and welcoming for parents. In Ukraine these thing are very rare...” (Nadia, 31 y.o., mother of two)*

Some other respondents have highlighted the influence of the prevalent gender relations on the level of paternal involvement into children’s play. Olga, the mother of 3 small children, have explained that in Sweden she can afford to spend time playing with her children because nobody including her husband requires her to be perfect in housekeeping. She put it the next way:

*“Here in Sweden I can be active, involved and interesting mother for my children because I do not care too much about housework. I would better spend the weekend playing with my kids than trying to make my house perfectly clean and structured. Moreover, my husband helps me a lot with cooking, shopping and running of a household in general. In Ukraine women are still expected to do all the household chores themselves, keep the house perfectly clean and cook 5 different dishes a day. Obviously, they do not have any energy or enthusiasm to play with their children...”*

Thus, it is evident that gender ideology as well as prevailing leisure consumption practices in respective society are important factors to consider in the analysis of determinants of paternal involvement in child care (Aldous et al., 1998). Prevailing ideas about motherhood and womanhood have been extensively recognized as fundamental influences on women’s leisure. The idea that women should construct their daily practices according with the ‘ideology of housewifery’ (Henderson et al., 1989) and confirm to the standards ‘naturally’ expected of mothers, is reproduced by a range of various practices.

Even though most of the informants have stated that gender relations in Sweden are much more egalitarian and give the mothers more opportunities to play and spend time with their children, it has to be acknowledged that women in the present study remain the primary providers of family leisure work. Family activities take considerable time and effort to organize, schedule and facilitate. Often food has to be prepared, information has to be accessed about activities and events, extra clothing has to be packed, and children have to be rallied and organized. And the female respondents of the study, whether or not they are employed in market activities, have reported to shoulder the major portion of this work, including the organizational work, the clean-up work and the ‘emotion work’. Family leisure, therefore, compounds the heavy workload experienced by many mothers, adding to their other family and household responsibilities, and to the paid work responsibilities of employed mothers.

Thus, we can summarize that the normative practices of family leisure are different in Ukraine and Sweden. The respondents have reported the significant changes in their family activities after the immigration to Sweden. The respondents found the leisure practices spread in Sweden to be much more “progressive”, “reasonable” and “healthier” and have successfully incorporated those into their lifestyle. The shift was done through the consumption of the available spaces and services: playgrounds, amusement parks, cafes, swimming pools etc. In the same time the incorporation of the new set of leisure practices has impacted the consumption patterns of the families themselves: the style of children as well as parents was changed to more comfortable and sporty. In addition to recognizing the relational framework

that emphasizes a family's agency in their leisure negotiations, it is also important to recognize the broader cultural ideologies that shape the context in which this process occurs. Therefore, the connection of consumption to children's and parental activities is explored, while seeking to understand how this connection is embedded within dominant cultural ideologies of parenthood and gender relations.

### ***5.3.3 Consuming schooling, culture and discipline***

The other important dimension of consumption that plays a major role in the structuring and framing of the family post migratory experiences is the consumption of schooling, extracurricular activities and other education services. Furthermore, the research from the different branches of social science makes it clear that child rearing practices also change in the course of migration (Halpern-Manners, 2011). One important factor in shifting parental behavior is a change in the locus and nature of education. Thus, the study of family practices related to the schooling in after migration period is a fruitful soil for the investigation of the underlying norms, ideas and approaches to education in the both sending and receiving countries of migration. Moreover, mothers, who are the primary informants of the present study, play an important role in transmitting, maintaining or enhancing social, intellectual and cultural capital from one generation to the next. In migration they are faced with the challenge of ensuring the cultural resources they transmit to their children are validated. This section explores the role of gender, ethnicity and consumption in the education process in transnational contexts, focusing on how migrant Ukrainian mothers imagine, consume and experience education services in Ukraine and Sweden, while strategically deploying cultural resources from one national setting in another. In this section I will primarily utilize the theorisation of Allison J. Pugh (2009), who defines the family practices connected to, influenced by or aimed at enrolling in the local education system(s) as "pathway consumption". Pathway consumption describes the ways in which families make decisions about where to live, experiences and extracurricular activities to join, and the places and groups to socialize based upon the caregiver's desire to shape their children's pathways through life. The focus upon pathways signals the importance of context and experiences in attaining and achieving cultural, social and intellectual capital(s).

Despite their privileged pre migratory experiences, many respondents reported that by migrating to Sweden they have got significant (both economic and educational) advantage for their children in terms of pathways consumption. First of all, after moving to Sweden, Ukrainian migrants realized that a lot of practices that they have been considering to be child-

rearing issues in Ukraine, have got deducted from accounts by the simple fact of moving to Sweden, which implied the shift of the education policy, without any kind of parental extra effort put into the process. The respondents reported that the tuition fees for the “elite” high quality schools in Ukraine are too high even for those parents who consider themselves to be middle-class. Notwithstanding, after moving to Sweden Ukrainian mothers highly appreciated the fact that the childcare and school system is universal and almost completely subsidized by the state. Moreover, Swedish schools supply children with everything needed for everyday learning: from paper to books. This example resonates with the statement of Pugh about the complexity and contextuality of the pathways consumption: “what counts as a child-rearing problem and what counts as a solution reflects greater forces that are at work – the particular configuration of public provisioning, the structure of opportunities and resources, corporate marketing and cultural expectation” (Pugh, 2009:177).

The other theme that emerged though the course of the interviews is the comparison of the Ukrainian and Swedish schools in terms of the discipline, academic requirements and the general psychological environment of the educational institutions. The respondents have reported that their children consider Swedish schools and preschools to be less strict and exacting compare to Ukrainian ones:

*“My children do not feel exhausted or burned out here. In Ukraine it was happening all the time. Because of that children did not want to go to school and we have had a lot of conflicts, tears and negotiation because of that” (Nadia, the mother of two).*

Interestingly, the mothers have reported that the high academic requirements and large amounts of homework widespread in Ukrainian schools were turned into family practices, because children could not manage to do the homework themselves without the help of parents. Thus, the consumption of schooling in Ukraine was burdensome not only in terms of the financial investment, but also regarding the time expenses of the parents. Furthermore, some of the informants have reported about the existence of the “economy of dignity” (Pugh, 2009) in Ukrainian school: in order to look “decent” and being socially accepted their children have had to wear new, fashionable clothes, preferable from famous brands. As Katya from Kyiv puts it:

*“In Ukraine school is like a fashion show: if you don’t want you children to struggle and feel miserable, you have to make sure that they have the most trendy and expensive clothes, gadgets, accessories etc. This is very burdensome for parents”.*

The other respondent, mother of two school age boys, pointed out that the described above requirements for children's looks do not only empty the wallets of the families, but also add considerable amount of working hours to the domestic (mostly feminized) work:

*“Back in Ukraine everything was much more complicated for me as a mom... Yes... I always have had to carry about their (sons’) clothes and shoes. Washing pants, ironing shirts, lining jackets... I have had to do it almost every day. Very exhausting... But here boys can just wear whatever they are comfortable in. Nobody is going to judge or exclude them for being too comfy or unfashionable”*

In the same time, even being generally satisfied with the education system in Sweden, yet many mothers decided to mobilize their cultural resources and make great efforts to keep their children rooted and able to navigate diverse contexts by teaching them Russian, Ukrainian and English languages. Being asked about their motivation to put an effort into language training of their children, the respondents acknowledged the important role of knowing two and more languages for the development of cognitive abilities of children and also reported the need to translate the feeling of “belonging” to Ukraine to their children. As Ira said:

*“Well I spoke to him (her son) Ukrainian since he was born. I think it is a big advantage to speak two languages. And also it’s part of my son’s cultural heritage. It would be a crime to deprive him from his roots”.*

The other mothers also developed various strategies to raise their children being bilingual or multilingual. As Olga, the mother of three put it:

*“I have developed the system: my children learn Swedish in the kindergarten, I talk to them in Ukrainian, their father talks to them in English, and they watch cartoons and movies in Russian. And it is going really very well! I am proud that my kids are going to be fluent in four different languages!”*

Apart from talking to their children in Ukrainian/Russian, many mothers have actively deployed accessible products and services for teaching their children the languages: Ukrainian books, alphabet toys, cartoons and movies have been reported to be the key instruments for language learning. Thus, the mothers have demonstrated everyday consumption practices of the child entertaining products to be strategically aimed at teaching their children the languages and mobilizing their international cultural capital. These practices echo a general consensus in my sample that multilinguality as well as intercultural knowledge and skills are desirable and highly valued in the society.

Interestingly, that even in the families, where both parents were originally from Ukraine, it was the mothers who took responsibility for enabling their children to access the language and cultural resources of their country of origin. Many respondents have explained this choice as

rational arguing that the mothers are the primary caregivers and tend to spend much more time with their children than fathers do. As Yana, the mother of little girl, from Dnipro put it:

*“Language learning requires a lot of time, energy and patience from parents. My husband is not ready to put so much effort into this. Moreover, he is generally not very interested and gets easily bored with all these language learning games... That’s why it is mostly me who teaches our girl Ukrainian and Russian”*

This view of language teaching as being too “boring” and “energy consuming” for fathers was very widespread in the sample, what generally reflects the gendered dynamics of family learning studied elsewhere (Lois, 2010; Stambach and David, 2005). Moreover, according to the data from the Facebook group “Ukrainian mothers in Sweden”, wherefrom the majority of the respondents were recruited from, and the comments of the respondents prove the same, the mothers tend to be responsible for the preparation of the national dishes and costumes as well as learning of Ukrainian poems and songs with their children for the international fairs and holidays widespread in Swedish schools. In Facebook group mothers often seek simple recipes of Ukrainian dishes and borrow from each other national costumes for their children for the school performances. Women’s role in the family often makes them responsible for the production and circulation of symbolic capital as a form of status display. This is particularly notable through reproductive work in the household, where mothers perform the practice of transforming class into status and group membership through consumption and cultural participation (Collins, 1998: 219).

In summary, the data presented in this section reflects the notion that the consumption of education is not limited only to the children’s learning. It also affects the other aspects of family life most of which are deeply gendered: shopping, esthetic work (selection of clothes and accessories), emotional work (calming down children who feel exhausted after long hours in school), domestic chores, and preparation of the homework. The mothers in the sample clearly did not differentiate their family lifestyle and consumption practices from the education of their children and therefore have demonstrated high level of sensitivity to the shift of education systems from Ukrainian to Swedish, which appeared to be much less burdensome and time consuming for mothers. These emergent practices are highly gendered and rearticulate the relationship between nationally bounded and transnational cultural resources, highlighting the role of the accessible educational goods and services in the feasibility of the language learning by children, who are deprived from the native language speaking environment. In this way, mothers’ agency can bridge this gap between the differential value attributed to cultural resources in different national settings.

## 6. Concluding remarks

The overall aim of this master's thesis was explorative, namely to grasp the place of consumption practices in the gendered experiences of skilled Ukrainian female migrants in Sweden. The empirical data gathered and analyzed throughout the course of this research project constitute a rather small sample which is restricted by the limitations previously discussed. Thus, the main research findings regard the pool of people I interviewed. Therefore, the attempt to draw general and systemic critical conclusions about the interplay of consumption, migration and gender from this limited sample seems to be illegitimate and arrogant for me. However, I tentatively suggest that the consumption-related patterns and practices discovered in the course of this exploratory research may also contribute to grasping the gendered experiences of other female immigrants from former Soviet Socialist republics to Western Europe, inasmuch as some structural characteristics are matching (i.e. higher education, middle-classness, cis-gender, heterosexuality).

One of the most striking findings encountered in the research is the evidence that among middle-class Ukrainian women migration decision-making process is highly saturated with consumption-bound practices and ideas. Talking about their both childhood and parenting experiences, the interviews arguably perceived consumption to be inseparably connected and mutually shaped by the gendered practices of care and manifestations of love. Migration to Sweden was described by the respondents as a step to unlimited consumption opportunities for themselves and their children, access to developed markets and unfamiliar consumer identities highly contrasting with those prevalent in their country of origin, Ukraine. In the same time, developed world migration as a patriarchal practice has led to downward social mobility of some respondents, who consequently lost their identity of professional and "producer" and had to take over the position of a housewife and primary "consumer" of the family.

Secondly, analysis shows that nowadays female migrants tend to construct their ideas about the nation-state they reside, its politics and regime based on their gendered experiences of consuming welfare support, medical services, public spaces, schools etc. Considering the structure and organization of the routine consumption practices in Sweden the study participants were making conclusions about the power relations between state and citizens, doctors and patients, locals and newcomers, men and women. For example, the majority of the respondents agreed on the notion that in the context of Ukrainian cities mothers and their

infants are marginalised and relegated to domestic spaces. On the other hand, the interviewees described Sweden as “welcoming, caring and responsible” country, where the urban life is organized with thoughtfulness that helps make it family-friendly, which in its turn contributes to the perception of differential gender relations rooted in the context of historical and cultural circumstances of Ukraine and Sweden. These research outcomes are illustrative in terms of the role of consumption in the understanding and constructing of the image of host country by the immigrant population. It is evident that gender-sensitive and inclusive consumption politics have a significant importance in structuring the gendered practices of care and experiences of migrant women.

Finally, the inquiry demonstrated that consumption is constitutive for production and reproduction of gender, family practices, contextualized ideas on appropriate childcare and education. Ukrainian migrant mothers have mobilized their consumer agency in various ways in order to construct gender-conforming and heteronormative environment for their children. Moreover, consumption was utilized as a way to transmit cultural and social capital transgenerationally. Importantly, the practices of offspring intellectual development, management of family leisure and transmitting of cultural capital were found to be highly gendered and arguably related to gender stereotyping of mothers as skilled consumers of culture and education.

Overall, this thesis adds to the literature stating that consumers’ trajectories, reflexive practices, and dynamics within international contexts shape their ability to negotiate normative ideas about family and gender throughout the course of migration (c.f. Coskuner-Balli and Thompson 2011; Thompson and Üstüner, 2015). Elaborating on this, I argue that structuring the consumption practices as the focal point of the sociological research is a rich, beneficial, and theoretically insightful analytical approach for examining gendered dynamics of power on the international scale, which will consequently lead to more nuanced, systematic and sophisticated understanding of the dialectical unity of gender, consumption and migration in contemporary western society. The future research in the field could examine consumption practices of migrant males (fathers) or queer migrants in the context of their movement between heterogeneous gendered geographies of power (Mahler & Pessar, 2001). Investigating partnerships (c.f. Pugh, 2009), or focusing exclusively on males (Miller, 2010), may offer a valuable contribution to consumer research on the dynamics of gender, migration and consumption.

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