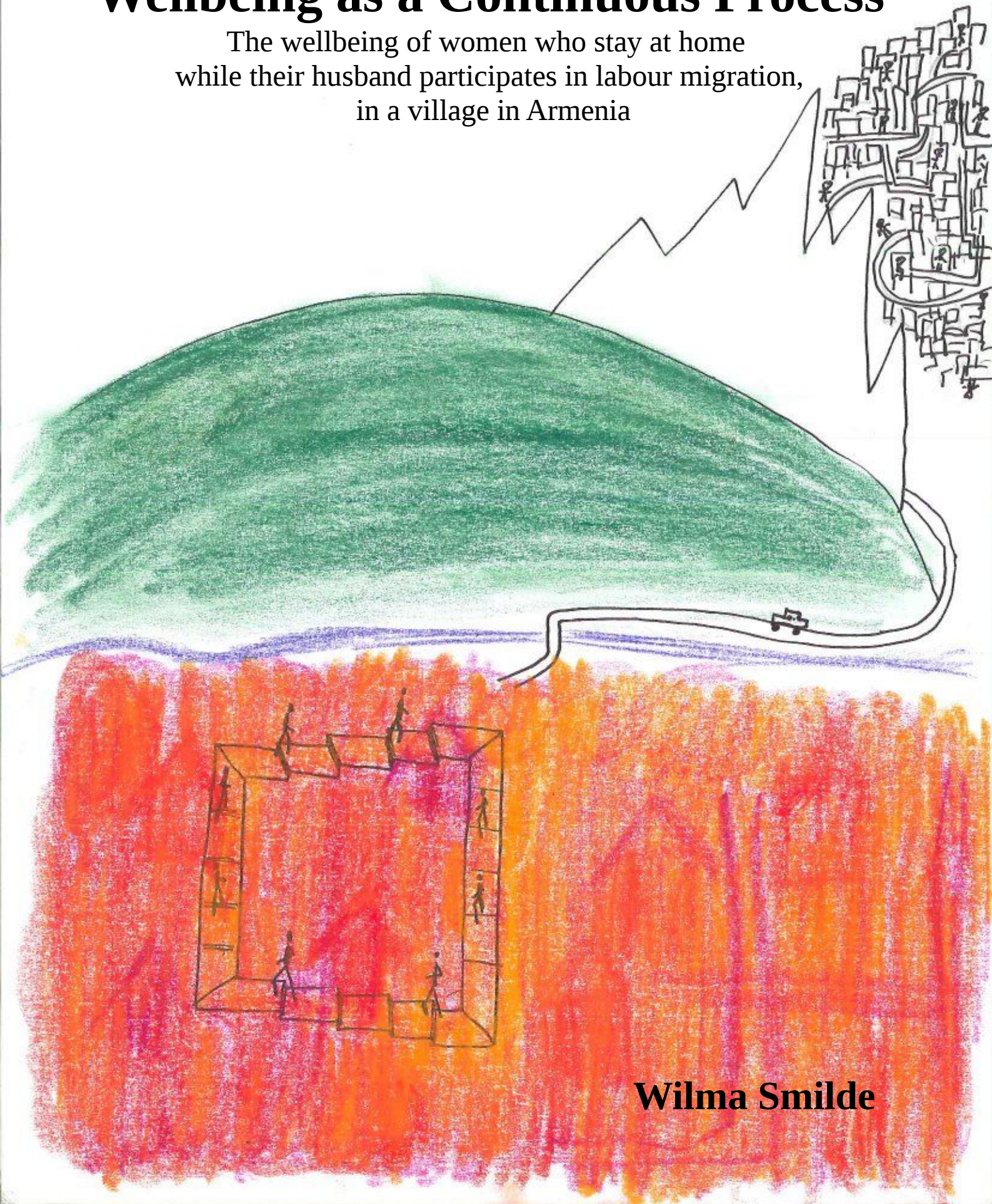


Wellbeing as a Continuous Process

The wellbeing of women who stay at home while their husband participates in labour migration, in a village in Armenia



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Foreword and acknowledgements

During my studies in international development, I often wondered why we are doing development without talking about wellbeing. What difference does it make to improve the material conditions when the individuals wellbeing does not improve? An intrinsic connection was made between development and wellbeing. This thesis is a question to this connection, and describes the way women in Gandzak, a village in Armenia, shape their wellbeing

Hereby I present my thesis on wellbeing. Wellbeing is a continuous process, not always consciously, but also subconsciously. Every person is always trying to improve her life. It is a way of life. More, it is a way to cope with our world, to focus on the things that make our life beautiful. It is a way of surviving as well, as without a reason to continue, we would have lost our motivation to live. One could compare wellbeing, and maybe development in general, with a 'Penrose stair' graphically depicted by M.C. Escher in his lithograph 'Ascending and descending' (1960) that formed an inspiration for the front of this thesis. In this thesis it can sometimes be as if people are continuously shaping, and in this way improving their wellbeing, but the result is not clearly improving. Maybe wellbeing is continuously climbing, but continuing in this way is closer to living, not necessarily adding to the living conditions, yet at the same time always improving.

There are many ways in which people search for wellbeing. In this thesis I chose to focus on a special group of women, who face a big challenge as their husbands are gone most of the year, and in some cases do not return at all. I wanted to understand how people can live like that, and I found that there is not a clear explanation. However, wellbeing sheds a light on it, and shows how these women are continually finding ways to deal with their challenges.

My thesis is an end product of my studies in International Development, a study that has challenged my thinking in different ways. On the one hand, I have found theoretical concepts that helped me to structure my thinking about problems in this world, and made it possible to see the bigger picture of interlinkages. However, the ideals with which I started to study were challenged by my studies. Challenged for the good, as in the end, my ideals are stronger. At the same time I have become critical. Maybe too critical sometimes to appreciate the things that do happen in development. Therefore I am thankful that I have other sources for hope that help me to see the even bigger picture of this world. Thanks to Taizé, a place where I found rest and a place where I have come to realise that the way the world works is not necessarily how I should fit in. Thanks to God, who sees the bigger picture and who is working on a more sustainable world than we could ever imagine. I am very happy to cooperate with him, and to know that I am not doing this alone. This really gives me the motivation to find a place where after my studies I can continue working on my ideals.

Relations have been essential for me during the process of my thesis, and therefore I would like to show my gratitude to all the people who have helped me in my research. There are many, and all of them are beautiful. The most important people are the ones who have helped me in the village of my research. Շնորհակալություն to Zamo, Emma, Mariam, Arax, Gevorg and Marush Tatik, for sharing your home with me. Thanks for your patience in understanding me. Shot apres especially to Mariam and Arax for teaching me Armenian and telling me about the village. Thanks Emma, for not sharing all your insights and in this way giving me the space to find my own. Thanks Zamo, for joking about Fiat Doblos and relativising life. Marus Tatik, I always remember how you did not want me to leave, but now you have left us all. Thanks also to Tatik Susan, for being another grandmother to me, and always giving me my own special thyme tea, with mooraba. Thanks Anna, Tigranuhi, Abraham, and especially Tiruhi for sharing your home with me, working in the garden, and in this ways sharing the story of your life. Thanks to all the other women in the village who have shared their time with me, being patient and sharing their sweets, and also their hard bites. Thanks Varsik jan, my translator, for translating all my good and stupid questions, accompanying me on all my visits and sharing all your background information and your family with me. Without

all of you, my research would have been a flop. And also thanks for translating the summary into Armenian.

At a certain point, I was afraid that I would not manage to start with my research at all. Thanks to Asha for telling me I was a hero. Thanks Momo for joking and sharing meals and thanks Naira, for your chats and being helpful, and thanks to the both of you for making Yerevan a nice place to be. Thanks to professor Syuzi Hovhannisyan, the only person in the Armenian universities who happened to be helpful, and through whom I found a translator.

Thanks to my supervisor Elisabet Rasch, for recalling that I was talking about women, not theories, and for all your helpful comments. Thanks to all the dear people who took the time to read my thesis, and are still interested in it, and in me. Thanks Alberto Arce, for being interested in my stories, and reading my thesis.

Thanks to all my friends who have shared in my student time, and have always been present, also whenever one of us was abroad, thanks to my lieve vriendinnen Harriet, Ina and Sabrina. Thanks to Marjanneke, philosophising about wellbeing helped to develop my thinking. And thanks to Petra, I am happy with you. Thanks to my housemates Wytze, Lena, Johannes, Jan Joris and Esther. Thanks for eating the breads I made to distract me from my thesis, thanks for all these lunches and dinners, listening to my complains about my thesis, and joking about life.

A special thanks for Mattias, for everything. Travelling together, sharing adventures, checking out new countries. Thanks for all your support in many different ways!

And thanks to God. For helping me understand life, and helping me during my research, especially after hearing so many sad stories, and being a stranger in many ways. Thanks for the prayer of Taizé which came to me and stayed with me while listening to and reflecting on all these stories and on the hardships of life, in the midst of which people are still shaping their wellbeing.

*“Le cœur brisé le Seigneur est proche, il sauve les esprits abattus”
(Psalm 34, Taizé song)*



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Summary

This thesis describes how women, who stay at home in a village in Armenia while their husbands participate in seasonal labour migration in Russia, shape their wellbeing. A fieldwork of 2.5 months in early spring 2013 in a mountainous village called Gandzak, in the north east of Armenia forms the basis of this thesis.

In the introduction the problem is described: the research on the people who stay at home while family members participate in migration, often focusses on the financial aspects, although the absence of a husband entails many more effects. The use of wellbeing is proposed as a solution for this as it is holistic. Participatory observation, immersions and interviews are the main methods used in the fieldwork.

The thinking of wellbeing originates in the discussion in development sociology, where a new view on poverty came up as a critique on the dominant macro-economic theories. The concept of wellbeing is explained with the help of a conceptual model. The underlying notions for the model are that wellbeing is personal, a combination of processes in time and space, pluralistic and multidimensional, and holistic. Agency as defined by Long (2001) is a central theme, and so are interactions and relations. Wellbeing is seen as a process, where choices and personal evaluation are alternating. There are four aspects of the model, that both influence the personal evaluation and choices regarding wellbeing, and give direction for wellbeing. The four different aspects are dignity & values, interaction & relation, hope & imagination, and fulfilling life. All different aspects interrelate and are together important for the wellbeing of an individual. Often the different aspects overlap, and there is a contingent conflict (Nussbaum, 1993). However, if managed well this adds to the wellbeing.

A historical account is given, where the factors leading to the current situation of labour migration are highlighted. Seasonal labour migration to Russia in order to earn money for the family who stays at home is a concept known in Armenian under the name *khopan*. Already under the Soviet Union *khopan* started, but during the years after the end of the Soviet Union, the amount of men leaving for Russia increased enormously. After a decline, the economic crisis starting in 2007 created a new increase in the number of people going for *khopan*. In Armenia, due to economic and cultural factors, only men leave for Russia, which makes that many women are alone responsible for the household most of the year.

The empirical chapters describe a normal day for an Armenian woman whose husband goes for *khopan*, where children, work, eating and drinking, social contacts and being alone are central elements. With the help of nine case studies and various pictures, the life of Armenian women in the village is further illustrated. In these chapters different themes and challenges are elucidated to get an insight in how these women shape their wellbeing in daily life. The challenges are the care for sick and elderly people, to go to Russia or not as a family, and being alone. There are also some aspects in life that make life beautiful or fun, such as sharing meals, baking cakes and drinking coffee. The main themes described are the value of children, a paid job and faith. In these chapters it becomes clear that different women give different significance to the various aspect of the wellbeing model, thereby illustrating that the multiplicity of the model, together with individual choices create different outcomes, showing that the model is personal.

It is concluded that in the daily life women are often busy, and in the different themes it becomes clear that she faces many different issues. The different aspects: material, hope & imagination, dignity & values, and fulfilling life all influence the choices of women, and the aspects overlap. However, sometimes there is a conflict of the different aspect, but linking to the concept of contingent conflict, it is argued that these tensions are also making life interesting, and that women have the ability to choose between them. Another point argued for is that the fact that there is always something to do, makes it easier to continue if life is harder. In making life less hard, the

relaxing and fun times during the role play an important role. Another aspect highlighted is the creativity of women to change circumstances, or to find ways to continue. Sometimes they are forced by the different issues that face them to make choices which they would not have made if the circumstances would have been more positive.

Although the women are very able to continue their life without their husbands around, it does not mean that the fact that he is gone is easy, and therefore it is argued that to let the husband go for *khopan* is a tragic choice (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999) and that most women would have a higher wellbeing if their husbands would be around. However, the continuity of the process of wellbeing, both in daily life and in the longer run make it easier to continue life.

Summary in Armenian **Ամփոփում**

Այս թեզում նկարագրվում է, թե ինչպես են կանայք, ովքեր հիմականում չեն աշխատում, հոգում իրենց բարեկուցությունը, երբ իրենց անուսինները մեկում են Ռուսաստան արատագնա սեզոնային աշխատանքի որոնելու: Թեզի հիմքում ընկած են 2.5 ամիս տևած դաշտային աշխատանքների արդյունքում հավաքված փաստերը, որոնք տեղի են ունեցել Հայաստանի հյուսիս-արևելքում գտնող գյուղերի մեկում` Գանձաքարում: Ներածության մեջ նկարագրված է արտագնա աշխատանքն ու դրանից ծագող խնդիրները. այն մարդկանց կյանքն ովքեր մնում են տանը, երբ ընտանիքի մյուս անդամները մեկնում են արտագնա աշխատանքի: Հաճախ անդրադարձ է կատարվում ֆինանսական խնդիրներին, սակայն այնուամենայնիվ ամուսնու բացակայությունն ավելի մեծ ազդեցություն է ունենում ընտանեկան կյանքի վրա:

Դաշտային աշխատանքներն իրականացվել են գյուղական առօրյային անմիջական մասնակցությամբ, հետազոտությունների և հարցազրույցի մեթոդներով:

Բարեկեցության գաղափարախոսությունը ծագել է զարգացող սոցիոլոգիայում, որտեղ աղքատության վերաբերյալ նոր տեսությունն է հայտ եկավ որպես քննադատություն գերակշռող մակրո-տնտեսական տեսության մեջ: Բարեկեցությունն հասկացությունը բացատրվում է հայեցակարգային մոդելի օգնությամբ: Մոդելի հիմքում ընկած տեսակետները ցույց են տալիս, որ բարեկեցությանն խիստ անհատական է` գործնթացների համակցությունն ժամանակի և տարածության մեջ, բազմակարծիք, բազմակողմ և ամբողջական: Տեսությունն ինչպես սահմանում է Լոնգը (2001) կենտրոնական թեմա է` փոխկապակցվածություն և փոխհարաբերություններ:

Բարեկեցությունը բացատրվում է որպես մի երևույթ, որտեղ ընտրությունն ու անձնական գնահատումը հաջողությամբ հաջորդում են միմյանց: Մոդելն ունի չորս տեսակետներ, որոնք ինչպես ազդեցություն են ունենում անձնական գնահատումների այնպես էլ ընտրությունների վրա և բարեկեցության համար տալիս են ուղղություններ: Դրանք են` հպարտությունը և արժեքները, փոխհարաբերությունները և հարաբերությունները, հույսն ու երևակայությունը, և կյանքի լրացումները: Բոլոր այս տարբեր տեսակետները փոխկապակցված են և բոլորն էլ կարևոր են անհատի բարեկեցության համար: Հաճախ այս տարբեր ասպեկտները համընկնում են և միշտ առկա են պատահական կոնֆլիկտներ (Martha Craven Nussbaum, 1993): Այնուամենայնիվ, եթե այս ամենը լավ է կառավարվում այն միայն դրականորեն է ազդում մարդու բարեկեցության վրա: Կատարվել է նաև պատմական անդրադարձ, որտեղ ներկա իրավիճակին հանգեցնող փաստերն առանձնահատուկ կերպով կարևորվում են: Հայրենիքում մնացող ընտանիքի ծախսերը հոգայու համար` գումար վաստակելու նպատակով, Ռուսաստան մեկնելու երևույթը հայտի է “խոսքան” անունով: “Խոսքան”-ի երևույթը դեռևս սկիզբ առել սովետական տարիներին, սակայն սովետական կարգերի փլուզումից հետո խոսքան գնացող տղամարդկանց թիվն աննախադեպ կերպով աճեց: Հայաստանում տնտեսական և մշակութային պատճառներով խոսքան գնում են միայն

տղամարդիկ, որի պատճառով էլ կանայք, մնալով տանը միայնակ, իրենք են հոգում առօրյա հոգսերը:

Գլուխներից մեկում նկարագրվում է հայ կնոջ, ում ամուսինը գնում է արտագնա աշխատանքի, առօրյան, որտեղ երեխանները, աշխատանքը, սնվելն ու խմելը, սոցիալական հարաբերություններն ու հանգստանալը հիմնական բաղադրիչներն են:

Թվով ինը պատահական հետազոտությունների և ամենատարբեր նկարների միջոցով հայ կնոջ առօրյան ավելի է լուսաբանվում: Այս գլխում տարբեր թեմաներ և մարտահրավերներ են լուսաբանվում, որոնք հնարավորություն են տալիս ավելի լավ հասկանալ թե ինչպես է հայ կինը հոգում իր բարեկեցությունը առօրյա կյանքում:

Հիմնական մարտահրավերներն են ընտանիքի հիվանդ և ծեր անդամների խնամքը և միայնակ լինելը: Կյանքում կան նաև այնպիսի բնագավառներ, որոնք այն դարձնում են գեղեցիկ և ուրախ, ինչպիսիք են հյուրասիրությունը, խմորեղեն պատրաստելը և սուրճ խմելը: Հայ կնոջ կայնքում առանձնահատուկ կարևորություն ունեն երեխաները, վճարվող աշխատանքն ու հավատքը: Այս գլուխներից պարզ է դառնում, որ յուրաքանչյուր կնոջ համար բարեկեցությունն ու նրա բաղադրիչ մասերն ունեն տարբեր կարևորություն:

Այսպիսով հասկանալով, որ բարեկեցության մոդելն ինքնին բարդ մոդել է այն ունենում է արդյունքներ, եվս մեկ անգամ ապացուցելով, որ այն խիստ անհատական է:

Այս ամենից պարզ է դառնում, որ կանանց առօրյան բավականին հագեցած է, և այդ ընթացքում նա հանդիպում է որոշ խնդիրների: Բոլոր արժեքները, սկսած նյութականից մինչև հպարտություն և բարեկեցիկ կյանքի համար անհրաժեշտ բոլոր պայաններն իրենց ազդեցությունն են թողնում կնոջ կողմից կատարված ցանակացած ընտրության վրա, որը եվս մեկ անգամ ապացուցում է այս արժեքների փոխկապակցվածությունը: Չնայած այս ամենին, երբեմն անհամատեղելի են այս արժեքները, որն էլ հաճախ որոշ մարդկանց կարծիքով հետաքրքիր է դարձնում կյանքը, և կանայք ստիպված են լինում ընտրություն կատարել նրանց միջև: Ոմանք էլ հավոզված են, որ հենց այն հանգամանքը, որ անընդհատ ինչ-որ նպատակ կա, ուժ է տալիս, որպեսզի մարդիկ կարողանան հաղթահարել կյանքի դժվարությունները:

Կյանքի դժվարությունները հաղթահարելու ճանապարհին հանգստի և ժամանցի դերն անփոխարինելի է: Հայ կանանց բնորոշ մեկ այլ գիծ էլ համարվում է նրանց ստեղծագործ միտքը, որը նրանց հնարավորություն է տալիս փոխել հանգամանքների ընթացքը, կամ էլ պարզապես շարունակել ապրել: Այնուամենայնիվ, երբեմն ոչ այնքան դրական հանգամանքները նրանց ընտրության հնարավորություն չեն տալիս, և նրանք ստիպված են լինում որոշումներ կայացնել իրեն ցանկություններին հակառակ: Այս ամենին գուգահեռ նրանք կարողանում են հոգալ իրենց առօրյա հոգսերն ամուսնու բացակայության ընթացքում, ինչն ամենևին չի նշանակում, որ հայ կնոջ համար ամուսնու բացակայությունը հեշտ է, ավելին համոզմունք կա, որ ամուսնու խոպան գնալու փաստի հետ համաձայնվելը դժվարին որոշում է (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999):

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| <i>Foreword and acknowledgements</i> | 3 |
| <i>Summary</i> | 5 |
| <i>Summary in Armenian Ամփոփում</i> | 7 |
| <i>Glossary</i> | 11 |
| Chapter 1 Introduction..... | 1 |
| Wellbeing..... | 1 |
| Labour migration..... | 2 |
| Research purpose..... | 4 |
| Research questions..... | 5 |
| Operationalisation..... | 5 |
| Methodology..... | 7 |
| My experience in the field..... | 13 |
| Reading guide..... | 15 |
| Chapter 2 Theoretical framework..... | 17 |
| Wellbeing in perspective..... | 17 |
| Wellbeing and good life..... | 18 |
| Conceptual model of wellbeing..... | 19 |
| Chapter 3 “No choice but to go” | 26 |
| Life history Hasmik Rezian..... | 26 |
| The 1990s of Karineh Gohigian..... | 28 |
| Difficult periods & migration..... | 28 |
| Country and village..... | 29 |
| End of Soviet Union..... | 31 |
| Livelihoods today in Gandzakar..... | 34 |
| Khopan today..... | 37 |
| Conclusion..... | 38 |
| Intermezzo I..... | 40 |
| Case 1 Roza Arpagian: Sickness as part of life..... | 40 |
| Case 2 There are two cows, one is not here, the other has to do all the work..... | 42 |
| Case 3 My neighbours part 1: khopan & escape..... | 45 |
| Chapter 4. Morning..... | 47 |
| Children are my number one..... | 47 |
| The husband who is not there..... | 50 |
| Challenge of elderly/old age & sickness..... | 52 |
| Conclusion | 53 |
| Intermezzo II..... | 55 |
| Case 4 Her son..... | 55 |
| Case 5 We will move..... | 57 |
| Case 6: My neighbours part II “We will receive a guest” | 58 |
| Chapter 5. Afternoon..... | 61 |
| Working..... | 62 |
| Challenge: To stay or to move..... | 66 |
| Fulfilling life, what is valued more..... | 69 |
| Conclusion..... | 70 |
| Intermezzo III..... | 72 |
| Case 7 Like father, like son-in-law..... | 72 |
| Case 8 “A human being can get used to everything” | 73 |
| Case 9 Neighbours III “A family member has come home” | 75 |

Chapter 6. Evening.....78
 Communication.....79
 Challenge: alone.....80
 Hope & imagination.....84
 Conclusion.....86
Conclusion and discussion.....87
Bibliography.....92
List of Appendices.....97

Glossary

Aghdan (upper): The name of the village Gandzakark before the year 1978, coming from an Azeri word, meaning wheat village.

AMD / Dram: Armenian Dram, the Armenian currency. During the time of my research, 100 AMD was around €0,19 (1 000 AMD = 1,87), or €1 is 540 AMD.

Gandzakark: The village of my research, in the mountainous north west of Armenia, in Tavush marz. See appendix 1 for a map.

Ijevan: The major city close to the village of my research, a city with around 20 000 inhabitants. See appendix 1 for a map.

Khadsj: Cross-stone, a place outside the village, often with a standing stone, where people come to pray, light candles and sacrifice roosters.

Khopan: Male seasonal migration to Russia, in order to earn money for the family who stays in Armenia (See chapter 1, operationalisation, for a thorough explanation of this Armenian word.)

Tatik (Տատիկ): Armenian word for grandmother, also a respectful way to call an older woman.

Tavush marz: Marz is an administrative region in Armenia, and Tavush is the name of the administrative region in the north west of Armenia, where my research took place.

Illustration Index

| | |
|---|----|
| Figure 1: Model of wellbeing..... | 21 |
| Figure 2: Map of Armenia (Vidiani, 2012)..... | 30 |
| Figure 3: Model wellbeing (repeated)..... | 89 |

Illustration Index

| | |
|--|----|
| Picture 1: The importance of kids..... | 41 |
| Picture 2: Cinema..... | 43 |
| Picture 3: Shopkeeper..... | 56 |
| Picture 4: Don't cry..... | 56 |
| Picture 5: Doll cake..... | 59 |
| Picture 6: 'Budur, my favourite place in the village'..... | 59 |
| Picture 7: Outside..... | 74 |
| Picture 8: Aspect of faith: Church..... | 76 |
| Picture 9: Aspect of faith: Khadsj..... | 76 |
| Picture 10: Aspect of faith: candles..... | 76 |

(this is an anonymised version, therefore names and pictures are removed or changed)

Chapter 1 Introduction

One day, I walk into a shop of a shopkeeper called Inga who knows everyone and everything in the village. After chatting for a while, I ask her about the effects on the village of labour migration of men who work seasonally in Russia. She tells “It is good! Men go for work, earn money and they can buy things here. People with family members in Russia live better than others.” I ask about the family of these men, who stays in the village and she tells “the effect on the family is bad, they miss them a lot. The only good things is the money they get from it. Some women become very aggressive, they are pleased with nothing, because of the distance and the missing”. [Int 10/5/2013(2)].

This answer is typical for how many people perceive labour migration in the village of my research. It is seen as good, and many people want to go to Russia, but when talking about the effects other than financial, labour migration is seen as something bad, where women miss their husbands and children miss their father. In the wider thinking about the effect of labour migration on the place of origin of the labour migrants, a similar way of thinking can be seen as most attention is given to the financial aspects. Although these effects are important, in order to get a full picture of the effect of labour migration, it is important to consider the other aspects affecting the life of the people who are staying at home, while a family-member participates in labour migration.

In this thesis, I will use a wellbeing perspective, as a way to better understand the effects of labour migration, regarding both the material aspects as the other aspects such as the social aspects, feelings of loneliness, and aspects as hope and imagination. By looking at challenges people face, I will show how they shape their wellbeing in their life. In the rest of the introduction, the problem will be described, showing that an economical way of thinking leaves a lot of aspects unnoticed. Labour migration will be presented as a setting, in which these problem often arise, and where the people who stay behind are often forgotten. My research, where I made use of a wellbeing approach adds to the understanding of wellbeing, as my of using the concept differs from many other authors, and at the same time adds to the understanding of the effect of labour migration

Wellbeing

Already for millennia, philosophers and other scientists have thought on the concept of wellbeing, as already Aristotle and Aurelius have tried to understand what it means to live well (Diener, 1984; Nussbaum, 2011). Within the 20th century, the concept gained attention again, first within the social psychology (see for example Diener 1984) and later also in wider social and economic thinking, and specifically within development sociology as a response on the macro-economic thinking about poverty (Gough & McGregor, 2007; White, 2008). In some cases, the term subjective well-being is used (in Diener, 1984; and also in Gough & McGregor, 2007), which is occasionally linked to happiness (Diener, 1984). However, the thinking on happiness has taken a very different direction, and my research is not linked to happiness, as I see happiness more as a snapshot of life, while wellbeing adds a more profound understanding of how an individual shapes her life.

Within the thinking of development, the concept of wellbeing is not always used in the same way, and it is sometimes unclear what it means (White, 2008), and in this way it is unclear

what it adds to development thinking. In this thesis, I will try to find out what the concept can add to development, and what its limits are. Based on my theoretical framework (Chapter 2) I will define the concept as follows. Wellbeing is an active word, more like a process of shaping life, where an actor reflects and evaluates on different aspects in life, and makes choices regarding these. Agency (Long 2001:112) is central to wellbeing, where agency is “the capacity of particular individuals to monitor, evaluate and come to grips cognitively with their social worlds”. Interaction with individuals are an important element of this. Different aspects influence the process and thinking and valuing life, and are affected by the choices made. The different aspects are hope & imagination, values & dignity, material conditions and fulfilling life. In this thesis, I have looked at the wellbeing of women whose husband participates in seasonal transnational labour migration, and who live in a village in Armenia.

Within the literature on migration, wellbeing is not a new concept. There are some articles that relate wellbeing to those who stay at home in migration literature, such as (Gartaula, 2011; Jacka, 2012; Jackson, 2012; Roy & Nangia, 2005; Siegmann, 2010; Toyota *et al.*, 2007; Wright, 2012), but some are not clear about what they mean with the word wellbeing at all like Nguyen *et al.* (2006), some speak of subjective wellbeing like Gartaula (2011), Roy & Nangia (2005) speak of social well-being, which they define as a safe community with provision for those without means, Siegmann (2010) makes clear that wellbeing is influenced by different kinds of 'capital'.

The way I use wellbeing in my thesis most closely connects to how Gartaula uses it, but in his thesis he makes a link with a sustainable livelihoods approach, which I do not. However, the argument Wright makes for using a wellbeing approach in research on those who stay behind in migration connects to my research “Existing literature has tended to focus on the impact of financial remittances but the broader psychosocial impacts affecting human wellbeing outcomes have received less attention” (Wright 2012: summary).

Labour migration

Within the research on labour migration, often the focus is on the ones who leave, assessing their conditions in the place of work, researching on how they live when they come back home, and understanding the legal and illegal ways in which people travel to and work in a country where they are not residents. Yet, within research on migration, the ones who do not migrate to work are often forgotten, even though “‘leaving behind’ often entails emotional and psychological struggles as well as complex re-arrangements of the material aspects of daily life of a magnitude as significant as ‘moving to’ and ‘settling in’ places of destination. An individual's ‘migration’ presents a major rupture of the inner workings and everyday life of an entire house-hold” (Toyota *et al.*, 2007), see also Menjivar & Agadjanian, 2007:1249 and Sevoyan, 2011). Toyota *et al.* therefore argue for a new focus on the 'left-behind' within the research on migration, and that is why, in this thesis I want to focus on the ones who are affected by migration, but are not migrating themselves. However, as mentioned before, also in this research, a focus is on the macro-economic effects of the country or region, or the financial effects on the household, and the personal evaluation of the effect of the labour migration of a member of the household on other aspects than the financial means, is often overlooked.

Wellbeing as theoretical concept is appealing, as it aims a holistic understanding of the situation people live in, and aims at a personal evaluation of the circumstances. Labour migration is one of the outcomes of the fact that we live in an unequally divided, transnational world. Possessions, wealth, peace, resources, opportunities and favourable political conditions

vary tremendously across the world. At the same time, the different places within our world become more and more interconnected, making these differences between places all the more visible, and giving reasons and sometimes means to travel to other places. Especially in places where the economic conditions are not favourable, people go to different areas within the country, or to other countries where more jobs with higher wages are available, in this way making it possible to earn much more than would have been possible in the place of origin.

The main regions of labour migrations are Latin-America to the USA, Indonesia to richer English-speaking or Muslim countries, from Africa to Europe, from the poorer parts to the richer parts of South-East Asia and to Japan, from Nepal to India and other countries, from Eastern-Europe to Western-Europe and from the former Soviet states to Russia (DESA, 2009). In all these places, different dynamics influence the way people migrate, the gender of the migrating, the experience of the migrating, and the experience of the ones who do not migrate but are affected by the migration of others. As stated before, very few studies have looked at the country of origin of the migrating, and also seasonal migration is studied less (Sevoyan, 2011). In this research, I focus on the former Soviet Union, which has gained less attention in migration research (Sevoyan, 2011), and I choose to focus specifically on a village in Armenia, a country where many men go to Russia for seasonal labour migration, and I will explain shortly the influence of labour migration of Armenia,

In the 1990, shortly after the end of the Soviet Union, a big wave of Armenians left the country, both to settle and for labour migration. Between 1991 and 2001, 0.9 millions of Armenians migrated, mainly to Russia (EBRD 2002 in Bezemer & Lerman, 2004). In the first post-communistic years, migration strongly increased, but after 2000, the number dropped a bit and remained stable afterwards (ILO, 2009; Jijyan & Gevorgyan, 2010). In the 1990s, many people left to settle in Russia, but this number dropped afterwards, and between 2002 and 2007, labour migrants were 94% of the total migrants (ILO, 2009). However, the recent economic crisis together with the political situation in Armenia have led to a new increase of seasonal migrants.

Due to the historical situation, the jobs available in Russia, and the culture in Armenia, about all labour migrants are men. It also happens a lot that whole families move to Russia, yet, I do not consider this as labour migration, understanding the word to mean circular migration, and not the migration of a whole family for a long period of time. Labour migration causes a strong influence on the country, as many able-bodied men leave the country and use their energy somewhere else, furthermore it has a demographical influence, as these men are getting fewer children. Yet, there is also a positive point to migration, as the remittances send back home account for a large percentage of the GDP, accounting for 24% in 2003 and going down to 17% in 2007 (Jijyan & Gevorgyan, 2010).

In Armenia there is a big difference between the effect of labour migration on people living in a city or in the village. After the Soviet Union, especially in the rural areas many jobs disappeared, while many people came to the countryside as subsistence farming was a way to survive in the hard years after the fall of the Soviet Union. However, people were still in need of money, an often migration was the only way to be able to earn enough money (Jijyan & Gevorgyan, 2010; Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). Currently these jobs have not returned, so still the strategy of labour migration is more prevalent in the countryside. In my research I focus on a village in a rural, mountainous area, and this decision was confirmed when I heard from people that women in villages had mostly a harder life, as their tasks were both the household and the landwork, and furthermore that women whose husband participates in labour migration

had a more difficult life in villages, as there were very few things to do for them [FN10/5/2013].

In the existing literature on labour migration in Armenia (Danzer & Dietz, 2009; Grigorian & Melkonyan, 2011; ILO, 2009; Ivakhnyuk, 2006; Jijyan & Gevorgyan, 2010), most are focussing on the financial impacts of migration, the challenges for the country (demographically and the lack of able bodied men), and the challenges the migrants face. In this, the further aspects receive far less attention, however, there has been some research on the effect of migration on the experience of women such as Agadjanian *et al.*, (2007), Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007), Sevoyan (2011)¹ while Grigorian & Melkonyan (2011) only describe the financial aspects. During my research I will use these resources as background information and to see whether their findings and mine correspond, and with my research I will enrich the understanding of the effects of labour migration on the women who stay at home, by using a more holistic analysis.

Research purpose

Wellbeing is a concept that is hard to define, and used in various ways. In this research, I make use of a new definition of wellbeing, which adds to the understanding of the concept and use of wellbeing. Wellbeing, as defined in chapter 2, adds a **holistic** view to the understanding of what women experience while their husbands are living most of the year in Russia. Agency (Long 2001) is a central concept to wellbeing. A focus lies on the **personal evaluation** of the circumstances, instead of on the material or quantitative side. The centrality of agency in my definition of wellbeing leads to see these women as active agents, and furthermore, the individual perceptions will be central. I want to find out what this way of looking at women who stay at home while their husband participates in labour migration adds to the understanding of the situation the women live in, and in this way to the **understanding of the effect of migration** in the 'sending' country

Although there is some research on the **people who stay at home** while familymembers participate in labour migration, there is still very little understanding about where they go through. It might be clear that in most cases there is an increase in financial means, yet there is much more to it, as an important family-member leaves. In this research I want to add to the understanding of how **women** live when their husband leaves, and especially focus on how women work towards their own wellbeing.

Within research on wellbeing, different methods are used, but for small-scale, qualitative research there could be used a lot more understanding on which methods to use. Therefore, as a methodological purpose, I want to see how the use of different methods in various ways adds to the understanding of how women work towards their own wellbeing, and how this adds to the use of the term wellbeing in research.

1 Of these three, Victor Agadjanian is the main author, as he has co-authored or cooperated in the other two. The last article is specifically oriented on the sexual side of the women whose husband leaves for migration, on which Agadjanian and Sevoyan have published another article (2010). Their forthcoming article might also be of interest, as it focusses on human wellbeing, socio-economic development and social connectedness (2013). More general literature on Armenian women who stay at home and related to other aspects of wellbeing, I have not found other literature. There might however be more resources available in Russian or Armenian, but as I am not able to read these, I could use nor find these.

Research questions

Based on the research purpose just mentioned, I developed the following research question: How do women in a village in rural Armenia - called Gandzakar -, whose husband participates in seasonal transnational labour migration shape, and reflect on, their wellbeing? Within this question, the agency as both the shaping of and the reflection of the world around them, which are part of agency, influence the wellbeing of the women.

In the theoretical framework I will elaborately explain with how I understand wellbeing, and based on this, I have developed the following sub-questions to answer my research question.

- 1) What are the material conditions of the women whose husband participates in labour migration, and who live in Gandzakar?
- 2) What do women in a village in rural Armenia, whose husband participates in labour migration see as fulfilling lives and how do put this into practice?
- 3) What is the role of hope and imagination for women in a village in rural Armenia, whose husband participates in labour migration?
- 4) How do women in a village in rural Armenia, whose husband participates in labour migration give themselves value and dignity?

Operationalisation

Left-behind?

As in Armenia, only men participate in labour migration, women, children and elderly are the ones who stay in the village. The focus group in my research will be women whose husband is participating in labour-migration. In literature, different terms are used for these women, like 'those who stay behind' (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007), 'the other side of migration' (Gartaula, 2011) 'left-behind' (Jacka, 2012; McEvoy, 2008; Sevoyan, 2011) or without hyphen: 'left behind' (Antman, 2010; Nguyen et al., 2006; Toyota et al., 2007) between apostrophes (Wright, 2012) or 'women who stay at home' (Kaspar, 2008). Yet, it is important to realise the implications of these words, and how they create an image of these women. Some terms imply the passive state of the women, and it seems that the women do not have an active role in the decision-making that leads to the labour-migration of their husband. Although this can be true in some cases (Gartaula, 2011) mostly husband and wife decide together (Kaspar, 2008; Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). Jacka (2012) chooses to use the word left-behind, but with caution, as she is aware of the connotation the term has of being abandoned. In her research in Ningxia (China), she uses the word *liushou*, which means “(those who) stay and hold the fort”, which is a better description. Archambault (2010) questions the term 'left behind' and the connotation it has. She describes how women in a rural area in Tanzania choose to stay in their homes, and actively decide not to join their husbands to secure their houses and land, and to stay in their social environment. They are happy that their husband had chosen to work in the city so that the family has a higher income. Her main comment on the term 'left behind' is that it “masks the extent to which staying in Ugweno (at home) may be part of an empowering strategy that offers women farmers a degree of economic autonomy and social well-being that they would not necessarily find elsewhere” (Archambault, 2010: 920).

For the reasons mentioned above, I decided not to use the term 'left behind', and instead

use a combination of terms, like 'those who stay' or those who decided to stay at home. At home in this sense does not mean to stay in the house, or to work only in the house, but it means to stay in the house that is their families house, to create a home for the children at that place, and to be able to welcome the husband back in that place when he returns.

Wellbeing in Armenian

To better understand how women in Gandzakar work towards their wellbeing, I asked women how they conceptualise the term. I first will explain the meaning of the word in Armenian, and after that explain how they practically saw it in their lives.

In Armenian, the word wellbeing is mostly translated as բարեկեցութիւն (barekets'ut'yun) or as բարօրութիւն (barorot'yun). The first word, barekets'ut'yun literary means good life, where **bare** means good, **kets** means so much as 'living' and the ending of **ut'yun** is used as the suffix to change the adjective into a noun (like the English '-ity'). Barorot'yun (with a similar meaning) is also used. Both these words also mean welfare, which is more linked to a financial state of being.

The word բարեկեցիկ կյան (bareketsik kyan) could also be used, which means good or prosperous life. (in the first word bare means good, and kyan means life). Like the Armenian word, Fischer (2012) also uses the wording of 'good life', and he closely related this to wellbeing. He states that a good life is defined personally, and can differ per person.

During my research, my translator mostly used the first word when asking about wellbeing, and often she explained that we were looking at the word in a qualitative instead of a financial sense. In that way most women understood what we meant, but in some instances the woman did not grasp we were looking for, and my translator would help her understanding the word by asking the question in a more figurative way, for example 'what are the spices in your soup' or in a different way such as 'what are things that make your life meaningful/give meaning to your life'.

During the different personal and group interviews, I asked this question many times and often people would first point at their material conditions, an aspect seen as the first part of wellbeing by Gough & McGregor (2007). This illustrates the difficulty of understanding the term in Armenian as in many other languages. However, when diving deeper into wellbeing, also in Armenian culture there is an understanding of the difference between material wellbeing and non-material wellbeing, seen as spiritual wellbeing or similar words. When reached this understanding, women would often mention as most important to them: people in their environment, such as children, their husband, their other close relatives, neighbours and friends; health; and furthermore God, hope and personal development.

The word *khopan*

The Armenian word խոպան (khopan)¹ originally means 'fallow' or 'leave fallow', but nowadays is mostly understood as 'going to Russia to work', or 'labour-migration'. However, the origin of the last meaning is related to the first, as during the Soviet Union, many Armenian

1 Armenia has its own language, Armenian, and this language has a unique alphabet. I will use the common transcription to make it more accessible for non-Armenian readers. The word is pronounced as 'gopaan', where the g is a Dutch g, in other languages often transcribed as gh or kh.

men left for seasonal labour to the 'virgin lands' of Kazakhstan, to participate in the development of these lands (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). Yet, many people do not connect these meanings anymore as is clear by a definition of ILO (2009) which explains *khopan* as an “Armenian folk term for leaving to work abroad”(p.9), and also my translator did not know this meaning thinking it had come from a Russian term.

Currently, everyone in Armenia knows and uses the term, as everyone happens to know people who are going to Russia to work. The term is understood as **male seasonal migration to Russia, in order to earn money for the family who stays in Armenia**. It is understood as **male**, as there are practically no women who participate. It is **seasonal**, as that is what most men do, leaving in spring between February and May, coming back in autumn, between October and December, although it can occur that a man does not come back for some years. Most jobs are seasonal as the winters in Russia are mostly too cold to work and most men work in construction or agriculture, even though according to Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) “These days, however, the return of Armenian men from Russia is not as predictable” (p. 1250). Also, if a man does not come back, he still 'went for *khopan*' as that was his initial intention. It is to **Russia**, as the overwhelming majority of labour-migrants goes to Russia (96% according to Returnee Survey 2008, in ILO 2009:7), and it is to earn money for the **family who stays in Armenia**, as it is also possible that the whole family moves to Russia, but this is not seen as *khopan*. This last part '**to earn money for the family**' is the reason why people go.

Methodology

In order to answer my questions, I made use of the following methods. My research was a qualitative, in-depth research, in which I used as main methods: semi-structured interviews, participatory observation, participatory groups, immersions and life histories. In this part, I will describe the methods and tell how I used them, and evaluate the aspects influencing my research.

Place & time

My research took place from March 10 – 23 and from April 11 – May 15, in a mountainous village called Gandzakar in Tavush province in Armenia. I wanted to conduct the research late winter and early spring, in order to get a understanding of that period. Chambers (1997) states that research often takes place in favourable seasons, missing the harder periods of the year, and thereby overlooking the time when food-security and climatic conditions are the least favourable and when people suffer of these. I wanted to avoid this by doing my research in this period, as in winter, the mountainous regions of Armenia can be quite cold, and in the early spring the harvest of last year is nearly finished while new vegetables are not edible yet.

As I wanted to get an in-depth understanding, I decided to go to one village, and as the village was large, I focussed on one part of the village¹. Another reason was that the topics of my research could be quite sensible, and therefore it would be better to stay in one place, in order for my informants to get a good impression of me so that they would trust me, and in order for me to get a deeper understanding of the community and culture, and build up some relationships with different people. This proved to work, although my means to make deep relationships were limited because of the still short period of my stay and the difference in

1 In appendix 1 a map of the village can be found, together with demarcation of the research area and an explanation for this.

language, and therefore only with a few people I had a strong relationship. However, these people often shared their knowledge and contacts to help me in my research.

Immersion

My idea was to get a deep understanding of the lives of some women who lived without their husbands, by staying with them for a few days or a week, and sharing their daily lives and help them with whatever they were doing. Chambers (2007) calls this process immersion, where immersions are “open-ended, experiential, face-to-face, interactive, and human” (p. 29). Immersions are mostly used for development practitioners, to get a deeper understanding of the reality of the people they are working with, however, in my research I wanted to find out whether it would also be a useful tool for research. Normally immersions are two to four days, but in order to use them as research-tool I practically changed immersion into a longer period, with a little less intensity, yet in other aspects similar.

However, in practice it proved impossible to find a woman whose husband was in Russia who could host me. Although Armenian people in general are very hospitable, staying with a family for more than one night, and being a foreigner myself, together with some practical limitations and some values made it impossible for me to stay with a woman in a situation like that. In winter, many families only use part of the house as it is too costly to heat (as also Dudwick, 2003 describes) and there was no spare room, or even a spare bed. Some women were willing to host me, but an in-living son or a mother-in-law was not, and therefore I could not stay. In the end, I found a family, where the husband did not go for *khopan*, but who was willing to host me, and I stayed with them for most of my research, sleeping on the couch in the living room. Another family, where the men had passed away, was also willing to host me in the times the other family was not available. In this way, I was able to participate in the household, helping with chores and getting to know two Armenian families from the inside.

Immersion as a tool of research.

From origin, immersions are meant as a means for development practitioner to get a better understanding of the reality of the people they are working with. It should be a period of about two nights and three days, where a development practitioner lives in the household of a family, sharing in all the tasks of one of the family-members. Immersion is based on the social anthropological techniques of participant observation, and related to 'total participatory research' and 'listening to stories' (Chambers 2007). Chambers (2007), based on Kumaran (2003) proposes this as an alternative way of doing research concerning poverty and vulnerability.

As a research tool, immersions differ from participant observation, in the sense that mostly with participant observation the time is limited to a few hours, and during the participant observation, the researcher stays mostly in the role of researcher. Staying with a host-family is more common during anthropological research, but often the research at the host family is limited.

In my research, my stay at my host-family was something in-between immersion and a normal host-family, as the family did not belong to my purpose-group in the village as the husband had not gone for *khopan*, I was not able to join them all the time during the day as they had jobs, and furthermore I also used other methods during my stay, and because of that I was often gone during the day, and I was sometimes working and writing in the evening. However, I wanted to learn a lot about the culture to understand the context of my research and in that way

I was paying attention to what happened around me all the time, and I tried to participate in most of the household activities. Furthermore, I did not have my own room, and therefore I could not just leave the family-life for a while, except during my regular walks.

Challenges of immersion as a tool of research.

“It is as if my 'reflection and save button' are always on” [FN2/5/2013].

The challenges of immersion as a tool in research are many. One is the intensity of it, which on the one hand provides a lot of data, impressions and understanding, but on the other hand can sometimes be overwhelming. Therefore, it is important to take enough time for reflection.

Another challenge is that it can feel as if it is very important to be 'liked', and let that influence the behaviour, both of the participant and the host, but probably even stronger with the participant as she is adapting to another culture and tries to fit it (Smith Bowen, 1964). However, it is important to realise that the host is also experiencing 'immersion' with an unknown person of another culture, however as they stay in a familiar environment, this experience is less intense. Furthermore, a challenge is the living together, as intensive living together with person whom one did not know at all before can cause annoyances from both sides. In this way, the positive, but also the negative sides of a person are gotten to know from an insider's point of view.

As the goal of the research was partly to understand the culture, and partly to understand the way people thought, the whole research was intensive, as these kinds of research stay in one's head all the time (as opposed to for example a research on farming practices). The combination with immersion made the research even more intense. Therefore I was happy my research did not take much longer. The influence on my research was mixed, as on the one hand, I was able to understand a lot of the culture, but it also caused that I was not always able to reflect on my research with a clear mind.

Positive sides of immersions as a tool of research.

The positive sides of immersions as a tool of research are also various. First, the intensive stay and living together (together with some reflection on it) make it possible to understand underlying values of actions, as one feels the life of a person, instead of only hearing about it. This is also my main critique on immersion as it is normally used, as 2-4 days with a family does give a lot of impressions and certainly adds to the understanding of the life people live, but on the other hand, especially if the culture differs, does not always provide total insight in the reasoning of people, connecting the situations with the values and feelings the participant has, instead of with the ones of the host.

Together with interviews and listening to stories, it provides a very useful tool for research, as during an interview, the researcher can hear what people think about their lives themselves. The limitation of interviews is that the respondent will answer what at that moment seems relevant to her, or what she wants to share with the researcher. Yet, with immersion it is possible to live life like the people do it, and to discover deeper aspects and values, and get a more total overview of the different aspects.

Interviews

During my research, I made use of interviews, which contained the following topics: general information, living situation, social contacts, daily structure, food, faith, husband, dreams &

imagination, wellbeing, and some other small questions¹. The goal of an interview was to get an insight in the life of the woman, and to get an idea of the way a woman would work on her wellbeing in different ways. It also functioned as a tool to get to know the woman and to build up some kind of relationship with her, and many women I visited for a second time.

Before the second visit, I would prepare some questions relating to the stories the woman had told the time before. In that way I was able to fill some gaps in my knowledge, and to get deeper understanding of the topics we had talked about before. Also, in many cases when I visited a woman twice, the impression I got the first time was different from the one I got the second time, and thereby it sometimes rectified and sometimes balanced the view I got of the woman and her family. General topics I used during my second visit were: friends, good day, village, move to Russia, children, work or not, image in community, decision-making, hard period, education, relationship with husband, will he be back one day. Furthermore I included questions about the personal situation, for example if someone had been sick or if the house was being rebuild, I would inquire about this.

I also did some secondary interviews, with women who were not my target group, to understand their life, as they also were able to give me a lot of information about life in the village, and their specific stories helped to place the other stories in perspective, and to better understand the what difference it made whether a husband would be gone to Russia, in comparison with other women without husband (unmarried, divorced or widowed) and with women whose husband was at home. Furthermore, some sensitive topics were only possible to talk about with women whose husband did not go to Russia, as they could speak about the topics in general, and did not feel embarrassed or uncomfortable when discussing these issues.

Other interviews I did were historical interviews, with the aim to understand the historical account leading to the current situation of labour migration in the village, and to get a better understanding of life in the village in general.

Genealogies

Another method I used in a way similar to interviews were genealogies. I used genealogies in order to get an insight in the family-situation of the people and to see how much of the family had moved out of the village. Often there would be a lot of stories connected to the genealogy, and I asked people about this. Genealogies proved to be a useful tool to get an easy conversation with people, especially when I would be drawing the genealogy while they were watching. In that way, the person felt involved, and could correct me if I had done something wrong (I used mostly symbols), breaking the language barrier. Sometimes I would also ask people some of the questions based on the interview questions, and I also used a genealogy together with a life history, to get a deeper insight in the life of the woman and the history of the village.

It was interesting for me to discover the use of genealogies, as I have wanted to use them before in South-Sudan (Smilde, 2011), but there it was not possible to use them as people had a lot of traumas in their family, where they did not want to be remembered of. During the current research, this was never a problem.

1 In appendix 2 the interview and the extra topics can be found.

Participatory observation

In this part I will describe how I used participatory observation in my research. Although I was constantly in the community, paying attention to all what happened, there were some special moments that I want to highlight as participatory activities. As said before, immersion is also related to participatory observation, but I see immersions as different and only with the two families who hosted me.

“Breath the same air”

After an interview with Haykuhi Ermoian, she commented “I thought that you had come to breath the same air” [Int 3]. I realised that she meant that she thought that I did not only come to do interviews, but also to share life. This made me realise that I had let myself being forced into formal ways of doing research, because of some disappointments in the beginning, and because many women would better understand when I would just come for an interview, but not only to talk with them. After this I decided to look more for other opportunities, and at some places I would just come and chat or have coffee or lunch. Furthermore I started to help some families with the work on the land, helped a woman in her shop, went to church, played games with young people and climbed the mountain with a group of young villagers (see picture 1). And in this and in some other cases I could just be with people without the goal of asking as many questions as possible. This gave me the opportunities to breath the same air, and to understand the value of working on the land, drinking coffee with neighbours, going to a shop, or just meet people on the street.

Coffee talks

My original idea was to have informal kitchen talks with people. Abarca (2006) describes how she uses kitchen talks to connect to women, to learn from them and to share knowledge about cooking, but also about life. However, it proved harder than I thought to have informal talks with people I did not know and could not communicate with, as we did not share a common language. Therefore I would start with a interview or a genealogy, but often this would end in a 'coffee talk', as in Armenian culture, part of hospitality is to end a visit with coffee (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006). Yet, these coffee talks gave an opportunity to continue the visit after the more formal interview, building up some relationship, and touching upon some other topics. Often when I would visit a woman for the second time, the main activity was drinking coffee and eating sweets, and I would ask questions but depending on the situation I would choose to take notes at that moment or later.

Children

During participatory observation, children played a large role, as often they had time to accompany me on walks around the village, to share in the street life, to explain all the things I observed and they were willing to show me many places. Although in my thesis I do not mention children very often as a source of information, many background information and most of my knowledge on the language comes from them, and they played a large role in my life in the village. Without them it would have been much harder to do most of my participatory research.

Participatory groups

In many cases, I did interviews with one woman, but in order to also get a different input I also organised groups. Groups give different information, and for some sensible topics it might be easier to speak about it in a group, as it is possible to talk about the general. Also, it can function to check some information heard in other conversations, or to get understanding in underlying causes.

Although it proved much harder to organise groups than I initially thought, I was able to organise some groups. The reasons that it was hard to organise groups was that people would not come to an event organised by someone they did not know very well, and although I had built up some trust and most women had a positive image of me, this did not mean that our relationship was strong enough for them to come to an event I organised. Therefore, I tried other ways to organise group, first to let someone else, who had this relationship, host the group, where I would just be another guest, yet leading the conversation, and secondly, to go to places where women would already be together, such as working places. In total I led two groups of the first kind, and three of the second kind, of which two at the same place with more or less the same women. Furthermore, sometimes there would be a 'natural group' in which I happened to be, where I would sometimes take the opportunity to ask some questions. In the groups, I used different methods, which I will describe below. In all cases, I tried to use the principles of participatory research appraisal (PRA) based on (Chambers, 1986, 1997, 2007) and the magazines *Participatory Learning and Action* of the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED, 2013). During my participatory groups I have used the following methods.

- 1) In the groups, and sometimes with individuals, I used cards in order to get an understanding how people gave importance to various aspects influencing their wellbeing. Sometimes I would use the words the women used just before and wrote these on cards and asked them to order these cards, and in other cases I had prepared cards and I asked people to order these. Afterwards, I asked them to explain their order.
- 2) To be able to better understand the decision-making within a family, I used a decision-making matrix to see for which aspect which family member was the main decision-maker.
- 3) During one group, I used the methods of livelihoods, problems and uncertainty analysis to get a better understanding of the important daily factors that influenced the life of the people in the village. This method proved to work very well as it connects to the daily life of the women, and although some of the problems regarded by some were caused by other women, it did not end in a conflict.
- 4) Based on the aspects mentioned in the livelihoods, problems and uncertainty analysis, I did a Wholistic Worldview Analysis (Jayakaran, 2007). In this analysis, it is possible to understand how much control a specific group within a community has over certain aspects.

Case study

During my research, I carried out case studies with specific families. The main case study I carried out was a case study with the neighbours, which is presented in this thesis in the form of three stories (case 3, 6, and 9). In my case study, I used the different methods mentioned above, and as I lived close to the people, I often would meet them on an informal way.

How I reached people

My host-family and the relatives of my translator were my initial contacts, and furthermore I asked every person whom I met whether she could introduce me to someone else – snowball effect. After a while, I discovered that there were two or three groups of people I knew, of whom the members hardly knew one another. Furthermore there were some individuals whom I met at their jobs.

Stories on challenges

When speaking with women during my research, I realised that often, in order to answer a question, the women tell stories about the challenges they have had, or in different cases, their whole life or situation was an example of the challenge they faced. Asking questions about this gave me a lot of insight in the way they thought and made choices, about their freedoms and limits and on how they felt about their life and made it something what they wanted, or changed their expectations to reach a situation where they felt fine. In some situations, women described situations they had gone through, but in other cases, they were in the middle of challenge at that moment. (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011) uses and argues for the use of (personal) narratives in understanding the lives of people, to see and understand how different aspects of policy or culture affect the life of a person. In my thesis, I will narrate some of the stories of the women I met, sometimes using my own words, sometimes using their words, and show how they face(d) challenges and how, in these challenges, they shape(d) their wellbeing.

Pictures

The initial idea was to use pictures on a participatory way, asking women to take pictures, and later discuss them in groups. However, it proved much harder than I expected based on literature (Van Auken *et al.*, 2010). Most women did not feel like taking pictures and said it would take too much of their time or simply said no. The two women who actually made pictures proved that it took a lot of time, because they only gave me their pictures after more than a month. Therefore I did not use the pictures in groups, but took time with them individually to understand what they meant with it. This provided interesting insights about their daily life, such as creativity (see Case 6, picture 5 and 6) or what they liked about their daily life.

I have decided upon another way of using pictures, and will use them in my thesis to illustrate different important aspects of the life women have mentioned, and to give some idea about the village I stayed in order to get a better understanding of the rest of the material. And as food is such an important part of life, I will show some nice foods to illustrate the daily rhythm.

My experience in the field

Practically unprepared

As it was hard to find an organisation that was working in the field of my research, I decided to do an independent research, which meant that when I came to Armenia, I did not have any contacts or starting point to begin with my research work. I soon discovered that my theme was very relevant to most people, and that I could go nearly everywhere in Armenia to do my

fieldwork. However, I needed a translator, and this proved harder than I thought. After more than one month in Yerevan, I could start with my field research. However, already during this first month, I learned a lot about the Armenian culture, the food and the current political situation, as during my stay in the capital, the presidential elections took place, with afterwards daily demonstrations and many people who believed there had been fraud (see chapter 3).

Yet, at March 10, I was able to go to Ijevan and then to Gandzakar. I did not decide upon a research location beforehand, as I had wanted to let it depend on my translator. As she was from this region, I decided to go there, and after visiting three villages we decided to stay in Gandzakar as it had the biggest amount of people going for labour migration, while still being a mountainous village not situated directly at a big road.

After the initial hard start, and except for some challenges mentioned before (groups and immersions), the rest of the research passed quite smoothly, and I met many helpful people in the village who contributed to the improvement of my research.

Language

I did not speak the language of the people I conducted my research with (Armenian). Therefore I worked with a translator, who accompanied me on my visits to other women and translated the interviews and some of the other conversations. However, most of the time with my host-families, I did not have a translator. I taught them some English, and they taught me some Armenian, and also some of them already spoke a little English, making it possible to have simple conversations.

Yet, it is not always necessary to understand the language of the people one is living with. On the one hand it enlarges the understanding, but on the other hand, without language, a person is more receptive for the atmosphere and in that way is able to understand situations. Another advantage is the possibility to automatically reflect during activities, instead of listening actively all the time [FN2/5/2013].

Limitations

Although during my research I was able to obtain a lot of information, it is good to also mention the limitations of my research. Although I have carefully chosen the time of my research, to really understand the life of the women it would be valuable to spend more time with the women, and to see how during various seasons different challenges are faced. Furthermore, nearly all women interviewed were at the time of the interview without their husband. On the one hand this was positive, as women could be more open about their relationship with their husband, yet on the other hand, I was not able to see how their relationship was, and therefore my data can be one sided. However, as my research is about the way women shape their wellbeing, the one-sidedness does add to the understanding of the side of the women.

During my research, I have shared in the life of two different families, but not with a woman whose husband was going for *khopan*. In one of the families I stayed with, the male families had passed away, and in this way I was able to understand what would change in a situation where no male family-member was present, but I have not had the ability to see the evening life of women whose husband was in Russia.

While I lived in the village, I had to keep different things in mind. On the one hand I wanted to be accepted, to be trusted by the women in the village, and therefore I had to fit in the culture for a certain extent. On the other hand, I sometimes wanted, as a researcher, to ask the questions nobody would ask on topics people normally would not want to talk about. This two

goals conflicted often, and as my translator also had difficulty with not fitting in the culture, often we chose for the first goal. In this way, I built up a good name in the village, and people were positive about me, but at the same time, I was not able to ask questions about certain topics. However, it is unclear which way would have better results, as I was not able to compare the two, and it could very well be that a good name would be more important in order to also be able to touch upon the more sensible topics. There I have to acknowledge again that my time was limited, and that I was not able to build up very close relationships with many people.

My research is about one village in a region in Armenia. Although the village seemed to be an average village in some senses, as it has a similar history as many other villages in Armenia, the percentage of men going for *khopan* seems average, and the level of development was similar, still it is good to keep in mind that it is a specific research at a specific time, and that in order to understand the situation of all women in all villages in Armenia, more comparable research should be done.

Reading guide

In the following chapters I will describe answers to my research questions based on the research taken place in Gandzakar in Armenian, where I applied the methods described above. My theoretical framework on wellbeing, which underlies my research questions, and the rest of my thesis, will be presented in chapter 2. Chapter 3, called 'No choice but to go' provides a historical account and further information describing the context of chapter 4-6 which are the main empirical chapters, although empirical material is also used in chapter 3. Also, chapter 3 describes some important aspects of wellbeing, such as the practical circumstances people live in. It will become clear how people decide to go for labour migration. Furthermore a brief history of Armenia, and of the village Gandzakar will be given. The goal of this chapter is to understand chapter 4-6 and to answer sub-question 1.

Before each of the empirical chapters 4-6, there will be an intermezzo with three cases, each portraying a woman, her life, the challenges she faces, how she deals with these and in all this, how she is shaping her wellbeing. In the empirical chapters, these cases are used as inspiration. Furthermore, in each intermezzo there will be pictures, on different aspects of the daily life in Gandzakar. These intermezzo's will help to create an understanding of the life of women living in Gandzakar while their husband goes for *khopan*.

The chapter 4-6 are called respectively Morning, Afternoon and Evening, and together describe one day. In this way I will provide insight in the daily life of women in Gandzakar, as the daily life is what speaks most practically about how people are doing. At the same time, it illustrates the continuation of the different aspects of daily life, and thereby it highlights the continuous structure, which is partly chosen by women, and partly intrinsic to life.

In the morning, the day started, where children are the main reason to start the day. Therefore I will start in the first chapter with the theme of children, as also women described that children are the most important for their wellbeing. After this, on the afternoon, women continue their day by going out, and I will pay attention to the theme of work, discussing the relevance of different works for different women. In the last chapter, Evening, the women return home, and spend time with their close family. At the same time the evening is also the end of the daily rhythm, where the continuity of tasks and social appointments stops, and this can emphasise the fact that the woman is alone, without her husband.

Every part of the day, and every aspect of daily life is also an illustration of how a woman shapes her wellbeing, and this I will highlight by paying attention to the different

aspects of my conceptualisation of wellbeing. Most of the aspects come back in every chapter, but I will give specific attention to fulfilling life in the Afternoon, comparing different aspects of the day with each other, and to hope and imagination in the evening, as this is very relevant when a woman is alone. Another aspect highlighted in every chapter is a 'challenge', as in the stories the women told, some challenges came back every time. In the Morning, I will describe the challenge of elderly and sick people in the close life of the women, in the Afternoon, I will describe the challenging question 'whether or not to move away from the village with the family', and in the Evening chapter, being alone sometimes creates the challenge of loneliness.

Within the chapter, there will be two types of text, one describing the above mentioned themes and challenges, and one describing the direct daily life, creating the rhythm in the text. In this I will follow one day of a woman in Gandzakar. For practical reasons, I will use the stories of different women, yet, by doing this, I also want to provide an insight in the differences between the women in the village, as not every woman faces the same challenges, and in this way illustrate how wellbeing is personal and pluralistic. The last type of text can be recognised by a red indent. All this together will give an impression what the daily life is of these women, and how they combine various aspects of life (Nussbaum, 1993) and in all these things work towards their wellbeing.

After the empirical chapters, chapter 7 will present my conclusion and discussion, demarcating the end of my thesis.

Chapter 2 Theoretical framework

Wellbeing is a broad theme, and many authors use it in different ways. In this chapter I will shortly outline the theoretical thinking of which wellbeing has become one of the results. I will continue by giving my own definition of the concept of wellbeing, explain how it is seen by various authors, and after that, I will present and explain how I see wellbeing, using a conceptual model with different aspects, where agency has a central role. During the chapter I will occasionally connect the topic of wellbeing to my research on women who stay at home while their husband leaves for labour migration.

Wellbeing in perspective

Wellbeing, good life and the individual have become more central during the last decades, when a shift in paradigms called for a new focus to understand poverty. Nussbaum (2011) argues that “the dominant theories that have historically guided policy choices” concerning quality of life “are deeply mistaken” (Nussbaum 2011:xi), and that a focus on economic figures does not show the real situation people are living in, and does not provide incentives for policy makers to reduce poverty. Amartya Sen (Sen, 1979; 1985; 1999) and Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2000, 2011; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993a) therefore argue for a new approach that focusses on individual capabilities and freedoms, includes social justice, and sees each person as an end (Nussbaum 2011: 18). The main critique is on GDP as a measure to assess the poverty of a country, which does not take into account the differences between people and regions in the country. This way of looking forgets different characteristics of poverty, the way different individuals make choices, and the inequality within a country (Sen, 1979; Gough *et al.*, 2007).

A focus that is wider than only on economic factors provides a deeper insight in how inequalities work and what really matters to people. When applying it to labour migration, it is important to realise that people are not 'forced by the system' to participate in labour migration but that every individual makes own decisions. Only when every individual is seen as an active agent (Long, 2001; Chambers, 2007) the process of migration can be understood. This will at the same time lead to more equality in research on migration, as people are seen as people, and every person, the one leaving and the one staying, is regarded with the same value and dignity. Norman Long in his actor-oriented approach (e.g. Arce & Long, 2000; Long, 1990, 2001) argues that every individual should be seen as a knowledgeable and capable person, in relation with her environment, and he critiques the focus on groups as unicities and the 'poor' as passive recipient of development aid. Another approach that gives an alternative focus on poverty and the poor is a sustainable livelihoods approach (Chambers & Conway, 1992), which is based on individuals, and their capability, equity and sustainability, and where social and environmental sustainability on the long run are central.

What connects these authors is the focus, instead of on the quantitative and economic factors, on a quality of life and on the individual person with own capacities, agency and knowledge. Their theories, approaches and methods are very different, but their main goal is to find new ways to conquer poverty and to diminish inequality. Furthermore, all of these approaches argue for an holistic view on poverty and development, where different aspects of human life are interconnected and interdependent.

In the same period, a new approach started to focus on wellbeing, building on the other

approaches, as it also focusses on strengths instead of needs, is oriented towards the actor instead of taking an outsider perspective and “recognise(s) the multiplicity and integrity of people's lives forged in a complex mix of priorities, strategies, influences, activities and therefore outcomes (White, 2008:3). Furthermore, wellbeing has a positive focus, as wellbeing is something everyone would desire, and gives therefore an 'inclusive aspiration' as opposed to poverty for example (White, 2008). Last, and most specifically found in a wellbeing approach is that it directs its attention to how people experience their life, and not only to the 'objective' measures of welfare (White, 2008).

The research on women whose husband participates in labour migration often regards mainly the material side, and a wellbeing approach could help to understand the other effects of migration, namely the feelings a woman has, and her personal evaluation and what she makes of her own situation. In the rest of this chapter, I will first explain the term wellbeing and related terms such as good life, and continue with explaining in which ways a wellbeing approach is currently used, and after that I will propose my own conceptual model of how I understand wellbeing and how I have used it during my research.

Wellbeing and good life

The introduction of Gough *et al.* (2007) gives a good overview of the various meanings of wellbeing. They quote the *Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Honderich, 2005), stating that while it is “usually concise and parsimonious [it] has difficulty in defining its meaning: 'Variously interpreted as “living and faring well” or “flourishing”, the notion of wellbeing is intricately bound up with our ideas about what constitutes human happiness and the sort of life it is good to lead” (Gough *et al.*, 2007: 4). This notion on the one hand points to values in society, but also to expectations, that can be created by different means. These expectations, and desires, are an essential part of wellbeing.

Wellbeing is sometimes seen as synonym to a good life, and also in Armenian it is translated like that. Fischer (2012) shows that 'good life' does not mean that life is always happy or without difficulties, as “the ups and downs of real experience and struggle give value to the ends enjoyed and that folks are driven to be certain sorts of people (not indeterminate blobs)” (p.6). Later he states, referring to Nozick (1974) that even if people have the agency to choose for an easy life, they would rather choose for real life.

Welfare in wellbeing

Welfare refers to the financial circumstances a person lives in, and it has been seen as equal to wellbeing in some streams of thought. During the 20th century, wellbeing has changed in meaning and in some years it has been seen as equal to welfare, and in other instances it has had a very subjective meaning (Gough & McGregor, 2007). Nowadays, many authors on wellbeing state that welfare is a part of wellbeing (Fischer, 2012; Gough & McGregor, 2007). McGregor (2004) puts it like this: “at any point in time the wellbeing of an individual is the outcome of the resources they have; the needs that they are able to fulfil; and their subjective evaluation of their state of wellbeing”, which means that resources and needs are underlying wellbeing, but that in the end a personal evaluation makes the result. So, resources and needs play a role, however, these resources and needs are later seen as the wellbeing which is evaluated, meaning that a subjective evaluation of their wellbeing is their wellbeing. To make it clear, I want to make a distinction between these, and see wellbeing as the evaluation of different aspects of life, and

these different aspects are the fulfilment of needs, the resources and other aspects that I will mention later.

'Subjective' and 'objective' wellbeing

As we have seen before, White (2008) sees a shift in focus from the 'objective' to the perceptions and experience as central to wellbeing. Using a wellbeing approach, some authors make a distinction between 'objective' and 'subjective' wellbeing (Gartaula, 2011; Gough & McGregor, 2007), where Gartaula (2011: 113) defines objective wellbeing as “the universality of basic human needs required for a good life” or in short the material conditions available to fulfil needs. Gartaula, applying subjective wellbeing to his research on ‘the other side’ of migration, states that subjective wellbeing is the “self-reported experiences of migrant's wives on their life satisfaction and primary relationships of their husbands” (Gartaula, 2011:113), differing from Gough & McGregor (2007) who quote Gasper and state the subjective wellbeing is “the feelings of a person whose wellbeing is estimated” or, more clear, “the subjective evaluation of (...) the objective circumstances (Gough & McGregor 2007: 5). In the paragraph above I have argued that it does not make sense to make this difference between two kinds of wellbeing, as already another word exists for the circumstances, namely material conditions. Furthermore, every evaluation is subjective and therefore the distinction is arbitrary. Gough & McGregor (2007) also acknowledge this, but it does not stop them from using the terms. White (2008) also uses the term subjective, together with the relational and material dimensions of wellbeing. For her, the material are the practical welfare, the relational are the social relations, and the subjective concerns values, perceptions and experience (White, 2008:7). The material and the relational are seen as part of wellbeing, but I want to argue that they are not the wellbeing itself but form inspiration to wellbeing, which is the subjective wellbeing. Although the other two dimensions are important to wellbeing, these are not wellbeing itself.

Conceptual model of wellbeing

As wellbeing is a difficult concept to define (White, 2008; Gough & McGregor 2007), it is important to make clear how I understand the concept in relation to my research. The main articles that inspired my theoretical framework were White (2008) and Fischer (2012) with their conceptualisation of the notion of wellbeing, Long (2001) for his conceptualisation of agency, Nussbaum for her notion of contingent conflict (1993), and together with Sen on aspiration and hope, and on freedom and choices (Nussbaum & Sen 1993; Sen 1999; Nussbaum 2011), and Appadurai (2004) on aspiration. In the proposed model, all these concepts have a place, but first I will explain the underlying notions, on which my model of wellbeing is based upon, and after that continue with the other parts of the model.

Underlying notions

To better understand the thinking about wellbeing, and to better understand how wellbeing is personally shaped by individuals, the following notions are important to my model. Wellbeing is first¹ personal, secondly like a verb, thirdly pluralistic and fourth it is holistic. Although these notions are strongly interrelated, I will explain them by order.

First, as mentioned before, wellbeing is personal (Chambers, 1997; Nussbaum & Sen, 1993b) and “we need to value what people say the good life should look like”(Nussbaum &

1 The order of these notions does not have any other goal than to make it easier to read the text.

Sen, 1993b: 9). Therefore, to really understand how wellbeing is for a person, it is important to focus on the individual and see how this person is shaping her own wellbeing. The actor-oriented approach is a useful tool in understanding the individual, and seeing the individual as a capable and knowledgeable agent. As I will argue later, agency is central to the individual. It is good to realise that the individual is not alone, but in an environment, which is partly shaped by and partly shapes the individual, and therefore social surroundings are part of my model. Yet, in this it is important to listen to the way a person narrates her life and choices she made in this, and how she conceives the influence of others and of values and norms on it. It might be that she does not recognise all influences, but as wellbeing is a personal evaluation of these things, it might be that it is not important. However, it is good to make a difference between what a person tells and what a person knows but not shares, or knows only discursively (Giddens, 1984).

Secondly, wellbeing can be seen as a combination of processes, differing in time and space (White 2008), and this makes wellbeing itself a process, where an individual reflects and makes choices and puts these choices into practice in everyday life (see also Das (2000) in White, 2006). For that reason I want to see wellbeing as continuous, ever changing but towards a certain goal, although the goal may change as well. Wellbeing has therefore more verb- than noun-like qualities.

Wellbeing is in the third place pluralistic, multidimensional, and multifaceted, all pointing towards the different aspects that all influence wellbeing. In the life of an individual, many different tasks, obligations, options and possibilities are present, and there are different dimensions which overlap. For example, there is time, place, family, financial, societal and metaphysical aspects, and a person has to make choices regarding all these aspects

Strongly linked to the pluralistic aspect is the last aspect of wellbeing, namely that it is holistic (White, 2008), which means that the different aspects of wellbeing are intimately interconnected and explicable only by reference to the whole, and that if one aspect is mentioned, the other aspects relate to these as well. This holistic outlook helps to understand the life of the individual better than many other theories, as a person also encounters all these aspects at the same time and related to one another.

Within my research, the pluralistic and holistic outlook of wellbeing help to understand the multifaceted life of the women, and understand the effect of labour migration in various aspects of their lives. Life comprises more than one side, and the ability of a human to combine these aspects makes it a need for a model to also combine the different parts of life. Furthermore, the verb-like quality of wellbeing makes it possible to see how wellbeing is practices in everyday life.

Aspects of wellbeing

The conceptual model of figure 1 is a simplified visualisation of my definition of **wellbeing**. As wellbeing has many different aspects, reality is still more complicated. However, it aims to illustrate how the different concepts are all interrelated and in continuous motion. The word wellbeing is in the middle, and the arrows around it are the process of wellbeing, the process I want to describe as personal evaluation and choices, which influence one another.



Figure 1: Model of wellbeing

Within this process, **agency** is a key concept, and I will explain it, first offering definitions of other authors, and after that describe which role it has in my model. According to Long (2001), agency comprises both capability and knowledgeability, and also the “complex set of social relationships” (p.113) of an actor, including “individuals, organisations, relevant technologies, financial and material resources” (*idem*) etc. Shortly summarised it is the “capacity of particular individuals to monitor, evaluate and come to grips cognitively with their social worlds” (p.112).

Both Fischer and Sen define agency as more narrow than Long, however, Fischer connects it to wellbeing, and the ability to construct one’s life, a way I also use the concept in my model. Wellbeing is often regarded as synonym of ‘good life’ and when Fischer (2012) defines wellbeing, he starts with *eudaimonia*¹ and states that “the good life is about having the power to construct a life that one values, equivalent to what we tend to call “agency””(p.6). So he explains agency with ‘the power to construct’. In the framework Fischer (2012) uses, he also mentions ‘opportunity structures’ which limit or facilitate the agency, and in his view, agency therefore is the will, while opportunity structures are a way. This term is similar to the term Gough *et al.* (2007) call ‘enabling structures’. However, Fishers discern between opportunity structures and agency does not seem to work for me, as the will and the way are strongly related to one another. Sen (1999) uses the term freedom which he sees as the space of a person to do and be what she values. Freedom, together with choices create a certain space where a person is able to do and be what she wants (see also Nussbaum 1993). Sen (1999) also uses the term agency, and relates this to change as someone with agency can bring change (p.19). He mostly

1 The Greek word “Eudaimonia comes from “eu-,” signifying “well” and “daimon,” which is the same root as demon, signifying benevolent power over one’s destiny” (Fischer, 2012: 6).

relates the term agency to women, where he emphasises the important role of women's agency for wellbeing, as women are “active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of *both* women and men” (Sen, 1999:189, emphasis original). He states that a greater focus on the agency will create more wellbeing, yet, he does not clearly explain how this greater focus should work in practice. Sen’s connection to change and women is remarkable, as he seems to connect agency more with women. I do not agree with this, as both men and women have the ability to change their situation, and the situation of others, but as my research focuses on how women shape their wellbeing, it is how I use it in practice.

Agency how I use it comprises both the choices and personal evaluation, which are linked to the knowledgeable and capability Long (2001) mentions. Furthermore, as I see it, are both the 'agency' and the 'opportunity structures' mentioned by Fischer (2012), or better, the freedom and choices of Sen (1999). Therefore agency gives a person the ability to shape her wellbeing.

After understanding this central concept, I will turn to the other aspects, mentioned in the arrows of the model, of interaction & relation, values & dignity, hope & imagination and fulfilling life. I will explain them in this order, and at the same time relate the different aspects to one another, as the aforementioned holistic notion of the model implies the interrelatedness between the different aspects.

Interaction & relation are important to wellbeing in two ways. On the one hand, in interaction, an individual discusses values in society, jokes about other people in the village and talks about choices and challenges she faces. Many conversations in daily life are in some way evaluating life, sometimes in a serious way, and sometimes in a joking way. In this way a person takes the values in society and the opinions of other, and uses this as input in her own personal evaluation. On the other hand, relations are one of the things a person evaluates on, and makes choices towards, such as a mother who makes choices for her children, or a father who goes to Russia in order to earn money, not only for himself but also for his family. Relations give a positive feeling, and White (2008) indicates that in research on wellbeing, relatedness emerged as a central issue contributing to the wellbeing of individuals. White (2008) includes a relational dimension in her model of wellbeing, and includes also political, and cultural identities in it. Although I state that relations are important to wellbeing, I do not agree with her with her dimensions of wellbeing, as, although relations and interaction contribute to wellbeing, it is not the wellbeing itself. White (2008) mentions also the discussion on whether the relations are part of a person or outside of a person, and states that “people become who and what they are through their relatedness to others” (White 2008: 8), which links to the concept of agency. I agree with her to the greatest extent, however, it is important to stress that not only relations but also other aspects of life, such as faith, and individual choices are an important part of this. Relationship and interaction are strongly linked to agency, as in Long’s (2001) definition of agency, he also includes the relationships a person has, shows that agency resides not only in the person, but that it also is affected and influences the social surroundings of a person, and that agency of a person can be limited or enlarged by relationships. However, I distinguish the two to make the picture clearer, and to give words to this specific part of agency.

In my research, I focussed on women who lived most of the year without their husband, which made the quality and quantity of contact with their husband about all daily matters hard, and this influences the interaction. Furthermore, the transnationality of the relationship

influences the wellbeing of the women.

To explain the aspect of **dignity and values**, I first want to focus also on the way a person sees her own dignity, as according to Fischer “ample evidence shows that relative valuations of fairness and dignity play a central role in work satisfaction and overall wellbeing” (Fischer 2012:11). In the way he describes dignity and fairness, it means so much as how other people see a person, and how they give space to that person to develop or be. Fischer (2012) states that dignity and fairness have to do with solidarity, how a person is seen in society, and is strongly connected to social norms, as in some cultures it is important to have a lot of land, but in other cultures it is more important to wear modern cloths. Values are strongly linked to dignity, and therefore I have chosen to link these two. Dignity and fairness have to do with how people in society think and what they value, and in this way link to the aspect of interaction & relation, but also on how a person acts on these values, the choices a person makes. Gartaula (2011) gives the example of how a women in rural Nepal should stay at home, but when her husband leaves for labour migration, she goes to the market and the field to work, and while at that time she does not respect the value, after it, she is respected by the people around her, changing the current situation and how she was seen before, because beforehand she was even respected less.

Other values are related to **material conditions**, an aspect influencing the life of women. Material conditions are often a reason to go for *khopan*, as this is strongly connected to the value attached to having a certain material living standard. Also material conditions can be a source of dignity, as in society it can be that a person having a bigger, more luxury house is looked upon with dignity. During a womengroup in my research, the women discussed what standards they had relating to material conditions, and after a strong argument, it became clear that some of them valued luxury much more than others.

Values and dignity are strongly related, and if a person agrees with certain values in society this makes that a person sees her life as dignified when she follows these values, while dignity is often valued by an individual, in that way influencing the choices she makes to shape her wellbeing. This explains this aspect, and now I will explain the concept of **hope and imagination**.

Nussbaum and Sen mention some elements that influence the quality of life, such as health care, medical services, education, labour, rights, relations and “(w)e need, perhaps above all, to know how people are enabled by the society in question to imagine, to wonder, to feel emotions such as love and gratitude, that presuppose that life is more than a set of commercial relations, and that the human being (..) is an unfathomable mystery” (p.1). This imagination and wonder is related to what Fischer (2012) calls aspiration and gives direction to agency within wellbeing. Aspiration can be understood as hope, and it is future oriented thinking. Appadurai (2004) shows that aspirations are important to change, as these have an image of a good life, and directs someone's efforts towards a good life (Appadurai, 2004). Hope can be based on something such as knowledge about the future, change in circumstances, money or faith. It can also be strongly related to imagination, as what you can imagine is also what you hope for. This is also what Fischer says, when he states that “Notions of the good life orient the aspirations of agency and provide a dynamic framework through which to interpret one’s own actions and those of others, all the while bound by the realm of what is seen as possible (what Pierre Bourdieu (1977) termed “doxa”)” (Fischer 2012:11). White (2008) connects hope to the present “Expectations of the future (..) have a bearing on how people conceive their present”.

Often aspiration is based on the idea of a good life, however the capacity to aspire is limited by the means to realise, and the opportunities known (Appadurai 2004), similar to what Nussbaum (1993) states, when she says that fulfilment of desires is a prerequisites for happiness and quality of life, and describes poor, unhealthy women, who are not dissatisfied with their life. She says “(s)ince one necessary condition of much desiring seems to be the ability to imagine the object of desire, it is easy to see why severe limitations of experience, in the case of many of the world's women, should lead, as well, to limitations of desire” (p.324).

In Armenia, as in many parts of the former Soviet Union, higher standards of living are well known to people, and in my research I often found that people compared their current situation with how they lived back then. This also gives a certain possibility to dream high, and to have high expectations of how it can be. Most women who make the decision to let their husband go for *khopan* have high hopes on what he will be able to do. However, many facets in daily life make it hard to have hope and to make dreams for the future. Hope and imagination, direct the shaping of wellbeing towards the future, a decisions are based on these.

Aspiration, and therefore hope and imagination, are strongly connected to values in society, and are formed in interaction (Appadurai, 2004). “Having a larger purpose and being part of a meaningful project are central to wellbeing among both the affluent and the poor” (Fischer 2012: 11). Although Fischer does includes both rich and poor, he sees this dimension of participating in meaningful projects on a very job-oriented way, while I found there are many more ways to understand this dimension, as having a family, and taking care of a family is the main meaningful project most people in my research participate in, and taking care of a sick family member is another example. Especially for women, and maybe especially for rural women, in situations where there is a small opportunity to find a job such as the village of my research, meaningful projects are to participate in society and in a family, and I found that this is true for many women during my research. The term I want to use for this is **fulfilling life**, as I want to define it as broader than participating in meaningful projects. The Oxford Dictionary defines fulfilling as “making someone satisfied or happy through allowing their character or abilities to develop fully” (Oxford Dictionary, 2013) and this adds the development of character and abilities to the concept. This definition also links to the concept Nussbaum (2011:34) uses in her book on central capabilities, namely affiliation, which she explains as “Being able to live with and towards others, to recognize and show concern for other human beings”, which gives a goal of a fulfilling life, namely to make choices for the wellbeing of others. So making choices for a fulfilling life means to make choices for the wellbeing of others or the wellbeing of society and a development of character and abilities, which in return also contributes to the own wellbeing.

An individual evaluates the material conditions, the social surroundings, life fulfilment, values and hope and imagination, and makes choices regarding these issues. At the same time, these aspects are influencing the way a person evaluates, as for example, a woman talks with her friends about the values in society regarding a woman who works, as in Armenia it is sometimes seen as bad for a woman to work, but at the same time knows that she needs money to be able to care for her children, who are important for her. The friends can tell her that she should just ignores the judgements of others, but still the woman herself needs to make the choice to work. If she decides to work she is working at her wellbeing, but also when she decides not to work, as she sees different aspects as more or less important.

A person is not always actively shaping her wellbeing, as many choices in life are not directly made while regarding wellbeing, yet instead the direct goal will be reflected upon. For

example, a person chooses to work while having children, as many other people also work, and it is financially necessary to work. In this way, a person chooses directly for financial security and complying with the values in society. Yet at the same time, the person can work on the personal development, and make life more fulfilling as the work can give a deeper sense of giving meaning to life. In this way, a person chooses actively for certain aspects, but as the choice also influences other parts of life, it means that a person is shaping her wellbeing in different aspects at the same time, while the cause is maybe only the fact that she needed money.

Contingent conflict

Many different aspects all are part of wellbeing or influence the wellbeing of a person, and this shows the reality of life, which consists of many different aspects, and choices to be made, every day and when new things arise. According to Nussbaum (1993:333), “living well as a human being has a plurality of distinct components, none of them reducible to the others”, and this shows the multifacetedness of life, and we face contingent conflict in this. A contingent conflict is “when you value a plurality of different goods, all of which are taken to make a non-homogeneous contribution to the goodness of a life, then you will discover, either more or less often, depending on how you live, that you are faced with a situation in which you cannot satisfy the demands of all the things to which you are committed” (Nussbaum, 1993: 333). She reasons that women face more often a contingent conflict, as women more often have multiple commitments, for example to a family, towards a job and towards a needy neighbour. However, it is good to realise that the conflict is not to be avoided, as all the commitments give value to a life, and one commitment can form inspiration and insight to other commitments, and it is wiser to acknowledge the conflict and find ways to combine different commitments.

To summarise, wellbeing is process of evaluating and choosing (White, 2008) and it is holistic (White, 2008), personal (White, 2008), pluralistic in value (Nussbaum, 1993; 2011). Agency (Long, 2001) is central to wellbeing, and is related to all aspects of wellbeing. Freedom and choices (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 2001) are fundamental to this agency. The aspects influencing and being influenced by choices, evaluation and interaction on wellbeing are: to give oneself value and dignity (Nussbaum, 2011; Fischer, 2012), to have a fulfilling life (Fischer, 2012) and aspiration and hope (Nussbaum & Sen, 1993b; Fischer 2012; Appadurai 2004). Interaction and relations are important, both for the evaluating and as a direction of wellbeing. The multiplicity of wellbeing creates a contingent conflict (Nussbaum 1993), which can contribute to wellbeing if one finds a good way to deal with it.

To understand wellbeing, I focussed on the daily life, and how in this, people are constructing their wellbeing. Only very seldom, people are consciously shaping their wellbeing, but the focus on practical aspects during my research made it possible to understand how women in various ways practically shaped their wellbeing. Furthermore, when talking about life it became clear how they reflected on it. Agency, as a perspective to do research, helped to see the women as active agents, continuously working towards their wellbeing.

Chapter 3 “No choice but to go”

Historical account leading to labour migration in Gandzakar

In this chapter I will sketch the historical account, leading to the current situation of many women staying at their home, while their husbands are going for labour migration in Russia. I will focus on the village of Gandzakar, where my research took place, but also pay attention to the wider surroundings, and the country of Armenia. Based on the two stories at the beginning of the chapter, I will tell how labour migration started and continued. The function of this chapter is to get better understanding in which practical matters lead to the labour migration of men. In this way I will answer the first research question about the material conditions people live in, and meanwhile in this chapter it becomes visible how people work towards their wellbeing, and how values and hope play a role in the decision making.

I will start with two stories, of which one presents the life history of a 82 years old woman, called Hasmik Rezian, who in her life experienced the difficulties of the village life, and whose husband already went to work in Russia. The second story presents the story of Karineh Gohigian, which illustrates the hard life of the 1990s.

Life history Hasmik Rezian

Hasmik Rezian is a woman of 82 years old, and lived her whole life in the village, I will tell the story of the village with her life history. When we talk a bit, I tell her that she looks younger than she is, and she tells “It is because I like to be around with young people. And my husband played a special kind of Armenian clarinet. Yet, he has passed away ten years ago.”

Hasmik is born in 1931 and grew up in the village of upper Aghdan. She grew up with her parents and one brother. Her father kept cows and every summer the whole family went with him to the summer pastures, and they spend the whole summer at the mountain. In the second World War, her father, together with all the young, able bodied men had to go and fight in the Soviet Army. In total around 460 men in the age of 18-25 year went to the army. In that time, the village was run totally by the women, and Hasmik tells “I was 8 years old when my father left. Later, also my brother left, he is born in 1925. It was a hard time, we had very few cloths, and no shoes to go to school. Everyone was really poor, all we could find we sent to the people in the army.” After the war ended, only 260 men returned, and the father of Hasmik did not come back. Her brother did come back, badly wounded, but he recovered later on.

“I went to school for six years, and after that I helped my mother to take care of the two cows we had left, to take them to the pastures or to gather grass for the winter. I remember one time when I was with some other children, and we were all very hungry. The wheat on the land was just ready to be harvested and we decided to take some wheat from the land. But someone caught us, and we were taken to the municipality, where the wheat we got and our knives were taken from us, and without anything we left again.”

After some years, she married and left the house to live together with her husband. Her husband’s father had also died during World War II, and therefore his family was poor as well. Both their parents could not support them, and they had a difficult start of their marriage because they had so little. They always had only little food, and also when her children were born they were poor. Many other people in the village were poor, and it was a hard time. Hasmik and her husband got 5 children, four boys and a girl, of whom one boy died just after he

had born. She learned how to make carpets, got skilled in it and together with a neighbour she started to sell carpets in Azerbaijan. Later a carpet factory opened in Ijevan, and she worked there for many years. Slowly she and her husband built up a living.

To improve their house, Hasmik and her husband wanted to build a garage and a fence, but the neighbours did not like it. They got big problems with their neighbours, who were rich and had many friends, and she tells “when I think of it I still get angry. I think this has caused the heart problems of my husband which have lead to his death”. However, now everyone of that family who lived in the village died, and the other people moved to Russia. In the time of the Soviet Union, her husband had gone for *khopan* for about five years, but not in a row, until he got sick. During that time, they saved money in order to renovate the house, but when the Soviet Union collapsed, the banks also fell and they lost most of their money. Much later she got some money back, but only the money she herself had put on the bank, yet, as her husband had passed away she could not get his money, which was much more.

Her children all married and moved away from the village to the bigger cities Vanadzor (2 hours by public transport) and Ijevan (15 minutes by public transport). Her second son went for *khopan* and in the beginning also his family joined. Hasmik and her husband visited them sometimes, and when they got a baby Hasmik helped her daughter-in-law. When she was in Russia, it was sometimes hard as she barely speaks Russian. She tells: “One day, I went to get groceries, and I wanted to get butter. I asked, and when the people behind the counter did not listen, I shouted, but nobody listened to me. Later, I learned that I should have gone in the line. Another time I went with my husband, and he knew how it worked and I could just point to things and the people were quite friendly in the end. Now my daughter-in-law lives in Ijevan, and her husband just goes seasonally.

My third and youngest son now lives in Ukraine. He could live here, because the house is his, but after he came from military service he went to Russia. He married to a girl from the village, but they could not get children together, so they divorced. Later, he met a girl from Ukraine, and they married, and now they live there. But he is still registered at this house, and when I die, it will go to him.

I ask her what kind of incomes she has, and she tells: “I get some pension, but not something extra. I am sick, I have some heartproblems, and I take five medicines, so officially I fall under the second group of sick people¹, as I am living alone. But I did not get anything for the last ten years. The woman at the government who should help me does not like me and she does not want to help me. But I am very pleased with my kids, because they are sending money often and I like them. My daughter who lives in Vanadzor visits me often, and in the winter times, my daughter stays with me because she can help with heating the house. A few years ago, I fell on my shoulder, and it was quite bad. Some friends in the village took care of me, and later I went to Vanadzor to the family of my daughter and stayed with them until I recovered. I have many friend in the village, and I spend a lot of time with them.

I ask her about *khopan* and she tells “many people go for *khopan* but not all get paid well. Only when you have family or contacts there it is good. Yet the life is hard there. I heard about a man, he is the neighbour of my sister, and he was brought back dead from Russia. He got a heart infarct there. You know, they have stress, they are far away and they get a bad

1 There are different categories of sick people, defining how much money a person would get. During a group interview, I asked about the different categories [G8/5/2013], and the women explained how they understood it, but mentioned that many people in the village do not understand the system totally. At the place where people should get money or refund, the people who work there are not very helpful. The topic created a lot of emotions during the group talk, and it would be interesting to do more research on it.

payment. But here the unemployment is very high, and people don't have a choice, one needs money. And if the government of today will stay, it will not get any better. The re-election of Sargsyan is really bad, the republican party cannot change this situation.”

Hasmik has encountered many difficulties, but still, she does not seem negative, although she does mention very few positive things. I ask her what gives her hope and she says: “Nearly all the friends of my age died, I should also die... No I don't want to die!”. [Int 9/5/2013]

The 1990s of Karineh Gohigian

Karineh Gohigian is 51 years old, and married when she was 22. She has two children, a son of 22 and a daughter of 27. In the 1990s, her husband went to Russia.

She tells: “My husband left in 1993, to find a job in Russia. But after he left, we did not get any news from him, and no money either. It was very hard, because I expected to have more money, but instead we had less. I had two little children to take care of, and no income at all. I did not know what to do, but in the end I went to the forest to pick herbs, and I sold them. It was a very hard time, we were in the forest the whole day, searching herbs, and we were earning just enough, or mostly just too little to live from. After five years, my husband came back, and he brought also some money. He had found a job, and after that he worked for most of the time as a taxi-driver in Moscow. He doesn't like his job, he gets crazy when there is a traffic jam. Every year he comes back here for new year, for one month. Since then he sends back money on a regular basis, and I have a job as well, and we work on the land so we have enough to live from. My children had a hard time as well, first in the beginning, and also later, growing up mostly without their father. When he first left, I really missed my husband a lot, now I still miss him, but it is easier. The hardest times are when I have to decide something, but I also learned that.

In the five years I was in the forest, I learned to like nature. I am a big fan of nature, I like every season, as every season is typical. When I was in the forest during that time, I got energy from the nature, when I was sitting there, and just seeing everything. One time I saw a stone, and water was just coming out of it. It was a miracle. And now still, every day I like nature, in the daytime I like best the evening, the sunset, when I am working on the land, then I just feel the nature. I have been in Russia, but it was very hard to live there, because I missed the village. I once stayed there one month, and it was hard. I missed the nature, the trees, the forest. Sometimes I don't like it when it is muddy in the streets, but still I like the rain, the sound of the drops.

In the beginning when my husband left, life was really hard, but later he sent money, I found this job at the municipality and life was getting easier. However, three years back it was easier, but now life, like food and everything, is getting more expensive. My husband has to continue working there, and maybe also my son and daughter will go to Russia, because they can't find a job here. That will be very hard for me, because I can't live without my children, and not without the village. In Russia, I just keep my soul and body together, but here I can really live.” [Int 8]

Difficult periods & migration

After reading the two stories, it has become clear that the village of Gandzak has seen various hard periods, of which the main were the years during the Second World War, and later

the 1990s. In these days, different factors came together, and many men left, first for war, and secondly for Russia, to find a job and to earn money. In both these times women were the main people staying and taking care of the village, and it were times of poverty. However, there were many differences between the two harsh periods, as for example, after the war, many men did not return, and although there are occasionally men who do not return from Russia, most men go for seasonal labour. In the story of Karineh, it becomes clear that in the past years, a new hard period has started, and this is visible in the number of men who start to leave again in the recent years, after migration had diminished between the end of the 1990ies and 2007. A young woman illustrates this, saying “When I would go for a coffee a few years ago, there were always many men around, but now, there are only girls left. All men have gone to Russia, or are planning to go.” [FN9/3/2013]

There are various aspect leading towards the migration of men, and in this chapter I will give attention to these aspects, of which the main are historical and very related to this the economic factors, and the inequality between the different countries. Furthermore, values in Armenian society influence migration. Relating migration to wellbeing, one could say that the main aspects leading to the choice to go to Russia are economical, material factors, which can influence wellbeing. However, the choice is related to the wider definition of wellbeing given before, as also hope and life fulfilment do play a role for many people. In the end, these reasons together made that quite some people regarded their decision to go, or to let their husband go to Russia, as 'no choice but to go'. However, the fact that people refer to these choice like this, also shows a limitation of the agency they perceive to have in order to change their circumstances.

I will start with some general information about Armenia, and continue with the historical account leading to the current situation of labour migrants. After that I will explain the current livelihoods of the people in Gandzakar. In every part, I will explain how the situation leads to the migration of men, and how this influences and has influenced, the life of the village. The chapter will be ended with an explanation of how *khopan* is practised nowadays in the village.

Country and village

Armenia

Armenia (or Հայաստան - Hayastan in Armenian) is a landlocked country in the Southern Caucasus, bordering Georgia, Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkey. It has a total area of 29,800 km², with a population of 3.1 million (Termeer & Zeynalian, 2000). Its capital city is Yerevan, and contains 1.2 million people. The Human Development Index of Armenia is 0.716, ranking 86 in the list of countries (Klugman, 2011).

Although Armenia is a small country, roughly the size of Belgium, it has a huge variety in landscapes, and contains more plant and animal species than all of Russia (Bezemer & Lerman, 2004). Most people live in the Ararat valley, with a Mediterranean climate, and also Yerevan lies in this valley. North east from the valley the lake Sevan is situated, and this is one of the highest sweet water lakes in the world (Termeer & Zeynalian, 2000). In the rest of the country, there are many mountainous villages, especially in the Lower Caucasus, ranging from the south east to the north west of Armenia.

Important characteristics for the Armenian culture are the old history, ranging back to more than 1000 BC; Christianity, as Armenia has become a Christian nation around 301 AD, as one of the first countries in the world, and the Armenian Apostolic Church is an central element in the lives of Armenians. This relates to the hope and imagination aspect of wellbeing, and I will come back to it in chapter 6; and the Armenian alphabet, created in 405 AD. In history, the genocide of the Ottomans on the Armenians living in the Ottoman empire of 1915 is the nadir in Armenian history, and around 600,000 people died in this (Britannica, 2012), although some countries do not acknowledge that this happened (for example Turkey and Azerbaijan).



Figure 2: Map of Armenia (Vidiani, 2012)

The village of Gandzakar

My research took place in the village of Gandzakar¹, in the mountainous north east of the country, in Tavush *marz* (administrative region). Gandzakar is mountainous village, with an environment composed of mainly forest, and some fields (see picture 1). The city Ijevan lies at 20 minute drive from the village, while the village lies around 2 hour drive from the capital Yerevan. I will explain first the history² of the village, and after that I will explain the relevance of the village for my research.

The village was established first in the 12th or 13th century, and was destroyed by

1 For a map, please see appendix 1.

2 All my historical information about the village is based on three interviews I held. First with Levon Galatian, who worked at the municipality [Int 18/3/2013], secondly with the teacher (or friend, as it was normal to call a teacher) Martin Galatian [Int 25/3/2013], who studied history, and also studied the history of the village. He sadly passed away during my research, but he would be happy that some of his research would live after him. The third interview was with Hasmik Rezian, in the life history in the beginning of the chapter.

Mongols, however still stones can be found of that period. From the 16th or 17th century onwards, the place was used as a summer place, and people would come from a place called 'lower Aghdan' to the settlement, at that time called 'upper Aghdan'. In the year 1792, 19 families settled in the place, and more families arrived, until it was one of the biggest villages in the region at the end of the 19th century, with around 400 inhabitants. They build two churches, and a school started in 1896. In 1929, the village and its lands were divided in an upper and lower part. During the Soviet Union, at the beginning the whole village functioned as a kolkhoz, but later this changed into a sovkhos, which practically meant that first farmers were paid in goods and later in money. During the Soviet Union, the village grew from around 500 inhabitants in the beginning, to around 4500 inhabitants in the 1990ies, with a downfall during harsh period of the 1940s in the middle. Mostly, people were doing fine in the village, and they did not need to move away because there was work in the nearby city of Ijevan, where a lot of factories were located, like Hasmik of the beginning of the chapter in the carpet factory.

In 1978 a law was ordained that all non-Armenian names of places should change to Armenian ones, and the name Aghdan (Աղղաճ) which means 'wheat village' and comes from an Azeri word, changed into Gandzakar (Գանձակար) which means valuable stone, referring to the gold that was found in the mountain in that time. The plan was to build a mine, but as the gold was located too deep, this plan was abandoned.

During the Soviet Union, around 600 people worked on the land, 1500 worked at other places like Ijevan or in government jobs, and another 150 went for *khopan*, like the husband of Hasmik, as already in that time the wages were higher than in Armenia.

At the moment, around one-thousand (or one quarter) of the official inhabitants of the village are living in Russia, and an extra 500 men go for *khopan* [FN11/3/2013]. There is also a high number of people who have moved out from the village to settle in other parts of Armenia. Out of this numbers, the impact of migration on the village are obvious, as many people have family in other parts of Armenia or in Russia, and many husbands and sons are participating in circular migration, affecting the life in the village, and especially the direct family members. In the rest of the chapter I will explain the factors of the past twenty-five years that led to the current situation.

End of Soviet Union

During most of the 20th century, Armenia was part of the Soviet Union. This had a strong influence of the development of the country. During the Soviet Union, there was a strong population growth, and the agricultural and industrial production grew enormously, creating many jobs, and the living conditions were good.

Challenges for Armenia

On the 23rd of August 1990, Armenia declared its independence. The change from communism to capitalism, but also other events caused big changes for the Armenian population. Yet, the changes had already started before the end of the Soviet Union, with an earthquake on December 7th, 1988 in north-west Armenia, destroying one-third of the republic's industrial capacity, causing a lot of unemployment, and many people to lose their house (Dudwick, 1997). Also the closing of the Metsamor nuclear power plant caused a lot of unemployment. Another shock factor was the war with Azerbaijan about the Nagorno-Kharabagh region (claimed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan), which caused about one million of displaced people and around

30,000 deaths (Shaffer, 1993) and continuing bad relations with the neighbouring countries Azerbaijan and Turkey, as the borders between Armenia and these countries (around two-third of the total borders) are still closed, even though a Russian brokered cease-fire has been in place since 1994.

The end of the Soviet Union and all other events caused high unemployment rates, the GDP in 1993 fell to 47% of the 1990 (Lerman & Mirzakhanian, 2001). Furthermore, the banks collapsed and, as Hasmik described, many people lost their savings. Yet, after 1993 the economy has steadily grown again to a level of 68% of the 1990 level in 2000 (Bezemer & Lerman, 2004). The financial crisis of the 1990s, together with the hopes created by the new state which did not become true within a short period of time, created a huge outflow of Armenians, most of whom settled in Russia. In that time, mostly families migrated, however at the end of the 1990s this changed into male family members who were participating in circular migration (Dudwick, 2003).

After the Soviet Union when many people lost their money and income, people were often ashamed for being poor, and as an strong value in Armenian society is hospitality, being able to give candies, coffee and food to guests [G11/5/2013], and many people stopped going to friends and neighbours, in order to not be obliged to welcome them another time, in that way isolating themselves (Gomart, 2003). Many people went through harsh times, as most were not used to poverty at all, but as they lost their jobs and their savings, they had to make choices they would never hoped to make, such as moving to other places or not going to birthday parties anymore because there was no money to buy a present (Dudwick, 2003). Most treasured in Armenian society are relations, in the first place relations with family, and in the second place to others. Family is often values higher than the individual (Ishkanian, 2002). Hospitality is an important means to ensure good relations within the family, but also with neighbours and friends.

Change for women

Ishkanian (2002) describes the suffering of women after the end of the Soviet Union. While under the Soviet Union, a high percentage of women would work, after the fall of the Soviet Union especially women became jobless, as thanks to the reasons mentioned above, many industries had closed down. Also the large farms closed down, and many government services ceased to exist, while mainly women worked there. At the same time, the costs of transportation rose, making travelling to work more expensive, while also more (jobless) guys were hanging in the street, creating feelings of insecurity (Kuehnast, 2000).

Armenian women, and especially mothers, are seen as very highly values; motherhoods is seen as sacred, and a mother is seen as the heart, the pillar or the light (sun) of the family (Ishkanian, 2002: 383). Also the family is seen as important, as it is the centre of affective life and a means to resist cultural assimilation and destruction (Dudwick, 1997), which was often necessary in the long history of the Armenian people. After the end of the Soviet Union, in some families this role was given back to women, and the husbands took back the responsibility for earning money. Fertaly (2012) has a strong critique on much of the post-socialist gender literature, saying that while they were “focused on the challenges women in newly capitalist societies were facing by showing how women were separated from the public sphere and largely devalued in national narratives, [they] did not discuss how women were able to express themselves from their homes, especially from their kitchens” (p.82). Dudwick (2003) however also indicates that the women were not always against staying and working at home, and

sometimes felt it as if during Soviet times they had to accept Soviet values, while more traditional Armenian values were closer to being mother at home than to work outside of the home.

Yet, it is important to realise that women, both at home and at work can have a fulfilling life, and that job does not necessarily give more life fulfilment. At the same time, it is good to understand that motherhood and having a job are not mutually exclusive (Nussbaum, 1993).

Changes in rural area & Gandzakar

The closing of big state farms created unemployment in rural areas, however, thanks to effective land privatisation, agricultural output stayed on the same level during 1990–97, and afterwards slowly increased to 113% of the 1990 level in 2000 (CIS, 2001 in Bezemer & Lerman, 2004). However, this number does not take into account regional differences, and in the village of Gandzakar, many people tell that they agricultural production is only a fraction of the amount produced during the Soviet Union. Yet, in 1997, 97% of the households in rural areas owned land and only 2% did not have access to land (Bezemer and Lerman (2004). Many people moved to rural areas, and in rural areas, “subsistence agriculture became an important survival strategy for many (...) and by the end Armenia had 228,000 independent farmers” (Dudwick, 2003: 118 and also in Kharatyan *et al.* (2003). In 1990, the percentage of the population living in rural areas was 30%, while in 2001 it was 33%, yet the agricultural share of employment was 17% in 1990, and it rose to 43% in 2001 (CIS, 2001 in Bezemer & Lerman, 2004). According to Davis *et al.* (2004), about 80% of the rural population practised subsistence agriculture, and this still seemed the case in the village of Gandzakar.

Yet, there is another side to the rural areas, as while the agricultural employment rose, particularly in the rural areas job opportunities became fewer in other sectors, and the rural non-farm income share in Armenia was on average 31% (Davis *et al.*, 2004). Both before and during Soviet times, the non-farm sector was very important in these areas, yet, as nearly all non-farm activities were public activities, with the fall of the Soviet Union, these all stopped. At the same time, the economic climate was not favourable for setting up new small enterprises. The people who used to work in these public works, either turned to agriculture, or chose to migrate (Kharatyan *et al.*, 2003), as often migration was the only way to be able to earn enough money to live.

In all of Armenia, and also in Gandzakar, the end of the Soviet Union had strong effects. Tavush *marz* “was among the parts of Armenia most affected by the crisis of the early 1990s: the near total collapse of small state-owned industrial enterprises set up as part of Soviet modernization was further exacerbated by the closing of the Armenia-Azerbaijan border and the military conflict between the two countries. As the crisis evolved into stagnation, migration from Tavush, both Russia-bound and to other places within Armenia, began to grow” (Agadjanian *et al.*, 2007). In that time, many families left for Russia, as life was much better there.

Migration in the 1990s

Apart from a lack of job opportunities in Armenia, another reason for labour migration is that the wages in Russia are much higher than in Armenia, people told me that these can be six to eight times as high as in Armenia. Furthermore, there are also non-economic reasons for migration. One woman mentioned adventure as a reason why some men leave, yet many women did not see this as an important factor [G3/5/2013].

Reading the story of Karineh above, it becomes clear the migration of her husband was not easy, as he did not send back money soon, and they lost contact for five year. I heard this more often during my research, and also Dudwick (2003) mentions this. She tells about women whose husband had left, but not sent money, and who were barely able to survive, if it was not their neighbours helping them. A woman in the village called Manik Abassian tells that she was asking all her neighbours for cloths, so that she could hand them out at school to needy mothers and children, mentioning especially those families whose father had left for Russia [Int 14/5/2013].

Especially in the few years after the fall of the Soviet Union, when many dreams of the new prosperous Armenian state collapsed and the hardship did not seize, many men left to Russia to find work. Often they did not have any contacts or network where they could fall back on, although quite some Armenians already lived in Russia. Communication was hard in that time, and if a husband would not earn money, he would feel ashamed to come back or to contact the family again. Sometimes there is a network of people, but a woman tells “my husband went for *khopan* for two years, to a place where he knew people from the village. He worked there for two years, but in all this time he did not get paid. He stopped working there because of that, and tried to get his money, as the people are still in Gandzakar. But they never gave him the money, and as he passed away a few years ago, I have an even smaller chance to ever get the money” [FN19/5/2013].

Current crisis

Until the financial crisis of 2007, the economy of Armenia kept growing at more than 10% a year, and although the economy started to grow again after 2009, thanks adequate handling of the problems caused by the financial crisis (Khachatryan, 2009, 2010), still people nowadays complain about the rising prices.

Furthermore, although the cease-fire has been in place since 1994, peace is still fragile in Armenia, there are still border problems and occasionally soldiers dying, and people are still afraid that the conflict might get bigger one day. Another issue is the political situation, which many people see as causing problems in the country. Some state that the country is an oligarchy (D. Petrosyan, 2013) and people do not trust the government anymore. The last presidential elections of 2013 showed that it was impossible to go against the current president, and although many people in the village hoped that Raffi Hovhannisyan would change the oligarchy and change in that way the economic situation, thanks to fraud (I. Sargsyan, 2013) president Serzh Sargsyan stayed in power. People told that that was another reason why more men would go for *khopan* [FN9/3/2013].

Livelihoods today in Gandzakar¹

To understand the material situation people in Gandzakar are living in, how this leads to migration, and to better comprehend how people are constructing their wellbeing based on their material circumstances, I will describe the livelihoods of the people in the village. The livelihood of the people living in Gandzakar consists of various different aspects, like agricultural production, keeping animals, gathering in the forest, jobs, relationships, and selling

1 The information on livelihoods is collected on different ways, namely during participatory observation, working on the land and walking through the village; interviews; and during a group interview with women in the culture house on May 8, 2013.

home-made produce. I describe only the livelihoods of this village, as within Armenian villages, many aspects might differ, due to different climatic circumstances, and to the landscape. I describe the livelihoods of the people in the village in general, so both the families whose husband stays in the village, and the families whose husband goes for *khopan*. In the next sub-chapter, I will describe the specific effects of *khopan* on livelihoods strategies, which will also become clear in the rest of my thesis.

Cultivation

Most people have a garden besides their house, and a piece of land at the end of the village, which they use for cultivation. Some families live from this most of the year, most families during summer and autumn, and some families have to buy vegetables the whole year round. Not all people cultivate their land at the ends of the village, as there is often a low output, because the lands are of bad quality, inputs are expensive, there is a the risk of draught as there is no irrigation on the lands, and a risk of roaming cows, as the fields are seldom fenced. The main produce grown on the small, close land are greens (vegetables, herbs, tomatoes, pepper etc.) and on the big land, which is further, potatoes, corn, beans and sometimes wheat.

Keeping animals

Some people have animals, such as cows, pigs, chicken and bees, which are kept for milk, meat, eggs and honey. However, to take care of cows, men need to be around, and it is good to have a big family otherwise one has to pay others for helping with the cows. Sometimes, the inputs needed for animals are very expensive, and it is cheaper to buy meat than to raise animals.

Textbox 1. Keeping cows as means of living

During a group interview, a woman tells: “We have animals, and sometimes our animals harm the land. From around May 10th until September or October 10th, most of the people take their cows to the summer pastures, but some don't go. During the summer these cows sometimes harm the fields, and before and after they go they can also do damage to the fields”. If a family only has only a few cows, they do not go to the summer pastures, but they let their cows graze at the small pastures at the end of the village. When a family has more cows, they will go, and one family member stays at the settlement in the mountains where the summer pastures are. “My husband goes there every year, and during the summer vacation, I also go. The grass there is healthy, and the cows grow fast. Nearly every year, after the summer, we sell the cows. I really like to go and to work at the pastures. The air is fresh, the nature is good, and my grandchildren also like coming there.”

I ask whether living without the husband because he is in Russia is comparable with living without the husband because he is at the summer pastures, but they tell it is not comparable at all. The woman whose husband is in Russia tells her life is hard, she has to take care of all the family-members, while the woman who joins her husband in summer to the summer-pastures tells that she is always looking forward to spending the summer in the mountains. [G8/5/2013]

Gathering

There are two kinds of wild produce, the first grows close by, such as nettle in spring, and other wild vegetables, and most families gather this only for their own household or maybe for their neighbours. Yet the other kind grows in the forest or in the fields that lay further astray, and these are gathered in order to sell on the market. Examples are strawberries, walnuts, mushrooms, special herbs, special flowers and wild vegetables. However, many families tell that they do not have the people to gather, and therefore do not earn money from this. Also, as can be seen in Karineh's story, it is not very profitable to gather and sell, although in some seasons gathering mushrooms can bring in a reasonable amount of money.

Incomes

Another aspect of livelihoods strategies is to obtain money, and there are various ways in doing this. Some people earn money from agricultural produce, but this happens very seldom, yet people do earn from selling animals or wild produce. Other incomes come from jobs, and government allowance such as pension, child allowance, and sickness allowance. A big problem is the current unemployment, which causes many men to be jobless, or work in a place with a bad situation. Many men in the village work in wood factories, and although the cutting of the wood is often done illegal and is risky¹, the payments can be reasonable to good. Another way of getting income is to sell homemade produce, and in the village I saw examples of women selling honey or vodka.

Money earned in Russia is an important source of income for many families, not only for families whose husband goes for *khopan*. A woman told "my husband lives in Russia with his family, and he has good business there. He wanted to have a house for when he returns, so he built it here, and now me and my family live in it. I do not know when he will return, but I am sure it will not be very soon" [FN 27/4/2013]. Relatives often help each other in difficult times [Int 12, G8/5/2013], although many people see it as shameful to ask for money, and they would rather die because of poverty and keep their dignity (Dudwick, 2003).

Expenses

The main expenses of people in Gandzakar are food, house, after secondary education, and for some in winter the heating of the house, and I will explain these expenses hereafter. If the own production is not sufficient, people buy in the shops in the village or on the market in Ijevan. People complain that prices rise and that they have to buy more and more on credit. Some poor families are not allowed to buy in some shops because they have a very high debt, but most families pay off their debt every month or year. The house is often inherited from the parents, although some build a new or buy another house. Yet, the house has to be renovated once a while and this is very expensive, although most people do the work themselves. Another expense is the cost for children to continue studying after secondary education. While primary and secondary education are free, studying involves quite a lot of money, and for some people this is a reason not to study. Other costs are heating of the house, especially when the house is heated with gas², light and water, cloths, and travelling.

1 Illegal: It is possible to cut wood on a legal way, but the majority of wood cutting is said to be done illegally, although I did not hear about people who got a fine. Risky: I heard more than once that someone who was cutting wood died because a tree fell on him.

2 A gas-heater costs about 30 000 dram per month (only in the winter months, and depending on the house). This

Hopes and fears

Future orientation influences choices made by the women today, and when talking to people about the future, people mention various issues they value, like health, peace and a good political situation. A group of women states “money is important, but in the end, we want our children and husband to be healthy and to live in peace, with one another and in our country” (G8/5/2013). Hope, and fears that can be seen as negative hopes, are aspects that influence wellbeing, and are important in the daily life of people.

Textbox 2. Don't earn enough

Levon Galatian works at the municipality since 1985, and every new mayor decides to keep him. However, now also he thinks about going to Russia, and he tells “I am suffering from the idea, I actually do not want to go. But my wife and I both work, and we don't earn enough to pay for the education of our children. Even though I know that what is in my head is the most valuable, and you should do something with that. Still with a simple job in Russia I would earn much more than what I earn now.”

Khopan today

Since the 1990s, the way of going for *khopan* has changed, because people tell that they only go if there is a job for them, or at least a network that can help them to find a job, which increases the chance on successful labour migration, but also the chance that a person migrates (Haug, 2008). The stories of women whose husband did not come back for a long time originated all in the 1990s, while most husbands who have left more recently come back every year.

Most women whose husband was going for *khopan* named the renovation of the house or the study of their children as the main goal for earning money. Some also told that the costs for living had been rising for a while, and that they were not able any longer to pay off their debts without extra money, and therefore the husband had gone for *khopan*. However, many women whose husband had gone initially for the renovation of the house for example, told that he had kept on going even though the house was renovated, because they needed the money for other expenses. Most women whom I asked how long they thought their husband needed to go, told that they did not know, probably as long as he could go.

Many men go for *khopan*, but not all men go in the same way. In the cases in the following chapter that portray different women, it becomes clear that most of them live (most of the year) without their husband, and in that way face some similar challenges. However, there is a difference in how their husbands go for *khopan*. Most men go like the husband of Perjuhi (Case 3), leaving for Russia in spring, returning every year, and keeping contact with his family. Some come for a few months, others only for a few weeks. Most husbands had already gone in the beginning of March when I started my research, but in the end of April, buses of men left from Ijevan for Russia, and the village became more empty (FN 7/5/2013). The most common professions performed by the inhabitants of Gandzakar who go for *khopan* are driver and construction worker, of which the last one is the profession for the majority of Armenians in Russia (ILO 2009).

Sometimes, like in the case of Roza Arpagian (Case 1, in the beginning), a husband only goes for a few months a year, and sometimes sons go for *khopan* as well. An interesting and

is also the minimum wage people earn by for example working in a kindergarten (5 days a week from 10-15.30). 1 euro is around 540 dram. Heating with wood is a much cheaper option.

typical part of the story of Roza is that all the female members stay in the village, while all the male members have gone to Russia (with an exception of the wife of the first son). It is very rare for a woman to go to Russia alone¹, but many join their husbands. However, many women mentioned that the village becomes a women village in summer (G25/3/2013). Still, women tell that they are very dependent on their male relatives, for fixing things in the house and for the money for their daily expenses, which sometimes becomes a problem.

In very few cases, like the case of Heghineh (Case 2) and Ohanna (Case 3), the husbands have gone for a long time, and it does not seem that they will ever return. However, the difference between their cases is that the husband of Ohanna has really left, and although he has gone to Russia, he has never returned nor sent any money. This kind of leaving is not normally meant with the word *khopan*, however, it can be seen as connected to *khopan*, as the husband has left for Russia. Ohanna or her family have not have had any contact with him, making his leaving more seem like an escape. Heghineh however, still has contact with her husband, and also her children still contact their father.

Not all people can go for *khopan*, as there are the problems of crossing borders, transport and the challenge of finding a job in another country, often as a non-registered resident, which causes the fact that in many places only the richer people can work abroad (Gartaula, 2011) an issue I also encountered in Gandzakar [FN19/04/2013; Int 9/5/2013].

Most migrants send home their remittances on a regular basis, and according to Jijyan & Gevorgyan (2010), 70% of the migrant households receive remittances regularly (p. 110). Although most women have at least high school degrees, and older women have often worked during the Soviet time when there were many more opportunities to work in rural areas (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007: 1249), nowadays, the money received from remittances is the only or main regular source of income.

Conclusion

The agricultural and industrial development during the Soviet Union created many jobs and a reasonable standard of welfare. Thanks to this and other causes, the Armenian population grew enormously. At the end of the Soviet Union, the agriculture and industry collapsed, leaving many people, especially in Tavush region, jobless. The devaluation of money caused many people to lose their savings, and altogether this caused a high level of poverty. For many people, this poverty was a whole new feeling, and they had to adapt their life to it.

Already during the Soviet Union, people had gone for *khopan*, and after the Soviet Union, this became a surviving strategy, as in Russia the wages were higher and there were many more jobs. Men, who were seen as breadwinners were the ones who had to go, and the jobs available in the Soviet Union were mainly male jobs. The women stayed at home and took care of the household and the family. At the same time, also many families left to settle in Russia.

In the beginning of the 21st century, the economic situation improved, and the migration level fell, but the economic crisis, together with the political situation causes again more people to leave for *khopan*, as people are unable to cover even the basic costs of living, or have other expenses that require more money than they can earn in Armenia. Hopes of a better future if the husband works in Russia, together with the idea of men that if they do not have a job they

1 I have only once heard about a woman going to Russia alone, it was a highly educated woman, who grew up in a city and was a granddaughter of a woman in the village. She went to Russia to teach the children of a rich Armenian family their Armenian history.

become useless, make going for *khopan* a way for both men and women to work on their wellbeing, while also other hopes and fear more directed to the future of the country influence their wellbeing. Looking to the financial or material situation, migration is the best option, but there is more to human life than the financial aspects, and in the rest of my thesis, I will search for a deeper understanding of the other factors that contribute to the evaluation on life, in order to better grasp how women in different ways work on their wellbeing.

Intermezzo I

In this intermezzo, three cases will be presented. They all portray a woman whose husband is going for *khopan*, and describe the main challenges she faces, on top of the fact that her husband is in Russia (most of the year). The first case is about Roza Arpagian, whose husband and sons are living in Russia. Sickness is a repeating challenge in her life, and in the case it is described how she deals with this, and despite of her challenges still works towards her wellbeing. In the second case, we see how Heghineh is inventive in dealing with her husband having gone for *khopan*, but does returning. It becomes clear how difficult situations force her to make choices against certain values, but improving her own wellbeing. The third case is the first part of serial of three stories on the case study on my neighbours, and describes two women: Ohanna and Perjuhi, a mother and a daughter-in-law, whose husbands both have gone to Russia, but the way they have gone is very different. In this first story, their challenge is to live together.

Case 1 Roza Arpagian: Sickness as part of life

Roza Arpagian is 53 years old and married when she was 19 years old. She got four children, two boys and two girls in the age 19-31. She is sick, and has a lot of pain in her legs. In the night she does not sleep well, she wakes up early in the morning and takes a walk in her garden, breaths the fresh air, and starts to work. She lives together with her daughters, who help her in her daily work and care for her if it is necessary. Around ten years ago, her two sons left for Russia, and they work there since, in construction. They did not get higher education, but they are really good in their jobs. One of her sons is married, and has two children, he lives with his whole family Russia. For already a long time, her husband went a few months per year to Russia, but a few years after her sons left, their father has joined them, and she was happy that he could go and stay with them, because she worried a lot about her sons. Although she has visited them often, she misses them very much. A few years ago, the son of her first son got sick, and she went to Russia to stay with the family to help. The grandson was very sick and the family needed to pay a lot for the medical treatments, but after a while he recovered. As mentioned before, also Roza suffers of a medical problem, causing her pain for already ten years. A few times she went to the hospital in Yerevan to treat it, but this never succeeded. The money to take care of her illness was send to her by her sons.

Her husband is now in Russia, where he worked as a driver. Yet, at the moment, he is not able to work, because he got a really bad heart problem. The doctor did not allow him to work, neither to travel long or take a plane. Therefore he stays at home in Russia, with his sons and the wife and children of his son. Roza tells: “It is very hard, in the beginning we were calling each other twice a day, we spent so much money on the phone, and mentally it was very hard. Now he is doing better again and I hope he will start working again soon. He likes his job and he would really like to start working again, also because of the money. In the first years he did not like it very much to live in Russia, but he got used to it.”

Her sons and her husband left for Russia because there is no job in the village, and they needed the money for education of the girls, and for renovating the house. Yet, even though there are three people of the family working in Russia, there is not much improvement. Roza says: “now, we have enough money for living. We can't save money, because my husband is sick and not able to work. If not for the health problems, we would have had a lot of progress.



Picture 1: The importance of kids.

Children from the village having lunch at Budur, the mountain of the village. In the background the village can be seen. (photo taken by Tigranuhi Stepanyan)

At the moment, we can just continue living.” She misses the family members who live in Russia: “When I was there, I was helping my daughter-in-law with everything and we were often walking in the streets together. I liked it a lot to be there. I would like to move there as well, but there is no place to live, because they are renting an apartment. When I am here, I miss them very much, both in practical ways, because we do not have anyone to repair the house as there are no men around, but more in mental ways, because I just miss them. My grandsons speak Russian, but at home they speak Armenian. The little boy who was sick is now six years old, and he is very smart. I miss him the most of all!”

In dealing with her troubles, she tells that God gives her strength: “I can't go to church, because I can't walk the distance, but I used to go to church often, here in the village or in Ijevan. I light a candle in front of the picture of Mary every morning.” She shows an icon and a chandelier, and also a cross. She looks up, and says: “Whenever I encounter difficulties in my life, I turn to God. I do it very often. My grandmother has taught me to pray and to light candles. God gives me strength mentally and practically. Sometimes I wish for something, and I tell it to God and he gives it to me.”

I ask her what things in life are most important for her wellbeing, and she mentions: “Health, good luck, being together as a family”. However, although these things seem not very present in her life, she does not seem to be very unhappy. I ask her why, and she says: “I am happy with my four children, they help each other a lot, like they give money to one another.” [Int 12]

Case 2 There are two cows, one is not here, the other has to do all the work

He does not come back

Heghineh Adamian is 51 years old, married and has four children: three daughters of 29, 27 and 25 and a son of 22 years old. “I have three brothers and three sisters. All of my brothers are in Russia, one of my sisters died, but the other two are here, and also their husbands are here.” Her husband went to Russia in 1994, and he works in construction in Samara. In the beginning he came back every year, but because of financial hardship he was not able to come back at all in the last 15 years. In the year 2000, Heghineh and her children went to Russia as well to build up a living there, but for different reasons it was hard for her to live there, mainly because it was not easy to feed a big family, and after three years she and her children returned to Gandzakar. She tells that she feels more free when she is here, more connected to the land. Nowadays, she still has contact with her husband, and they call each other every now and then. Sometimes her husband sends some money, but it is by far enough to live from. Yet, she says: “I am hopeful that we will be reunited one day, we don't have a bad relationship, it's just that he is so far away”. At a certain point, I ask whether he likes his life there, and Heghineh asks her daughter “does he like it?” and her daughter looks up, questioning, and says “Yes”, as if there is a whole story behind. “But he misses his family”, she adds.

“My husband has left because we had a dream to have a better house, but he could not manage to make much money. During the years when the children went to university, he has sent some money, but now he sends less again. Yet, me and my husband still have a dream to build a house here someday.” However, when I ask whether she thinks he will come back one

Picture 2. Cinema (below)

The old cinema, build during the Soviet Union. In that time, it was used for films, theatre, and travelling shows visited the village once in a while. It was always full, and the tickets were cheap. After the fall of the Soviet Union the building is not used any longer.



Picture 2: Cinema

day, she says: “He probably won't come back, I think. It is too hard with the culture, the live, the change.” During the conversation we have, she tells a few times that her husband’s respects her very much and that he, as a friend, helps her to overcome all her problems. It sometimes seems as if their relationship is quite good, and I ask again if she thinks whether one day he will be back here, living with her, but she says: “Only when he gets very old or sick he will come back”, and she does not look as if she is looking forward to that period.

Taking care of mother-in-law

Heghineh tells: “When I married, I moved here, to the house of my husband’s family. His mother was also still here, but she got sick, and she had to be cared for. I learned how to care for her, and I took care of her for twenty years, until 2009 when she passed away. The years when I was in Russia, my eldest daughter took care of her. My mother-in-law lay in bed for most of the time.

When I came back from Russia in 2003, I really needed money for the education of the children, and therefore I needed work. There was not much work, but I had learned to take care of elderly people, and other people told me I could manage that as I do not get nervous of old people, so I started to work for other families, to take care of their old grandmother. I did not have a choice, I needed the money so badly, but the people in the village didn't accept it, a woman of that age taking care and earning money from old people. It was really hard in the beginning but slowly it became more accepted, and now there are more women working like me. I get my clients from personal contacts because people know me, and the family pays me. At the moment I don't have anybody to take care of, but it can change any moment.

I also have another job, which started in 2006. At that time, my daughter went to art school in Ijevan, and she was quite good but it was hard for me to pay for her education. Then one of her professors heard about it and he offered me a job, and since then I am working as a cleaner at the school, six days per week.”

After my translator introduces me, Heghineh instantly stated metaphorically: “There are two cows, one is not there, and the other has to do all the work”. After she has described the hardship she has gone through and the work she has done, I ask her about the other cow, and she tells “The work of the other cow is cutting the wood and bringing it home, for fuel in the winter, and landwork. In the beginning after he left, it was very hard, because the children were young and had to go to school, and I had to work on the land all day to get enough food. There was no electricity and no gas, and I had to do all in my own. Since 2008 we have a gas heater, because it was too much work to get the wood, and even though we had a lot of land, we cultivate only little now”.

Being Armenian

She tells: “I did my best to tell my children that their father is not gone because he does not love them, but because of the situation. I have always tried to be there for them, and to comfort them. I told my children 'you are Armenian, you should stay here in your fathers’ house, even though he is not here'. Both my eldest daughters are married, and the first one lives in Russia with her family, not so far from her father. She visits him often, and also my son sometimes goes to visit his father in summer. At the moment he is in the army, and maybe he will also go to Russia, after he finishes military service. Only my youngest daughter still lives here, and the first son of my first daughter also lives here now, because this daughter got a new baby only three months ago, and it was easier for her if he would live here for a while. He is 10 years old,

and goes to school here, but he never learned to write Armenian¹, so I helped him to read and to write.”

She is proud to be Armenian, and says: “It is important to know your ancestors, because in that way you can live a happy life, but if you don't know your roots, it's useless”. I ask her about being a Christian, and she tells: “During my childhood, a Soviet person told me that there is no God. Yet, when I grew up, every year I saw my family and my grandmother praying with Easter², lighting candles, growing wheat and making it something special. My grandmother also has taught me to pray. Now, I also believe, and I discovered that, subconsciously, I always knew that there was a God. Nowadays, every time a grandmother dies and I lose my job, I hope and pray to God, and every time He helps. I observe in society it is strange to talk about religious feelings, even though everyone is Christian, and I wonder how it can be. Maybe it is because of the influence of the Soviet Union, however church is getting more popular in recent times. For me, faith is very important, it is not something with my head, but I feel it with my blood and my heart, it is something I have inherited from my ancestors and parents.”

She is a hero

The people in the village call her a hero, and I when I ask about her reputation in the village, she says: “I have a good reputation, the people call me a hero, because I was able to manage all these things. Yet, I am mainly proud of my children, because they are good, and have a good reputation. They become stronger and stronger when they overcome all their problems.”

After her story, I ask her if she is still happy with the life she has, and she says: “Yes, I am happy with my children. If someone would offer me the choice between this life or another, I would still chose this life, because of my children. All the dreams I have, are for my children, that they may have a good live and future”.

After our talk, we get coffee and tea with fruit, and I ask the daughter about her dreams for the future. She starts talking about her work, and her mother adds that she works in an icon-project of the Armenian Apostolic Church, and if she is very good, she can continue working for them. I ask if she wants to stay in the village, and she is sure when she says: “No! I want to go to a place where I can find a job in my field, art”. [Int 13/4/2013, FN13/4/2013]

Case 3 My neighbours part 1: khopan & escape

Zamo Mardanyan tells “my neighbour Armen is a few years younger than me. We both attended school in the village, but he quitted school after about four years. I continued education, and after my secondary school I studied for four years at Yerevan State University. I have a bachelors in economy, I speak and write Russian, and some English. Victor only speaks a little Russian, and he is hardly able to write. I work hard at the municipality, my wife and I have a shop and we work on the land. Still, my neighbour earns much more by just working as a driver in Russia, even though he speaks hardly any Russian!”

Armen Hovamesian is married to Perjuhi Hovamesian, a woman of 28 years old. She grew up in a village not far from Gandzakar, called Sevkar. She married when she was 21 years old, and they got two children, a girl, now six and a boy, now four years old. Victor goes for

1 The Armenian language has a unique alphabet. The grandson has probably learned to speak Armenian in his house, but only learned to write Russian at school.

2 My research took place in the months around Eastern. Often people, or I myself, would apply questions related to faith to Easter.

khopan, to the city of Sochi¹ (in Russia) where he works as a driver. Victor comes home every year before Christmas², but leaves every early spring to go back to Russia. During the first years of their marriage, he stayed at home, but that is no longer possible because of financial reasons.

Perjuhi shares the house with her two children and her mother-in-law, called Ohanna. The husband of Ohanna is also in Russia, but since he left he has never sent any money or contacted them. Before her husband left, Ohanna and he argued a lot, and when he left, around 25 years ago, he went together with a widowed woman from the village. Nobody in the village knows for sure what has happened between them, but everyone assumes that they started to live together in Russia.

Ohanna often complains, and is negative about things, and the neighbours tell that Ohanna often screams and that she can be grumpy or moody. Sometimes when I see Perjuhi and Ohanna together, they are screaming at each other, and it seems that they do not always get along well. However, at other times they are really nice towards one another. Once I visited them, and Ohanna was helping the little boy to arrange his cloths. She told him to cloth well, and explained to us “last week, he got sick because of the cold wind”. And the boy leaned against her and joked back at her. Often, when I meet Ohanna at the street with her two grandchildren she looks quite happy, and smiles at me to greet me. The life Ohanna has had is not easy. It was difficult to understand whether she has become more moody after her husband left or that she might have been like that for a much longer time. The quarrelling in the time before her husband left might even have led to the fact that he left. However, in spite of her grumpiness, she has the sympathy of her neighbours and of her daughter-in-law. Moreover, her grandchildren seem quite fond of her, and it is also visible that she likes them. She has continued life and has found ways to go on, first with her children, now with her daughter-in-law and her grandchildren. Furthermore, she works hard on the land, together with Perjuhi.

The house they live in has a few bedrooms, and a living room with a space for the kitchen. There is no running water in the house, but there is a tap outside, and this water can be used for most purposes, yet drinking water they need to get at a well, around a hundred meter from their house, and there is a non-water toilet in the garden. Perjuhi tells about the changes they have recently made to the house, and shows the doors. “These we have changed last year, and these a few months ago”. She knocks on the door and says “they look beautiful, but it actually is of a bad quality. These two doors are different than these three, because we have changed them in a different year.” I ask about the plans for the coming years, and she tells that they want to build a bathroom, toilet and a kitchen. “When my husband is at home in the winter months, he will work on the renovating of the house”.

Perjuhi tells that she does her best to keep a good relationship with her husband: “We call each other every day. We talk and also my children and my mother-in-law talk with him”. I ask her what is the most difficult time in a year, and she tells: “the first days after he goes to Russia are the hardest, and also the day when he buys a ticket to go there, and we know that he is going. The best period in the year is when he is coming back. It is the same for him, he does not really like to go there”. [Int 16/3/2013(1); Int 10/5/2013(1); FN15/4/2013; FN16/4/2013]
In the next intermezzo, I will show more of their life and the happenings around their family.

1 Sochi is the city where the Olympic Winter games (2014) will be held, and many Armenians have found jobs here in the preparation of the games.

2 Note that the Armenian Christmas is celebrated on the 6th of January, and not on the 25th of December.

Chapter 4. Morning

The day, and the continuity of daily life start every morning anew, and children are an important reason for this continuity. Therefore in this chapter I will give attention to children and other people in the life of the women, and pay some attention to the people who are missing in this daily life, that is the husbands. The people around a woman are important for her wellbeing, both in the interaction about wellbeing, and in how a woman experiences her wellbeing.

In the cases of the intermezzo, the women faced challenges and the value of relationships with people was illustrated. In these cases, it became clear the women work on their wellbeing, by making choices towards it. I will further illustrate their choices in this chapter. First I will describe the value of children, and in the relationship with her children, many aspects of wellbeing are described. After that, I will explain shortly what effect it has on daily tasks that the husband is not there. The last part of the chapter deals with how women manage the challenge of having a sick or elderly person close by. Overall, the importance of social contacts is a recurring theme in all chapters, and also the feeling of loneliness, which is not always prevalent, but often present in the background, affecting wellbeing. In chapter 6 I will give attention to this being alone specifically. The central elements of this chapter all have to do with relationships a woman has in her life. As her husband is gone, still other people are important for her affiliation.

A woman wakes up alone

Tosya Panoshan tells *“I wake up at 8.30, and send my children to school. Then I feed the chicken and my three pigs and take care of them, I have coffee with my neighbour and I organise the house. At around 10 o'clock, I leave for my job”* [Int 4]

All around the world, the woman wakes up the first in the household and gets the house started in the morning. This is the same in the village of Gandzakar. But she does not need to wake up her husband, nor does she have to prepare food for him, because he is in Russia. Yet, she gets up to take care of her children, and to take care of the household, and to start her day. And by starting her day, she starts the daily process of wellbeing, waking up to care, and practice affiliation, in this way contributing to the wellbeing of her children and herself.

Women like Perjuhi (case 3) have young, school-going children, and they have to take care of them in the morning. The children of Tosya (like Roza and Heghineh, case 1 and 2) are grown up, and, although she is there when they go out, she has less tasks relating to this. Tosya has her own job, and therefore needs to organise the house early in the morning, but still she has time to have coffee with her neighbour every day. However, there are many women who do not have a paid job. This difference deserves more attention, and I will come back to this more in depth in the next chapter. Most women are busy most of the time, organising their household and food security.

Children are my number one

Children are an important reason to wake up, and to take care of the household, and throughout the day they are the main reason for continuity of daily life. In the cases in the beginning of the chapter, both Roza and Heghineh emphasised the importance of their children in their lives.

Perjuhi mentioned it also, and it was clear from how she did that she liked her two kids very much and that they were important to her. Also her story in the next chapter illustrates this. Hasmik Rezian (story in chapter 2) illustrated the importance of children, when she told that her son first married, but after some years divorced because the couple could not get children. After a short time, he married another woman and got a child with her [Int 9/5/2013]. Most women I spoke to, got their first child within two years after their marriage.

In the way women refer to their children, it becomes visible how they work towards their wellbeing. In the following paragraphs, I will mention different aspects, first hope & imagination, which I will link to fulfilling life and affiliation. After that I will describe how women get dignity because of their children, and in the last paragraph, I will explain which value women give to their children, and how this influences their wellbeing.

Hopes for her children

Many women think about the future of their children. One woman, Tatik Iskuhi, tells: “All the time I have worked here in this house, together with my mother-in-law, to make the house a good place to live, so that my youngest and only son could live in a beautiful and good place. But what am I living for now, he has passed away 7 years ago, he could not enjoy it for long. Now my grandson looks like him, and I hope one day he will be able to enjoy this place with his family” [FN27/4/2013]. Now she continues to live in the house, together with her daughter-in-law and four grandchildren. Dreaming is connected to imagination and to having a future orientation, and is thereby an aspect of wellbeing. Children help to keep this future orientation, and influence how a woman sees herself in the future. Dreaming for children is also connected to affiliation (Nussbaum 2011) and fulfilling life, as the woman does not dream directly for herself, but for the future wellbeing of her children.

Often, women have many dreams for their children, which mostly have to do with a good marriage, and sometimes with studying or going abroad. Women do not often dream for themselves, although some answered that they had had dreams when they were younger, to go to Paris for example [Int 3] or to become a teacher [Int 8]. But most have passed their dreams to the next generation, or like Tatik Iskuhi, even two generations further.

In Heghineh's story, she faced many challenges, but she has overcome most of them. Most of her life she has lived for the future of her children, working hard, first on the land, and later in different jobs in order to feed them and let them study. In difficult times, her children might have been her only drive, and still now, she does not have many dreams for herself, but only for her children. The dreams she had together with her husband are still dangling in her head, but she does not see them as practical ideas any longer. It is interesting that the husband has probably had these dreams of building a new house together as well, and has left with these ideas. These are their shared dreams, but in the reality of their lives they have both realised that it will not come true. Yet it is still what binds them, and one of the topics they still speak about. However, when looking to the future the dreams for her children keep her going on with her life, and enjoying it, together with them.

Armenian women are heroes

When I visited some women working at the kindergarten, they stated: “Armenian people are heroes. They do everything for their children. They sacrifice their feelings, as it is not easy to live separately, parents prefer to stay together. Yet, Armenian women always think about the future of their children. They always think a day or longer ahead, questioning 'what can we do

for our children?’” [Int 4]. Especially in the case of Heghineh, this was very visible, as she did everything to get her children at university, and also when she recalls the way she spoke about their father to them, it is hard to imagine that she did not sacrifice her own feelings when she made sure her children's image of their father stayed good.

This way of speaking about women by the women at the kindergarten shows the value attached to mothers in society, and the dignity a woman with children gets when she is living for her children. Often, Armenian women are seen as mothers, and mothers as heroes, because they sacrifice everything for their children. This can also be an explanation for the fact that the women mainly dream for their children, and primarily live for their children. As argued in the conceptual model, values and dignity are part of the wellbeing of the women, which means that living for their children is working on their wellbeing.

Value of children

Women place a very high value on their children, and it is primarily children who make their lives fulfilling. Children give them a reason to get up, they structure their days, and give them a reason for working in their households. Even when their husband is not there to value their actions, the children are still in need of care. Often, when the children get older, the women will take care of their grandchildren. It is clear in the case of Roza that she values grandchildren a lot. Even though her daughters are caring for her more than she is able to do for them, she misses her grandchildren, to be able to take care of them and be with them. Also Heghineh is taking care of her grandson, now that her own children are grown up. In many families, the youngest son will stay with his parents after his marriage, like in the case of Ohanna and Perjuhi, and, even if the son goes for *khopan*, the daughter-in-law with the grandchildren stay with the mother-in-law. In their case, and I observed this also at many other places, there is a special relation between the inliving grandmother and the grandchildren.

For all mothers, children are important, but when the husband is not around for most of the year, children become even more important. Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) argue this as well, yet they argue that taking care of children shows a good use of remittances, an aspect I have never come across. Another aspect they mention which I did encounter, is that children are the number one focus for these women, and they use the term Hays (1996) uses “intensive mothering” (Menjívar & Agadjanian 2007:1254). So, on the one hand, children are important for every mother, but on the other hand, if a husband leaves, children become a more important focus, and give the women dignity as mothers and keep their lives busy and structured, and in that way fulfilling.

In the village where I lived, there were very few women without children, and also very few unmarried women¹. I spoke to some of them, and one of them had been married but divorced after a few days, and had since then been teaching at the school in the village. For her, instead of her children or her husband, personal development was the most important for her wellbeing, and she got a lot of satisfaction from her job. She tells that the influence of *khopan* on the village is really bad “it only helps in financial aspects, but it is bad for the community, especially for boys who miss their father when they grow up, and they behave badly” [Int

1 Nora Dudwick (2003) shows in her analysis of rural Armenia in the 1990s that there are many more people who stay unmarried compared to the time before the end of the Soviet Union, the men because they are unable to take care of the women, and often leave for Russia, which causes many women to stay alone. Yet, this analysis took place in the 1994-5, and it could be that it is by now balanced out. (Dudwick, 2003)

14/5/2013]. Raising their kids, and especially disciplining their boys is a challenge more women face, and also Gartaula (2011) mentions this as a problem faced by some women in Nepal. In my research I heard this as well, but not very often [Int 13].

Children are important for women as they give a structure to the day, contributing to continuity. Furthermore, if a woman lives for the wellbeing of her children, she practices fulfilling life. The relationship with her children becomes more important if the husband is gone, and the woman misses the affiliation with him. Furthermore, taking good care of the children gives the woman dignity. Children only partly structure the day, as also other tasks need to be done. However, most of the tasks are also indirectly for the children, as household tasks are also contributing to their lives.

Morning tasks

In the morning, sometimes even before breakfast, all the women in the house are busy cleaning and organising the house. The floors are swept and mopped, the kitchen is cleaned, the heater is cleaned and the animals are fed. Sometimes, the eldest woman in the house starts to make bread, and puts the flour, water, salt and yeast in the big wooden bowl, kneads it and let it rest. It might take the whole morning to bake the bread, as the fire has to be made in the big outside oven, and up to 30 or 40 breads are made in this. But after this work, there is bread for ten days. Often, when a fire is made, also a relative or neighbour might use the oven to bake the bread for her family. [FN14/4/2013]

The household tasks give dignity to a woman and structure to daily life. Values about a good mother, and a good woman in Armenian society are strongly related to the way a woman manages her household (Dudwick, 1997). If the children have gone to school, the women take care of the house, and in the weekend the daughters help.

Household tasks can fill the whole day, and women keep themselves busy with many things. Sometimes tasks take very long, such as baking bread or washing clothes, and a whole morning is spend on this, but there are many other small tasks as well. These tasks make life continue. Once, when in Armenia, I had to say goodbye to someone, who I would not see afterwards any more, and I felt sad about this. After she had gone I started to do the dishes and I discovered that by continuing to work, life also continues. Some women mentioned this also about the period just after their husband had left [Int 6/5/2013, Int 10/5/2013]. In this way, household work contribute to the continuation of life, to keep your hands busy so there is less time to reflect on feelings (Nussbaum, 2011). Also, doing things in the household, and therefore for others, makes life fulfilling, and in this way a woman is working on her wellbeing. Therefore, both the continuity the household task give, and the aim of the task have positive influence on the wellbeing of a woman.

The husband who is not there

After some tasks, it is time to drink coffee, and have a chat with the neighbours, but before that I will explain a bit on the husband who is not there, and what the effect of that is on the daily life of women. Inside that house is the place the women work, also if there are men around.

Tasks of men are in general more outside the house, and where strength is needed. In the morning most men leave the house to earn money, or to take care of animals. In households where no men are around, women often also do the male tasks, ask relatives to do these, or make constructions to bypass the male tasks [G18/4/2013]. An example is to change the wood-heater to a gas heater, as gathering wood is a male task, or to sell the cows, as in a female household, it is impossible to take care of the cows. Heghineh specifically mentions this when she metaphorically talks about the other cow, and although she has done all the work of the other cow herself in the beginning, more recently she changed the tasks, maybe because she made more money in her work so she could afford a gas-heater, or because she could not manage to do all the tasks herself any more.

An interesting aspect of the outcome was that only very few women valued their husband higher than their children, and in here it made no difference whether the husband was gone for *khopan* or not. In one group, where both women whose husband was going for *khopan* and whose husband was not were present, the husband ended up at place number 5, after God, children, parents (both sides), and close family. Yet, for some women, it was very important that the husband should be first, as when Perjuhi Hovamesian (Case 3) told that it was the children who were the most important in her life to make her happy, an older neighbour, Gretha Darukyan corrected her and said: “no, you should say your husband first” [Int 10/5/2013(1)]. However, in general the husband was valued nearly equal with children, but mostly a little less.

Coffee! And neighbours

“When you visit any Armenian home, you will be offered coffee as a hospitality gesture. Armenians feel awful if they can't offer guests a cup of coffee. “Soorchi pokh chunem” (I don't even have money for coffee”) became an expression of showing the worst degree of poverty. (...) Coffee defines the life of Armenians. It is a common initiation ritual. It also marks the end of hospitality for guests, the time to call it an evening and go home. And it's a popular morning fix.” (Petrosian & Underwood 2006:162-163).

After the household tasks, it is time to drink coffee, to visit neighbours, or for both. People often visit each other. In some cases, it is good to first check whether it possible to come over for a visit, especially if the relationship is not very strong, or if the people live a bit further apart. Nevertheless, neighbours just come and go, often just for coffee or a short chat. And even when people come only for a short chat, they are offered coffee. This is also what Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) observe, and they state: “The fact that other women also have their husbands in *khopan* and that men from the same village often go to the same place to work in Russia gives women more reasons for sharing (and commiserating)” (Menjívar & Agadjanian 2007: 1259). Sometimes I could observe this, in general people told that they would share more with their sisters yet sometimes also with their neighbours [Int 13; G3/5/2013], and Tamara Hanemian [Int 13/5/2013] even took her neighbour to our appointment to illustrate the importance of the neighbour in her life, and they stated that always if one of them suffered of a health problem, they would instantly call the other to come over and measure blood pressure. In this way, the women illustrate that their wellbeing is not only relational, relations also have positive influence on their wellbeing, creating an opportunity for a person to contribute to the wellbeing of the other person, creating also wellbeing of the first person. It is also hand creating a place to reflect on life together, either joking or serious, which is actively shaping wellbeing.

In the following paragraph, I will focus on the elderly or needy neighbour, who has a special role in the village. Furthermore, I will focus also on the parents-in-law, who are part of the household, but sometimes also become elderly and needy, and need to be cared for. As we have seen, neighbours often check on each other, especially if the person is sick.

Challenge of elderly/old age & sickness

Tatik Iskuhi tells: *“Every morning, Tatik Rose comes to visit us. Sometimes, she does not come, and then Abraham, my grandson, goes to her house to check on her. Tatik Rose does not take care of herself any more. She comes so often to my house that we sometimes get annoyed. You know, when she was younger, she was the head of the post-office, but now she has lost her head. Yesterday morning, she came here seven times with her broken radio, and asked me to fix it. One time she even brought the charger of her phone, and asked me whether she could maybe use that to fix her radio.”* She laughs, and I see the sadness she feels, because Rose is a good friend of her, but now she sees that Rose is getting worse by the day. *“She does not wash her cloths any longer, and when we ask whether we could wash her cloths for her, she says that they are already clean. She starts to smell very bad, because she doesn't wash herself either any more. We give her food, and also some distant relatives who live in the village sometimes bring her some food, but her own children scarcely visit her.”* [Combined fieldnotes]

It is the duty of the women to take care of the sick and elderly, especially of their own parents-in-law. Many women, like Heghineh (Case 2) and Perjuhi (Case 3), live(d) together with their parents-in-law, and take care of them as long as they live. In the village, people are speaking negatively about children who move away and visit their parents only seldom. However, it seems that because of outmigration of children, more elderly people stay alone. Francisca Antman (2010) makes the same observation in rural Mexico, where she states that migration causes more elderly people to stay alone, while on the other hand the caring task for the children who stay in the village increases (Antman, 2010) and also Wright (2012) mentions that when family-members migrate, it puts a strain on the others to take up the family duties such as caring for the elderly (Wright, 2012: 477).

When I shared this observation with people in the village, they were not at all sure whether it was true, and said that in some cases (for example the case of Tatik Rose mentioned earlier) it is not because of migration that people do not care for their parents, but because of a negative influence of a daughter-in-law, or because it seems the fate of their parents does not belong to their concern any longer. And they also showed cases to illustrate that most people do take care of their parents. For example, one morning, we visited a woman called Liya Kabbendjian for coffee, and she told about her neighbours whom she just visited. The husband had gone for *khopan* for many years, and last September, also his wife and two children of 1 and 5 years old had joined him. However, the whole family returned a few days ago, because the mother of the husband had gotten sick, and needed treatment. They came back to care for the older woman, and they did not know how long they would stay in the village, but probably for quite a while because they had started to cultivate the land [FN7/5/2013]. This case shows that the care for the parents is a duty people still take, even if they live far from them. They chose to come back from the live they had just started anew in Russia, to care for the grandmother. In this way, they lived according to values in society, keeping their dignity, and working on their wellbeing. However, if more and more sons move away to Russia, more

parents will stay alone, as it is foremost the task of the sons family to take care of the parents, and it is seen as shameful to let parents go to an elderly home (Dudwick, 2003). The family I stayed with had cared for the parents-in-law until they died, and still cared for an unmarried handicapped aunt. However, the wording 'cared for' does not exactly describe the relationship, as often the in-living family-members are really part of the family, and help as much as they can in the household chores. The relationship with the in-living family-member is important for the household, and by sharing and reflecting on life, they are co-creators in wellbeing. In this family, the husband left as the only of his brothers and sisters in the village, and when doing genealogies, it became clear that it was common that only one child stayed in the village.

Value of children & health

For Roza (Case 1), there are various aspects in life that are important for her wellbeing, like being together as a family, good luck and health. She mentions health as the most important, and it is interesting that she puts this strong value to health when she describes wellbeing, as many other women do not give it a very high place. It could be that Roza knows what she misses by not being healthy herself, and therefore understands the value of health. Yet, the answer on what makes her happy is her children, and solely her children, and she mentions that her sons and daughters share and borrow money from one another, so it seems that, although the sons has been gone for around ten years, there is still a good relation between the siblings. Roza really sees this, and appreciates this. Although the circumstances in her life are not easy at all, she still has a hearty personality, and smiles a lot.

The difference Roza makes in the answer on the question about wellbeing and being happy is interesting, and it seems that for her wellbeing is more a wish of things she does not have, while being happy is caused by what she does have. This difference was made by more women, and it shows how wellbeing is more connected with hope, a future orientation, while being happy is more momentarily. However, I think that also the current situation should be regarded as part of wellbeing, as the way a person reacts on a challenge is what influences the wellbeing. In this way, the fact that Roza sees health as very important, even though she is unhealthy, and she is still happy because of another thing she has, namely children, shows her agency in changing her focus, and therefore contributes to her wellbeing. And when looking at her, not only her children are an explanation for this, but also her faith, which she also mentioned as important to her life.

Conclusion

In this first empirical chapter, it became clear that children are significant in the shaping of the wellbeing of a woman, as because a woman lives for the wellbeing of her children, she practices fulfilling life. The relationship with her children becomes more important when the husband is gone, and the woman misses the affiliation with him. Additionally, taking good care of the children gives the woman dignity. By nearly all women, children are the seen as the most important for their wellbeing, but there are other issues important as well, such as neighbours and friends, and other ways of spending the life in fulfilling ways such as taking care of others. In the coming chapter, I will more elaborate on the specific theme of life fulfilment, applying it to work.

In this chapter, the social relatedness of women became clear in the coffee, and this is often a time to shortly reflect on wellbeing together, illustrating the importance of interaction.

The challenge of elderly and sick people in the close neighbourhood of the women creates tasks, illustrating the involvement of a woman with people around her, where she is able to contribute to the wellbeing of others, illustrating life fulfilment for her.

In the different aspects of daily life, it became clear that continuing doing tasks contributes to the continuity of life, and in this way makes it possible to continue the process of wellbeing. In the amount of tasks and other facets of life, choices have to be made. However, when being busy all the time, it could be that the mind has little time to reflect on life. Yet, this also reflects the daily process, where the continuity of choices together with the continuity of action create a future orientation, causing the continuation of life itself.

Intermezzo II

The following three cases portray again four women, and this time also one husband. Also in these cases, some challenges which the women face are highlighted, to get a practical idea of how the women work towards their wellbeing. In the first case we meet Shushan, who recently faced an accident of her son and who struggles to make her life continue, and social interaction plays a big role in this. The second case is about Haykuhi and her husband who have to decide to stay in the village or move away instead of continuing to live separately, choose to work on their wellbeing together and in the same place. In her case the (nuclear) family is important. The third case is the continuation of the story about my neighbours, the challenge is some unexpected news about the husband of Ohanna, and we see how both she and Perjuhi react to this news, and furthermore we see a creative side of Perjuhi.

Case 4¹ Her son

Shushan Gevorkian is a woman of 34 years old. She married when she was 16, and she has two children, a daughter who is 17 and a boy who is 12 years old. Her husband has gone for *khopan* for 8 years, and he goes from in early spring until December. When I visited the family half March he had already left. When I entered her place, I felt a bit depressed, and I first thought it was because I myself missed my boyfriend. After a while I realised that the atmosphere hung in the house.

My translator, who knew Shushan beforehand, told that she was a very hearty woman who always welcomed people, but when I interviewed her, it felt difficult as if she did not want to talk with me. After a while I ended my interview, and she offered us coffee, and we had some time with her and her two kids. It was holidays, so the kids were at home. The girl was studying very hard, as she had to prepare for the final exams at school, and only when a good result is booked it is possible to enrol at the university. The boy, called Maher, was really interested in me, and asked all kind of questions about the Netherlands, my life there and about my boyfriend. He was very active, and wanted to play outside, but his mother had told him to stay inside a little bit. After a while, I discovered that his hand did not look normal, and although he tried to hide his hand, I found out that he missed his hand. I had to think about the story I heard about the boy who had lost his hand while playing with fireworks last new year, and I realised it was this boy. Later, my translator confirmed this, and she told that he used to play the piano very well, and that he was also a great singer.

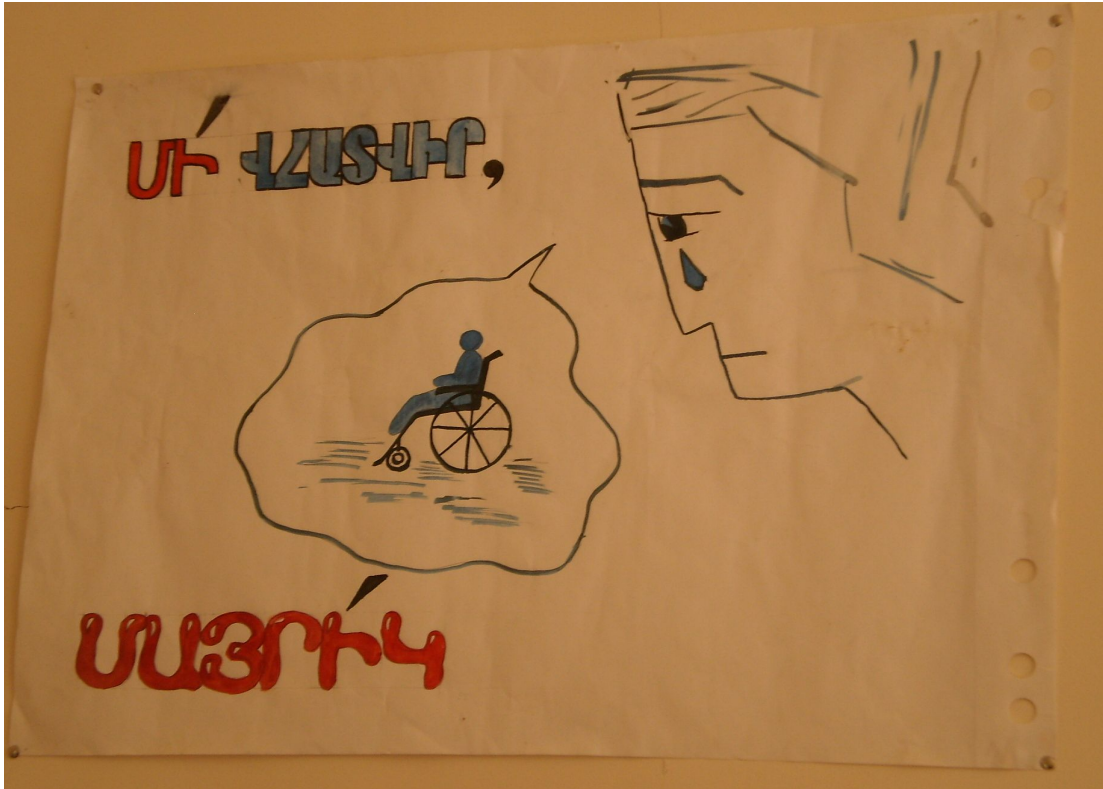
In the weeks after this, I often met Maher, and he was always very happy, greeting me and asking me about my boyfriend and my plans. At a certain moment, I met him with my translator, and Maher told that he was going to piano classes, in Ijevan, which he was still able to attain, even though he had only one hand left. He looked very happy when he told us where he was going.

We tried to visit Shushan another time, but she was often out, and sometimes the neighbours told she had gone to the hospital with Maher. One evening, about a month later, we visit some family of my translator, and they planned to visit Shushan and we decided to join them. The family we joined consisted of her cousin who had married but divorced a year afterwards, with her little son of 2 years old, and the brother of the cousin,

1 I continued the numbering of the cases in order not to mix up the cases of the three intermezzo's.



Picture 3: Shopkeeper
Anahit Keolian at her shop, which is also the largest shop in the village.



Picture 4: Don't cry
The words say: 'Don't cry, or don't be sad, mother.' The painting is made by the daughter of Heghineh (case 2). It hangs in the kindergarten.

a 14 year old boy who looks as if he is 8 years old because of a growing disease. When we enter the house, Shushan and her daughter are at home, and they welcome us in. We get coffee and candies. The atmosphere in the house is heavy, and I wonder how they feel, but as we are just joining some visitors, I don't feel like making an interview. The little nephew of Varsik walks around from the one to the other, and has lost his shyness for me. He gets candies from Shushan, and distributes them to other people, and collects them in the second round. Everyone looks at him, and laughs at the things he says, while not much else is said. The atmosphere gets lighter as everybody laughs at the funny nephew. It seems as if they are forgetting all their other sorrows for a while. [Int 9, FN19/03/2013, FN 2/5/2013]

Case 5 We will move

Haykuhi Ermoian is a woman of 31 years old. She married when she was 18 and she has a daughter and a son of 10 and 6 years old. She has studied psychology, and now works in the kindergarten as a special needs assistant, for already four years. When she married, she was still studying, and sometimes it was hard for her to combine taking care of her children and her studies. But her mother-in-law helped her a lot. At the moment, her parents-in-law are in Russia, and her husband has been gone to Russia as well for the past seven years. Yet, he did not feel comfortable in Russia, he feels he is not native there, and he missed his wife and kids, and therefore he has not left for Russia this year.

The job of Haykuhi is being organised by a Danish NGO, and there is one other person working in the same program. The goal of the program is to let children who are mentally limited still participate in normal classes, and to give all children equal chances in computer literacy, where children who come from poor households get the chance to use the computer at school. Haykuhi also visits parents at home to help them in raising their children, especially if they are lagging behind at school. Haykuhi likes her job a lot, the thing she likes the best about it is to develop herself in it, by training and contact with colleagues. After her studies, she stayed at home for about 5 years, but it did not fulfil herself that much and now that she has a job, it is better.

She tells about the time when her husband had been gone “If my husband is around, we just feel like a normal family, but when he is in Russia, we call everyday via Skype, but it doesn't feel as nice as when he is there. When we call, we talk about our children, about life, sometimes I ask him for some money, and about how we miss each other. I didn't like it when he is there and he did not like it either. We decided together that he should go, because it is necessary.”

I ask her about her dreams, and she tells “When I was younger, I dreamed that I would be walking along the Seine, and visiting cities like Paris and Marseille, but now I don't have dreams. If my husband will get a good job with a good payment, then we can realise other dreams. One needs money for that, and if there is money I can dream more”. I ask her what a good life is for her and she tells “being educated yourself, and use this in how you raise your children and interact with people around you. And peace in your family. That is what we have now, and if me and my husband would have a good job, and a nice house, it would make it perfect. I would like to live in a city, I don't really like this place, as there is no cinema or theatre or café (see picture 2). Also there is not much work, and my job is not well-paid. This place is not really good for children, they can't interact with other cultures. I would like to move to Yerevan. I don't have much friends here, they all live in the city”.

Later, we visit her at home, and her husband and children are also around. They live at the end of the village, in a big old house, where it is cold in winter. We chat about life,

differences between The Netherlands and Armenia, and about marriages. They show some DVD's about marriages where Haykuhi has been, and in a local marriage we see her dancing in between the other women of the village when they go to welcome the bride.

We talk about their life, and they tell that they are trying to go to Yerevan. They are both looking for jobs there, and hope to move there soon. They need around 100 000 AMD per month, but at the moment Haykuhi earns only 33 000AMD. Even if her husband would have a job with a minimum payment (around 30 000 AMD) they would not earn enough to live from. They have lived in Yerevan before, but their business failed. That is why they have come back to Gandzakar, and that is the reason Lilt's husband has gone to Russia. Yet, they tell "we love each other, and we want to stay together as a family." And he tells "I don't want to go to Russia anymore, I don't like it there. I have tried to find a job here since November, but I haven't found anything. Now we will try again to go to Yerevan, if we can find a job there". [Int 3, FN13/3/2013, FN28/3/2013, FN11/5/2014]

Case 6: My neighbours part II "We will receive a guest"

Perjuhi does not have an easy place to live. She has married her husband, moved away from her family, like many women in the village, and lives in this place, together with her mother-in-law. She tells that she would prefer to live in a city, but that she cannot as she has to live in this house. She misses her family, and people around her. In Gandzakar, she did not manage to make a lot of friends yet, as there are not many people of her age living close to her. She takes care of her children and works together with her mother-in-law in the garden.

On one afternoon, my interpreter and I pay a visit to my neighbours Perjuhi and Ohanna. They are both at home, but after a short while, Ohanna goes outside to work in the garden. Perjuhi puts the kettle on the fire to make tea, and washes the dishes. On the table stands a bowl with fruit, a plate with candies, and a beautiful cake. She tells "Yesterday, it was the birthday of Ohanna, and many family members came for her birthday, as most of them live in Ijevan". The cake is the birthday cake and Perjuhi tells that she has made this cake herself. "I really like baking cakes, and I always try to make something beautiful for a birthday. Another time, I tried to make this cake as well, but it failed. But I changed it a bit, and I made it to be another cake, with a chess theme".

I have asked her before to make pictures of things she likes to do, and she shows a picture of another cake she has made. It was the occasion of the birthday of her daughter, and as she goes to kindergarten, she has to treat the rest of her class. Perjuhi made a cake of a doll with a gigantic dress, which was the cake. On top of the cake stood a real doll, but the whole dress was made of cream. The cake looks beautiful, and Perjuhi is proud of her creation (see picture 5).

The husband of Ohanna has not contacted his family since he left, until about two years ago. And now, after these two years, he planned to come back. Ohanna does not look forward at all to the return of her husband, and tells that she has pain in her stomach and in her legs, and that she doesn't feel like meeting her husband. When I meet her on the street, she gestures at me, and after a while I to understand that she complains about her body, and about the fact that her husband will come back.

I ask Perjuhi how she feels about the fact that her father-in-law will come back, as she has never met him before. She says "it is as if we will receive a guest. I don't know how it will be. I have prepared a bedroom for him". People in the village talk about Ohanna and her



Picture 5: Doll cake

Doll-cake

The cake Perjuhi made for her daughter's birthday. (Picture taken by Perjuhi Hovamesian)

'Budur, my favourite place in the village' (Below)

I had asked some women to make picture of parts in the village that they liked very much. Perjuhi made this picture and told that she really liked this mountain, which is called Budur. (Picture taken by Perjuhi Hovamesian)



Picture 6: 'Budur, my favourite place in the village'

husband. They guess that probably the woman with whom he went to Russia has died, and then he cannot, or does not want to, live alone. At a birthday party at one of the neighbours, the men talk about how it was when Ohannas husband left long ago, and they laugh and wonder about how Ohanna will be when her husband will arrive. [Int 16/3/2013(1); Int 10/5(1); FN15/4/2013; FN 16/4/2013]

Chapter 5. Afternoon

In this chapter, a woman continues her daily life, and goes out for work, at a job or on the land. I will discuss what the role of work is in the life of the women, connecting it to the different aspects of wellbeing. Another central theme in this chapter is the challenging question people face of moving away from the village or staying, a crucial theme for people living in Gandzakar, and especially for women whose husband is already in Russia, which was illustrated by case 5. At the end of the chapter I will discuss more in-depth the core theme of fulfilling life, one of the aspects of the conceptual model, which influences and is influenced by the process of wellbeing.

As in the previous chapter, also the daily life of women will structure this chapter, and is alternated with the other contents. We will have lunch, work on the land and bake cake. Also these aspects of life are related to life fulfilment, as having lunch with colleagues, visiting people and working on the land are also strongly related to how women whose husband is in Russia spend their time, and thus how they choose to fulfil their life.

Lunch, sharing life

At a certain day we go to the kindergarten to meet some women there, like Haykuhi Ermoian of case 5. We arrive around lunch time, and instantly we are invited to join their lunch. Nearly all the women who work at the kindergarten are present (around 10), except for the teachers who eat with their classes. It is a festive meal, and a lot of different kinds of foods are on the table. A lot is home-made, such as sour vegetables (tomato, pickles, cabbage), compote (a juice), and tolma's (meat and rice filled cabbage leaf). Furthermore there are different kinds of cheeses, fresh vegetables, noodles, different kinds of meat and fish, and of course bread. There is a special reason for this festive meal, as the brother of Haykuhi just engaged the daughter of the treasurer, and as they have had a party (and two free days) now they share the leftovers with their colleagues. During the meal, the women give some nice foods to one another, and also we get a lot of nice food on our plate. The women chat and gossip about the people in the village who are rich and poor and they laugh a lot. Everyone gets a little glass of wine, and different toasts are made on the couple who is engaged and their families. (FN 2/5/2013)

Eating together is one of the most important social activities in Armenia, and a central element in daily life, like coffee in the last chapter. At all places in the village where more than one women worked, the women would eat together, bringing some homemade food and preparing some more at their work. Whether I went to the municipality, the culture house or the kindergarten, I would always be invited to join their lunch. Lunch is a place to share life, in different aspects: on the one hand for socialising, and to discuss the people in the village, evaluating life, and on the other hand to share important events of the life outside work, especially parties where always a lot of food is involved. In some way, it is a duty to share, to keep one's dignity, but as everyone shares, it also creates nice moments, influencing a positive evaluation, creating wellbeing. Interesting is that at the places where men and women worked together, the men would often eat separately, and go out or go home for lunch, while the women would have a system of dividing who would bring the food for lunch, and who would prepare the meal.

At home, there is not so much a fixed time for lunch, and it is often defined by the time children go to or return from school. Often women who worked at home, would work in the house or on the land in the morning and prepare or re-heat some food when they would feel hungry. However, eating and drinking coffee are similar in sharing, and an important reason to eat is if there are visitors, and I often would have lunch at homes of people I knew well. Sometimes people would help one another with land-work such as ploughing the land, and as an appreciation for the work done they would be invited to join a meal.

Eating together or drinking coffee is an important aspect of a visit, and it is a shame if one is unable to share their food with visitor. Sharing food and bread, is like sharing rice in other cultures as mentioned by White (2008) where she also connects having enough rice as important for wellbeing. An Armenian “expression is “*Panir u hahts – rits bats*”, a formula of hospitality which means “so little bread and cheese, but so big my heart” (Petrosian & Underwood, 2006: 41). One of the main reasons mentioned by people telling about the bad sides of having too little money was the fact that they would not be able to be hospitable, and share [G11/05/2013]. Petrosian & Underwood say (2006: 41): “To be *hahtsov*, that is to be “bready”, is the best compliment, meaning to be hospitable, to never sit down at the table without guests”, illustrating again the importance of the value of hospitality, and the wish of people to be together with others. Like rice in other countries, bread is in Armenia important for the wellbeing, and bread is strongly connected to hospitality, as relations are values strongly, and sharing strengthens these relations.

Working

Paid job or not?

Work is an important part of the day, and a paid job takes a big part of the day. In this part I will describe who work, and what role a job has for women. In Armenia, nearly all women have attended secondary education, and many have studied afterwards. Yet, very few women have a paid job (Paci, 2002:11). In Gandzakar, the main places women work are the kindergarten, the municipality and the culture house. Furthermore there are women who work at schools, in a clinic as a cleaner like Heggineh in case 2, or who have a shop (see picture 3). However, many women do not have a paid job, but work at home, on the land and in the household. This is also what Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) find, and they found that around 20% of the women has a job. As we have seen in chapter 3, during the Soviet times, nearly all women worked outside the house, as according to Levon Galatian [Int 18/3/2013] everybody had to work, otherwise the police would give you a job, and we have seen the change after the Soviet Union when many women stopped working, because of the economic crisis, but also because it was seen as good if a woman would stay at home, to protect the Armenian culture (Dudwick 1997).

In some interviews, I asked the women if they wanted to work, and a woman called Maremik Khatcherian told: “I asked my husband once whether I could work, but he said no, and now I don't start about it anymore, because he doesn't like that” [Int 13]. And another woman called Liya Kabbendjian said “I would like to work, but I know my husband doesn't let me go to work. Once I tried to persuade my husband to search for work for me, but he got really angry and said 'don't touch upon that topic anymore' ” and her mother-in-law adds “your father-

in-law didn't want to let his wife work either, so it is a kind a family tradition.” I asked these women why they thought some men would not let their wives work, and they said “some husbands are afraid that if the wife goes out a lot, she goes to other men” [Int 6/5/2013]. In this wish to work, and the husbands who do not want them to work, the women often make a choice to listen to their husband. They hereby illustrate that their husband is more important than their personal development, or at least that the long term good relationship with their husband is more valued than their wish to work, showing that their family is more important to their wellbeing than a job, but also illustrating that they do not always have the possibility to choose themselves what they want. Listening to their husband is partly a personal value, but it is also part of a value in society that a wife should listen to her husband, which make her respected. Also, connecting it to imagination mentioned by Nussbaum & Sen (1993) who state that it is hard for a someone to imagine something what she does not know of, it could be that woman do not know that it is possible to argue with their husband. Agadjanian *et al.* (2007: 7) state that sometimes husbands did not allow their wife to work because of young children, but I did not hear this argument, on the contrary as is shown in the following paragraph.

There are also quite some women who work, and many of them like their job. At a group interview at the culture house, I asked what their husbands thought of them working, and one woman told “my husband is a farmer, he likes that I work. If there would be a big factory, many more women would work there. When I had little kids, I wanted to stop working, but my husband said, 'no, you are educated, keep working', and now I am working already for 38 years.” Another woman told “my husband was in Russia when I started working. He could only accept it when he came home. Yet, when he came back, he said he likes it, because he knows I enjoy working, going out and meeting friends” [G8/5/2013]. In the case of Haykuhi (Case 5), at the moment she is the only one working, while her husband is unemployed.

I ask Anahit Keolian, who works in a shop, what she thinks about men who do not let their wives work, and she says: “It is very bad. It is a traditional thing, it's Armenian, men work, women stay at home. Yet it is not only tradition, because there is also a problem now with finding places to work, there is unemployment, for everyone, but more for women. Armenian men like their wife, they are not that strict to them. It is more love and respect, the men think they can do everything themselves, they don't want to let their wife do the hard work” [Int 8/5/2013]. However, this still implies that the wife should listen to their husband, although he is not a bad man. Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) also mention the absence of jobs as a major reason for women not to work. Yet, they also observe that women are sometimes not allowed to work by their husband, and they mention that especially wives of husbands who left did not work (Menjívar & Agadjanian, 2007). However, Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) do not observe this difference as significant¹, and I did not either, as both wives of husbands who left worked and wives of husbands who stayed in the village.

Some women create their own job, such as Heghineh in case 2, and a women called Lusineh Akhoyan, who started her own bakery. She tells “In the morning I wake up at 8, I drink coffee and eat something and take care of my pig. After that I will bake the whole day. First I bake for the school kitchen, and bring it to the school. I also get private orders from people, and I make them. Every day I get some orders. I really like to bake.” [Int 6]

1 In their villages of research in rural areas in Tavush and Ararat *marz*, 16.8% of women married to a not migrant, and 16.2% of the woman married to a migrants worked (Agadjanian *et al.*, 2007: 19).

Still work at home

As we have seen, there are quite some women who have a paid job, although it is a minority. Yet, all women work at home. According to (H. Petrosyan, 2005), a paid job has a different status for men and for women, while for men a job has the highest priority, for women with young children, a job does not give status and housework comes first. The value in society regarding women who work, provide less dignity to woman who work, and therefore she has to show that she is a good mother as well. However, a job can also give a certain dignity, such a woman who is respected for her autonomy [Int 13/5/2013], or because she is a schoolteacher [Int 14/5/2013]. A paid job does not give women less tasks in the household, while a women spends around four hours per day on these tasks, a men spends nearly no time on this (H. Petrosyan, 2005). As we have seen in the last chapter, the tasks for men and women are very different, and it could be that Petrosyan did not take this into account, yet it illustrates the fact that women work many hours per day, especially if they have a paid job. Anahit, who I quoted before, also states “If a woman comes home, she has to cook, clean and everything, however when a man comes home he sits down and does not do anything anymore [FN17/4/2013].

This means that regarding household tasks and amount of work it does not make a lot of change whether the husband goes for *khopan*, as it is anyway the woman who does the lion's share of the housework, which is also what Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) observe.

Value of work

There are different reasons to work for women, money is not the only reason. During the group interview in the culture house which I mentioned before, the women told how their job financially contributed to their household. For one the money would be finished in one day as a lot has been bought on credit before, another woman said the money lasted one week, and another said 15 days. This does not correspond totally to the finding of Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) who state that the household income is not significantly influences by the fact whether woman works or not. Yet, the woman in the culture house emphasised that for them their job is not only valued because of the money, but also because of the friendship, to spend the day well [G8/5/2013]. Both in the culture house and in the kindergarten, women mentioned that they regarded their colleagues as friends, and women who worked in a shop without colleagues also mentioned the social aspect of their job as the most positive [Int 10/5/2013:2]. A third reason why a job is valuable is, is mentioned in the case of Haykuhi, where her personal development is an important reason why she likes her job. She got bored at home, and her job gives her more challenges to develop herself.

However, when comparing their jobs to their family and their children, all women regarded their job as of little importance to them. This makes clear that for their fulfilment of life, a job plays a role, but their children and their family are valued higher, and have a stronger influence on their wellbeing. For most women who work, a job was seen as something extra, meeting friends, earning a little extra and making their daily life more varied. Some women who did not have a job complained that every day was the same, however, some women who had a job also mentioned this.

Fischer (2012) describes that participating in meaningful projects contributes to a good life, and although I practically never heard that women valued their job in this way, it does not mean that the women do not participate in moral projects. Fischer (2012) mentions also a wider

range where people can participate in moral projects, and in the life of the women, it does take place in society, as unpaid work.

New job

The case of Heghineh (case 2, of chapter 1) gives an interesting perspective in this matter. First she cared a very long time for her mother-in-law, but this burden changed into a source of knowledge and experience for her, giving her the opportunity to be a specialised nurse, taking care of elderly people in different families. She was the first woman in the village who did a job like this, and she was rather brave to start up something like this. However, it also illustrates the urgency of earning money, as without money, her children would not be able to study and have a good future. In her case, the word agency becomes very practical, as her knowledgeability and capability in taking care of elderly have grown during the years, and also the confidence of herself in this, stimulated by friends. As it was not accepted by the majority of the community, there was not much space for her in the beginning, but the little space she got she used in order to earn money, and at the same time changing values about a woman who has a function like her. The difficult years, when she had tried in many ways to keep the family together and to raise her children alone had probably given her some courage and an elephant skin, where she had learned not to let her actions be influenced by all what other people thought of her. This illustrates that she had the ability to change some values and keeping her dignity, like the woman mentioned in chapter 2 by Gartaula (2011). It is difficult to understand what she had gone through as a mother alone, and as another woman told “I don't want any other woman to experience this herself, but if you haven't experienced it you cannot understand”. In chapter 6, I will more elaborately on living alone. The story of Heghineh is unique in the sense that few men do not come back, and also in the sense that she herself started a totally new job, against the prevailing view in the village. Yet, difficulties force people into directions they would not go otherwise, illustrating the hardship of her life.

Gartaula (2011) describes a similar case, where a woman had to stay at home, but as she could not get enough food in that way, she was forced to work on the field. By doing this, she changed the value about women who go out of the house, and she kept her dignity. In this way Heghineh is also respected because of what she did, and people in the village generally call her a hero. This illustrates that an individual is not defined by the values in society, and that culture is not a closed box, but constantly changing because people do not always make choices according to it (Long 2001).

Working on the land

Karineh Gohigian, also mentioned in chapter 2, tells: “I work the whole day at the municipality, and at 5 I go home. In the afternoon and in the evening I work on the small land besides my house, and now during spring I have to do all the ploughing. The moment I like the best of the whole day is the evening, when I am working on the land during the sunset. Then I feel the nature” [Int 8].

Apart from paid work and household work, nearly all women in the village also cultivate some vegetables. Most houses have a little plot of land at the side of the house, where women and children cultivate herbs and some vegetables such as lettuce, tomatoes, peppers, eggplant, gherkin, courgette, and depending on the size also potatoes, cabbage and maize. Some families cultivate this bigger plot at the edge of the village, yet, many women who have a job

and whose husband went for *khopan* do not. The land has a practical reason, as it provides the family with food, yet working on the land has also some other functions, as the following story illustrates.

One day, around 5 in the afternoon, Tatik Iskuhi asks whether we want to join her to her field, and we walk uphill to the edge of the village where we find the fields. Tatik checks on the field, and although I thought that we had come to work on the field, after one minute Tatik walks two fields further where another woman is working. They sit down at the side of the field, and start chatting. A man passes, and he is greeted and welcomed. They chat about the fortunes of the village, about a woman who got sick. After a while a family passes, and they chat for a while and listen to the conversations, and leave again. The two women recall the time that their children got married to one another. The son of the other woman asked the hand of the daughter of Tatik to Tatik's husband, but he refused, because he had to finish his studies first. Yet, the two young people were so much in love and married secretly. They laugh and they chat, and I realise that we will not start working anymore. [FN27/4/2013] The women who have a paid job chat during their meals, and often during their work as well, yet the women who do not have a paid job have other places where they share the news in the village, gossip and laugh with other people than their family. This illustrates the importance of social relations and interaction for these women, as a break of their other work, but also as a way to reflect on life, and as a way to shape their wellbeing. The women themselves choose to find social contacts, as we will see in the last part of this chapter.

Challenge: To stay or to move

Although the life in the village can be good, and family and friends are close, we have seen in chapter 3 that there are many challenges, such as the lack of employment together with the fact that life is getting more expensive. In the livelihood analysis it became clear that, although there are ways to earn money, it is hard to earn enough money for a decent living. These issues are not only important for the husband, but also for the rest of the family as we have seen in the story above and in case 5. Many families have already decided to leave for Russia, or moved to a bigger city in Armenia. Some have the intention to come back, yet many have settled and never come back to the village. This causes many empty houses in the village, and is related to the problem of care for elderly discussed in chapter 4. Especially for women whose husband is going, there is the question whether she follows him or not. Most women place a high value on their family being together, however, many do stay in Gandzakar. In this part I will see what role agency plays in this decision and how much freedom there is to make a choice, and how women are shaping their wellbeing in this. I will look at two cases, one of Haykuhi (case 5) and the following story about Liya.

A woman called Liya Kabbendjian explains why she did not move to Russia with her family, even though her husband is going: *“I know it is hard for my husband to be there, in the beginning it was really hard. But he lives close to Moscow, I would not like my kids to live there because I think they will grow up like Russian people. If we would have the money, my husband would stay here in Gandzakar. I know about an Armenian guy of 21 years old, who grew up in Russia, but it was going very bad. He was always on the street and then he started fighting with the police. Then his family paid money not to get him in jail, and now he is living in a village in Armenia, and family-members take care of him. Moscow is a big city, if we would move there one can't control the going of the kids, they go out and you don't know if they go with good or bad people, they can just go anywhere. When I was living there before, one of the neighbours*

got sick, and my husband went there to help, and the people were so surprised that we came to help them, but for us it is normal to help. Yet, in the cities, women have a better life, there is a beauty-saloon, but here we have to work hard on the land and go to the forest. Still, we always keep our hope, we live with hope, that the future will be better, and the whole country will become better, and my husband finds a job here. That is the only thing missing for our wellbeing, a well-paid job. Some families here have nice houses here, but they now live in Russia. It is good, they enjoy their young years and can come back later, when they are older.” I ask whether she could live in the Russian countryside, but she says: “I prefer Armenia, it is better to be here because there is a school in every village, and there is shop”. [Int 6/5/2013].

To stay together or children's future

Both women face the same problem, but the outcome of their stories is different. Haykuhi and her husband plan to move, while Liya plans to stay in Gandzakar, while her husband keeps working seasonally in Russia. I will try to understand their decision, and link their stories to other stories I have heard. Haykuhi's story is unique as I did not hear about other men who stopped going to Russia and wanted to move to Yerevan with his family, however, I have heard other stories of women who wanted to join their husband in Russia. Yet, most women I talked to, lived in a situation like Liya. However, it is good to realise that in my research, I have only met women who were (still) living in Gandzakar, which gives a better picture of the people who decided to stay. It is good to note the context of the village where one-thousand (or one quarter) of the inhabitants of the village are momentarily living in Russia, mostly families as the number which excludes the men who go for *khopan* [FN11/3/2013].

In the story of Haykuhi, it becomes clear that both she and her husband enjoy being together as a family, and that this is a reason for them to do their best to stay together. Furthermore, the husband does not like Russia, and he does not feel like going there again. The decision of the husband to stop going is an central factor in their decision to leave the village, and although it is unclear how much this is influenced by Haykuhi's wish for him to stay, it is clear that she enjoys him being at home. Financial reasons and unemployment play influence their decision, yet, Haykuhi also wants to live in a city, because she can connect better to people and because she thinks her children will have better education opportunities. Interestingly, also Liya sees the positive side of the city, yet, for her children are a reason to stay in the village as it is a safe environment for children to grow up. Hopes for the future of their children play an important role in their strategy.

In Haykuhi's case, the wish to stay together is the cause of their plan to move, and this can be seen also in other cases. In Heghineh's case (case 2) the reason to move to Russia in 2000 was also to stay together with her husband, as he would not come back any more to the village. Some other women saw their husband and children all move to Russia one by one, and now they were left alone in the village. They also emphasised that they valued it very much to be together as a family, and that it would be a reason for them to move to Russia as well in the recent future [Int 6, Int 8].

Gandzakar and being Armenian

Archambault (2010) in her article about women whose husband migrates in a region in Tanzania, questions where people want to live, and she observes that many women want to stay in their region, because they are born there, grew up and got children. She mentions the sense of belonging, the feeling of being home, women speak about, which is related to the place, the

house and the relationships. However, she also observes that this is stronger for older people, while the younger generation tends to move to the cities before or soon after marriage. There is some link to the Armenian case, but also a difference and Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) observe that more than half of the Armenian women want to move out of their village, both those whose husband is in Russia and of women whose husband is not, however, of the women whose husband goes for *khopan*, there is a stronger wish to move to Russia, explained by Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) due to the economic limitations in Armenia, the wish to be with their husband and the need of their children.

In my research, I found that for younger or unmarried women, the choice is to go to Russia or to stay in the village, which is aptly illustrated by an unmarried woman called Inga Edinjikian (33), who said “I am not married, but I want to marry”, and when I asked whether she wants to marry a man who goes for *khopan*, she said: “together we will go to Russia, to work and live there. Armenia is not good, and it is not good for a woman to stay alone” [Int 10/5/2013(2)]. Still, many people hope that there will be more local jobs in the future and that there is no need to go to Russia. When asking a class of 15 year old pupils where they would like to live in ten years’ time, and whether they would go with their family to Russia, many responded that they liked their village very much, however there were many who said they would go with their family to Russia. Yet, it became clear how valuable their village is for them, and that there is not so much of a difference between moving away within the country or to Russia [Int School 13/5/2013]. Also women claim that their village is very valuable to them, as expressed by Liya and Heghineh (case 2) saying that they feel connected to the land here. Lusineh Akhoyan (the baker mentioned before) needed to leave, as her sons and husband all live in Russia. However, she says “I think I will miss my relatives and neighbours very much, but I do not have a choice, because I want my family to stay together”. For her, it is not a choice, and in her behaviour I felt that she could not make a choice in it. She is pulled between two places, one where her family-members live, and one where all the other people she knew live. Still, for many women it is a choice they make, and they have some freedom to choose any direction. Yet, linking the choice to having a fulfilling life and the importance of children or even grandchildren for the women as mentioned in chapter 4, for most women choosing for the most fulfilling life is going where their children go.

The value of being Armenian is also treasured (Dudwick, 1997), and we have seen this in the story of Heghineh, where she taught her children to be proud to be Armenian. Being Armenian is connected to the identity of people, and the value they give to themselves. Liya, in her story, mentions the difference between the people she knows in the village and her neighbours in Russia, who were amazed when her husband offered help. Her own dignity is highly connected to this way of living and helping, and it would be a challenge for her to live in a totally different environment.

The decision women have to make upon moving or staying makes them think about what they value, yet it also challenges their values, as different values such as the value of staying together as a family and their love for their village are conflicting. The importance they give to different responsibilities such as taking care of (grand)children and caring for elderly parents gives some insight in what the women see as making their life fulfilling. Furthermore, it shows where their hope is based on. For some, it is on the future of their children, but for other it is on the politics and the economy of their country, and they hope that in the future there is employment and as a result of that they do not need to make this decision anymore. Albeit, they are also thinking about the next generation and some of the women share their hope that their

children will later live in Russia or elsewhere with their family, not having to face the difficulties in the village [Int 20/4/2013], and having more chances for further development [Int 8/5/2013].

Baking cake, eating sweets

“If one gives you a bitter bile, you, in return, serve him with a sweet’. Pastries, cakes, and other sweets are traditional symbols of hospitality in Armenia” (first part Sayat Nova, as quoted by Petrosian & Underwood 2006:168). Often when I would come to a house, I would be offered cake, sweets, dried fruit, homemade syrup, mostly together with coffee. The few times I had brought a self-made cake or some Dutch sweets to a meeting, the women valued this very much, as they understood it as a token of my appreciation for them (combined fieldnotes).

Cake making and cake eating are two different things. When Perjuhi made the cake, she tells she enjoys the making, and she makes it in order to share the happy event of her daughter’s birthday with a beautiful cake at the kindergarten, and the other cake for the birthday of Ohanna. By making cakes, she shows that she values the visitors, and, in case of the birthday of Ohanna or her daughter, she shows that she is a good Armenian woman, as she is able to make nice cakes. Many other women made cake at special occasions, either for festivities, or in order to show a visitor how much she was appreciated. I have seen many beautiful cakes, and this proves the statement of Petrosian & Underwood (2006) “Armenian women are refined pastry creators whose inspiration never ceases” (p. 168). When eating a cake, or some other sweets, it is like sharing life, sharing a certain event, accepting the hospitality offered by the host, and often sitting around the coffee table, and enjoying the moment. The case of Shushan (case 4) gives the quote of Sayat Nova a new meaning, as Shushan is in the middle of a hard period in her life, but she still serves sweets to others. While enjoying the sweet, not the taste, but the way the young boy acts create a smile and make the heart lighter for the moment.

Fulfilling life, what is valued more

In this and the previous chapter, we have seen different aspects that make the life of a woman fulfilling, of which children are the most important, and jobs take an important part. Time wise, women spend a lot of time working, both inside and outside the house, in jobs, on the land and in the household. Yet, the quantity of spent time does not explain totally what is valued higher by women, but the goal of the activities does, as the underlying goals and choices reveal how they construct their wellbeing. For jobs, the goal is to earn money, which is for the family, yet, the money a woman earns does often not make a big difference in a household, especially if there is also income from remittances (Agadjanian *et al.*, 2007). Jobs are however important for the social contacts, valued highly by the women. Still, most women claim that they would give up their job at any moment if it would be better for their children, and as can be seen with the woman who bakes, being together with her family is more important than to keep on baking.

The household tasks and working on the land are most important for the family, as the first is essential for daily life, and the second important for food-security. However, also working on the land has a goal in itself, as many women who still cultivate a reasonable plot, claim that they like to be in nature and working on the land. However, many have stopped

cultivating because of the hard work, and, as Agadjanian *et al.* (2007) claim and I also observed, the work on the land is less necessary if there is a steady income from remittances. The other side of the work on the land is a social relevance, as the bigger fields lie outside the village, and land of different families border. The relationship with the 'land-neighbours' is appreciated, and gives news from other parts of the village. It is important to realise the value of the different works in itself, yet, many women regarded their day as 'always the same' and what they appreciated most were their children. As expressed by the women in the kindergarten "Armenian women do everything for their children" [Int 4].

Connecting it back to affiliation (Nussbaum, 2011), relations become very important. Although women do something for themselves, most of what they do also has the goal to work on the wellbeing of others, mainly their children. Yet, as this also links back to their own wellbeing, it can nevertheless be seen as shaping their own wellbeing.

The case of Shushan is tough illustration of this where the pain of Shushan because of the worries and sadness about the pain of her own son is soothed for a while by the happiness created by the little visiting child. Women do everything for their children, they live for their children, and if something happens to a child, it also happens to the mother (See also picture 4). Some people of the younger generation (in their 20ies) tell that it is not good that their mothers only live for their children, and they feel sometimes restricted by their mothers protection or ideas, although they see that it comes from love. They would like their mother to have more her own life and do things for herself instead of only for her family (personal conversation with young women living in Yerevan).

In the story of Perjuhi, it is interesting how she develops her own creativity in making cakes, and that the times when she is most happy to use this creativity is when she can serve others with it. The cake for her mother-in-law was nice, but the cake for her own daughter was much more special, and she was very proud of it. It seems as if she can enjoy things more when she does them for her children, illustrating that her children are important in her life.

Women chose to live for their children, but the migration of their husband makes this even more important. In the cases that the husband does not come back, the woman has still a reason to live for, and it might be even protecting herself from the missing of the husband that she is focussing so strongly on her children. However, this is not the same in all cases, as the story of Haykuhi (case 5) has shown, as the couple wants to stay together. Fulfilling therefore is related both to the time spend on tasks, the kind of tasks done, and the choices made by women regarding their situation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, different ways of how women practice wellbeing in the aspect of fulfilling life have been described, such as a paid job and working at the household or wider society. When deeper understanding the concept of life fulfilment, it becomes clear that it is important to look to the goal of the time spend, to understand the reason why a woman values certain aspects higher than other. When comparing children and a job, it can be seen that all women with children valued their children much higher than their job. As became clear in chapter four and was confirmed in this chapter, women live for their children, and also many other duties in life, such as a job or household tasks are indirectly done for the children, especially because their husband is not there.

However, children are not the only explanation of having a job, as women emphasised that they value their job also intrinsically, and because they meet their friends at the place of

their job, showing the plurality of wellbeing, and the social component of it. Some women were not allowed to work or were not able to find a job, and this first group of women makes clear the high value they give to the relationship with their husband, even when he is away, limiting their livelihood options. The latter illustrates the situation of the village, and the cause of labour migration of the husbands, namely the lack of employment. This shows that wellbeing is personal, and different for every person, and also that a person is not always able to fulfil all the different wants she has, as there is no room or freedom for it (Sen, 1999). Obeying the husband, even though he is not there, can also be seen as working on the relationship with him, as when he is gone there are limited ways to do this.

In different cases, women made choices regarding their wellbeing. What they regard as important plays a role, as could be seen in the part on fulfilling life. This can also be seen in the challenge on to leave the village or not, where certain values attached to the village, and with how women want their children to grow up are reasons to stay. Yet, values do not cover the total decision-making process, as also feelings of belonging play a role. This could be connected to the importance women attach to having close family and friends around. A not so highlighted aspect is that a person likes to stay in one place, and this can be connected to another level of choices for wellbeing, namely to like or enjoy something. This can also be seen in sharing sweets and baking cakes, which has a double function, as on the one hand it gives the woman a certain dignity, as hospitality and sharing food are valued, however it also is a fun activity, where a woman can apply her creativity, changing the sometimes not so happy moment into a happy moment, or prepare the festivity by working hard making cakes and beautiful food already days in advance, starting the party already. In this way, women strengthen their relationships, and do something what they like, adding to their wellbeing in two ways.

Intermezzo III

In the following cases that form part of the inspiration of chapter 6, we will meet again four different women. The first case describes the life of Tamara, whose husband has been gone for a long time, and who has during the years, and we will see how she deals with this situation, creating wellbeing without her husband but with other people. The second case portrays Azniv, a younger woman whose husband has been gone in order to provide the family with their own house. In her case we see the conflicting attitudes of missing him very much and being able to cope with this. In the third case we see the third and last story about the case study on Perjuhi and Ohanna. Ohanna's husband has returned, and we see how they have adapted to the new situation. Change offers possibility for new choices and is a moment for evaluation, and we see that they both deal differently with the situation.

Case 7 Like father, like son-in-law

Tamara Hanemian is 48 years old and married when she was 18. She has three children: two daughters and one son. The son still lives at home but the daughters are married, one lives in Russia at the moment, and one lives in the village. She has four grandchildren. At the moment, her house is being reconstructed, and she is living in the mess of that. Her husband works in Russia for over ten years, in construction.

A normal day for her starts at 7, when she makes fire, prepares food and drinks coffee. After that she works on the land until she is tired, and then she returns to the house to do the housekeeping. In the day she alternates the housework with the work on the land, and in the evening she watches television, only soap-operas and she goes to sleep at around 11. I ask her what she likes best, and she says "drinking coffee, relaxing... But if I have a good mood I like everything". All her family members live in Gandzakar, except for her two brothers who also in Russia for *khopan*. She meets her family-members a lot. The first time when I visited her, she told that her husband would be back in a few days. Yet, nearly two months later at the second time I interviewed her, she was preparing for the return of her husband at the end of the month.

I ask Tamara what is the most difficult time in the year, and she tells "when my husband is just back from Russia it's the hardest. During the years he has changed a bit. It takes time to adapt to each other, he thinks a bit like Russian people. Like he takes things easier." I ask her about wellbeing, and she says "if you have a good house, and an easy life...". And I ask her how she works on that and she says "My husband earns money. I am saving money, working on the household." She would grade her wellbeing with a 6,5 (on a scale of 10) and hopes it gets better, but doesn't know how. I ask about her husband, and she says "he's renting a house, but I don't really know how he is doing". Her children and grandchildren are very important to her, and she values them higher than her husband.

The second time we do not meet at her house, and her neighbour has joined her to meet us. Tamara looks pretty, and she tells she has just gone to the hairdresser. She tells, half joking, half serious "when my husband comes back at the end of the month, I'll go to the hairdresser again. I will look more beautiful, and he will not go anymore". I ask her neighbour whether her husband will go to Russia as well, and she says "no, he works as an electrician in the village.. If he goes.." - and she gestures that she will kill him if he does. I ask Tamara whether she is looking forward to the return of her husband, and she says "Of course, I missed him a lot! And I will miss you two as well, me and my neighbour see you walking

through the village everyday”.

I ask Tamara whether would like to move to Russia, but she says: “No, I don't want to go there. I like it here a lot. I like everything, the sound of the river, the nature, the trees. I have been to Russia often, as my father was in Russia, and we visited him a lot. I want to stay here. I am born here, and my father went for khopan, for 30-40 years. We grew up with four kids, and we missed our father a lot!” Her neighbour, half joking, says: “Ha, probably your father had a Russian wife there! That is why I don't want my husband to go”. And together they discuss and tell that if the husband is away, it affects the family a lot. Though, if the mother would go it would be worse, because the kids are more connected to the mother, the husband is mainly making money. The children will miss their father, but they need their mother much more. [Int 11, Int 13/5/2013]

Case 8 “A human being can get used to everything”

We have made an appointment with Azniv Ainilian, and she has specially baked a cake for us. While we are sitting around her kitchen table, she keeps serving us dried fruit, candies, bread, cheese and coffee. Azniv is 33 year old and she has three children, two daughters of 14 and 12 and a son of 6 years old. She got married when she was 16. Her husband works in Sochi, in construction, already for about 7 years. He comes back every winter, or if he still has work, they go there in summer holidays as Sochi lies at the sea. Three years ago, her husband stayed there for three years, but now he comes every year. He has been here last January, but he had to do a lot of things in other places in Armenia, so he only stayed home for ten days.

She tells “I was not very involved in the decision of him to go to Russia to work. He decided, but I did not mind, because I understood. In the beginning when we were just married, we lived in different houses in the village that were empty. Each time only for a few years, but now we bought this house. I value it very much to have my own house now.”

I ask her whether she calls him, and she says “Yes, ten times a day! I spend a lot of money on that. We talk about how we are, what we do. Every time I go out I tell him where I go, and when I come home I tell him that I am home. One time I told him I was going to the shop, but then I forgot to tell him that I was back, and then later he called and asked about it, haha, I totally forgot it.” And I joke that she probably talks more with him when he is in Russia than when he is here, and she says “that's true, here we speak less, because he is often going to see other people, and then you need to know where he is, with whom. Yet, I think that because we call each other so often it is easy to get along with each other when my husband comes back”.

We talk about wellbeing, and she says “Now that we have a house it is better, and now I dream that we will one day also have running water, a toilet and a bathroom. I think it will improve in the coming years if things continue like they go now.” About her husband, she says “My husband is not doing very well, he misses his family very much. He rents a small container and lives there alone. It is really cold in winter! Now his brother has joined him shortly ago, but he works in a different place so he might leave again.”

I ask her what makes her life fulfilling, and she says “That's a hard question. My husband. And my family. My husband is more important than my children, because they will marry one day.” And we talk a bit about that fact that many men leave the village, and I ask her what she thinks about that. She says “It is bad, the age in the village is getting higher as many young men leave after marriage. I know one couple, and three days after they married the guy left for Russia. The girl suffered a lot. For me it was also very hard, but it is getting easier, a



Picture 7: Outside

Playing children in the late afternoon in the village. When the weather got warmer, more and more of the life was situated outside.

human being can get used to everything. Some women whose husband is here tell that they can't live without their husband, but once he goes, they discover that they can also live on." However, the second time we meet her I ask her what she will advise women whose husband will go to Russia, and she says: "I would tell them not to let him go. Life is hard..." And after a brief silence she says: "I will try to give them hope. It will have a good end, you're doing it for the good...". I ask whether she wishes her daughters to have a life like her, with a husband who goes for *khopan*, and she says: "No, let them not go for *khopan*. Let the child also go with her husband." The daughter responds: "Russia, yes, I want to go there!" and I ask why Azniv has not gone to Russia herself, and she tells that there is no house there for them to live. If there would be a house she would go.

In the way Azniv describes her life, it becomes clear that social contacts are very important. She tells: "When I am finished with my household, sometime in the afternoon I mostly go to the house of my mother-in-law. There are always a lot of people, and that is good. I am very open and talkative, I like to be with people. Before, I did not have a good relation with my mother-in-law, but I was still going there, and I take care of her and visit her. A while ago, we had some problems with our neighbours. The neighbour damaged my father's car that was parked in front of our house. My father said something about it and they started arguing. I don't like the way my neighbours talk, but we greet each other. I don't keep bad feelings inside myself, you know, you do it to yourself if you do that".

I ask her about faith, and she tells that she reads the bible, watches TV programs about religion, but she doesn't go to church. With Easter, she grows wheat and put eggs there, and with the festive meal they eat this, together with fish and rice with dried fruits, and they drink wine. She tells that recently the village celebrates this feast bigger than before. I ask her whether she also fasts, and she says "no, I don't know how to start and to keep on going. If I would know that, I would do it." She tells that she prays with her children before they are going to bed, especially if they are young. And sometimes she speaks with her husband about faith. "Not often, sometimes he asks how I can believe in it, and I would prove it. When I prove it and talk about it, he believes also."

In the end, I ask her what is more difficult, to have financial hardship together, or to have you husband going for *khopan*. And she responds "the last. I would prefer my husband to be here." [Int 7, Int 20/4/2013]

Case 9 Neighbours III "A family member has come home"

The whole village is talking about the fact that Ohannas husband has come home, and as I am their neighbour, people ask me how it is. I just see the man walking in the garden, and the children of Perjuhi talking to him, but at a certain point, I am able to ask Perjuhi how it is. She tells that it is going quite well, but the household tasks have increased. "I am so busy with the work in the household that I don't have time for other things. I do not even have the time and mind to do, or even think about other things. Whenever my husband is not here, there is always more work for me, because then I have to do the things men normally do. And my father-in-law is not able to help a lot, as he is old and sick. He is too weak to cut wood or these kind of things". Also Ohanna complains about the fact that she has to work very hard now, even though she has pain in her legs and her back.

Perjuhi tells that her mother and father-in-law do not talk. "It is even hard for me to imagine they will ever talk. He tried to talk with her, but she doesn't respond. He and my mother-in-law both have their own bedroom, and I sleep in the other bedroom with my two



Picture 8: Aspect of faith: Church

Pictures 8, 9, 10. Three aspects of faith. Church, khadsj, candles.

8. The village church, which still looks like a barn as it has been a barn for long during the Soviet times.

9. Candles, most people go to church to light a candle and to pray. 10. Khadsj, or cross-stone, with a 'holy' tree. People go to the cross-stone to pray, and it is valued the same as church. Sometimes if a person is sick, people kill a rooster and hang some cloths and some feathers of the rooster in the tree.



Picture 10: Aspect of faith: candles



Picture 9: Aspect of faith: Khadsj

children". I ask how it is for her and for the children, and she tells "After the first days, we have gotten to know each other, and it is going better. Now, it is like a family member came home. Yesterday, some relatives came to visit us, and it was a very happy time. We have made a barbecue, and in the evening, the children were dancing with my father-in-law, and everybody was very glad. Yet, Ohanna did not dance, she was sleeping on her bed". I tell her that it is hard to imagine for me that a husband can just come to 'his' home even if he has not sent back any money, and just live again as if he always lived there. She tells: "I don't really know, I just respect him because I respect my husband" and a neighbour adds: "all you do for your parents-in-law, you do for your husband. When I was young, me and my husband lived together with my parents-in-law, and it was not always easy. My mother-in-law was a nice woman, but she lost her mind, and I had to take care of her for over 6 years. But for your husband, you should do it, it is an offer you bring". Perjuhi more or less agrees with her, but she adds "I did not see the hard period before my father-in-law left, when he and my mother-in-law were quarrelling a lot, so I don't really know what has happened, and I don't really know about the feelings it has created in each of them". Later we talk about her own husband, and I ask what he thinks of the fact that his father came home after such a long time. She tells "I think he is fine with it, but I don't know exactly, as we are not close together to be able to talk about it well. I am really looking forward to the time when he will be here as well." feelings it has created in each of them". Later we talk about her own husband, and I ask what he thinks of the fact that his father came home after such a long time. She tells "I think he is fine with it, but I don't know exactly, as we are not close together to be able to talk about it well. I am really looking forward to the time when he will be here as well."

Chapter 6. Evening

The last part of the day gives again a new insight in the way women shape their wellbeing. After the busy day, in this evening chapter, we will follow a woman back to her home, where, after all the social contacts she has had during the day, while at work or paying a visit, she is left alone with her feelings, and it could be a time for evaluating the day alone. The beginning of the evening is full of life, as the family that lives in the house are present. However it is also the time when the absence of the husband is most felt, as during the day the woman often leaves the house, and the husband would normally be at his job. Yet, in the evening, he is not coming back from his job. Often the evening is the time to communicate with the husband. Tasks lie and wait for her in the evening as well, but also there is time to relax while watching television. Still, the evening is the time when the woman is alone, and when her personal evaluation of the day and her life take place mostly. It differs per person how she does this, and in this chapter I will give special attention to the role of hope and imagination in all this, which can be based on faith or other things. In the theoretical framework, the conceptual model of wellbeing was presented, and hope and imagination was one of the aspects, influencing, and being influenced by the personal evaluation and choices women make regarding their wellbeing. Three themes will be described in this chapter, first communication with her husband, emphasising the importance of interaction, secondly I will elaborate specifically on the challenge of being alone, and thirdly the aspect of hope and imagination will be explored.

Dinner time, family time

“We went to visit a cousin of my translator. When we arrived, they told us to sit down in the living room with the grandmother. However, the cousin, her sister and her mother stayed all the time in the kitchen, cutting vegetables and mixing them to prepare tolma. After a while, I went to the kitchen and told them I wanted to learn to make tolma. I watched them mixing the minced meat, uncooked rice, herbs, spices and salt, and they put it into cabbage leaves and let it cook on the fire. At the same time they were preparing a salad which we were served with the tea and coffee.” (FN 2/5/2013).

At the end of the day, after work in a job or on the land, or after some visit, women go home to prepare dinner. We have seen the importance of meals and sharing in the last chapters, and now it is time to share the meal within the family. The kitchen is the domain of the wife, and it is a shame to let other people work in your own kitchen (Fertaly, 2012; Petrosian & Underwood, 2006). The times for dinner differ per household, and in some families there is a dinner at six or seven in the evening, while other families consume a small meal at five (consisting mainly out of bread) and a bigger meal at around ten. For most families, and especially for families where the mother has a paid job outside the house, the dinner is the most important meal of the day. It is the main meal to be together as a family, and the evening can be characterised as family time. There is a difference in seasons however, as in winter the whole family gathers around the wood-heater, while in the summer when the evening are light and warm, the children play in the streets (see picture 7) and people work on the fields or meet each other.

Family is the pillar of the Armenian society as mentioned in the previous chapters (Ishkanian, 2002; Dudwick, 1997), Women value family very strongly, where children make their lives fulfilling and give them a future orientation, also the rest of the close family is valued. In the evenings, the people living in the household have dinner together, and often in families where the husband is in Russia, this is the time to call the husband, and if the family and the husband own a computer, cheap calls can be made via Skype.

Communication

Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) describe the importance of communication for the woman to ensure the relationship with her husband, and also the relationship of her husband with her children. Yet, they emphasise the inequality between the husband and the wife as the husband mostly initiated the communication, and in that way tries to control the life of his wife. This aspect I did not encounter at all. One of the causes Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) mention is that often women in their research did not have access to phone or internet, and it could be that because of development in the phone industries things have changed, as during my research all women had at least a cell phone, and some people also had a computer with a good internet connection, facilitating the communication.

The other reason Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) mention is that the husband wants to control his wife to make sure she does not stray. I heard this argument related to jobs, as seen in chapter 5, but for the rest I have not heard it. The case of Azniv (case 8) shows the frequent calling of both Azniv and her husband, and it can be seen as controlling, however it does not seem as if Azniv interprets it like that. In Armenian society it is very normal to call very often, demonstrating the importance of interaction, and once when travelling together with a friend from the capital to another region where he would stay for a few days, and during the 8 hour trip he was called by his family at least every hour, by his mother, by his father and by his brother. Also other friends mentioned this, and it may be a reason why also when a wife and husband are living apart because of *khopan*, they still have frequent contact. The borders of the nation do not make a difference in the amount of calling, as often the different telecom-network providers have very attractive rates to call to Russia and back, and all this together creates a transnational family (Gartaula, 2011). Some women tell that they often ask their husband advise about choices they have to make, something Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) explain as their way to keep their husbands involved in the life at home, so that he will come back. This is part of the explanation, but it is also an aspect in the process of wellbeing, to interact and reflect on life and about the choices that need to be made, women practice also with their husband when he is away.

However, the communication does not mean that the distance is smaller, and women still miss their husband a lot. Even though it is possible to call often, they still describe the feeling of distance and loneliness, as they are not able to share all their feelings with their husband, mentioned by Perjuhi in case 9. Furthermore, not all couples have this frequent contact, and Tamara (case 7) tells that she does not really know how her husband is doing.

Late evening

After dinner and calling, the children do their homework and go to bed one by one. The woman does some work in the household, until she goes to bed. Sometimes the woman

shares a room, or even a bed with her children, but in other households children sleep in a separate room. Wright (2012), describing the influence of separation of family members states that “stable marriages generate happiness and trust (Layard 2005), yet the prolonged separations from family members due to migration often threaten this stability (Wright, 2012: 477). In my theoretical framework, I argued that relations are influencing wellbeing. In this way, relations can have a positive influence on wellbeing, although they do not define wellbeing. Yet, as a part of the social situation a woman is living in, relations help her to reflect on her situation, and help her to be confident to pursue wellbeing. Therefore, instability, absence or both can have negative influence on the wellbeing of a woman. The woman end the day often awake alone, without her husband.

Challenge: alone

At the end of the day, full of tasks and people, with always something to do, to make life continue, in the evening, everything slowly stops, and there is time to reflect on life alone. Although not all women who are alone feel lonely, I will in this part of this chapter, talk about loneliness specifically as it is connected to being alone. During the day, most of the time, the women are together with other women, with their children or with other relatives. All day they are busy, and make sure they just continue their day. Most women do this by doing all the house chores and the work on the land, visiting relatives and neighbours, and caring for their family: children and elderly people. A normal day does not differ so much from a day of a woman whose husband has a job in the village. The evenings, when getting to sleep and waking up the next day however are the times when it is most felt that the husband is not there. Some women expressed that they miss their husband when they don't “feel him around in the house. And when the kids are behaving bad” [Int 13]. As mentioned before, raising the children, and especially boys, is mentioned as something difficult by more women, and they tell that they would like their husband to be around, as in Armenian society, boys learn to listen to men better than to women.

A woman whose husband did not go abroad said “if my husband would go, I would feel unsafe in my house, and move back to my parents-in-law” [G11/5/2013]. This unsafe feeling was mentioned by more women, but there were also quite a few woman who lived just with their children, both with younger children and with older ones. Another woman mentioned that she misses her husband in decision-making, especially concerning the family. “I miss someone beside me, to share my thoughts”, and this is also what other women express, and Yeranuhi Darukyan tells that now it is very hard that he will go to Russia again “My sons have grown up, and marry, and there are a lot of changes in the family, my daughter-in-law just moved in, I want to share this with him” [Int 26/3/2013]. This illustrates that wellbeing is experienced as relational, according to this woman, as she enjoys things more if she can share them.

Many women expressed that the first years of *khopan* of the husband are the hardest. A woman called Nina tells that her husband has gone to Russia the first time: I miss my husband very much. I feel bad because of that. A man should be with his family, but still I don't miss him because of that, but because I miss him personally” [Int 16/3/2013(2)], yet, even though people get used to it, it does stay hard, as becomes clear in the cases of Roza and Azniv (case 7 and 8), and expressed by nearly all women.

Sometimes I was wondering whether all women would really miss their husband, as when a marriage is not working out well, going to Russia is also a way to continue the marriage, without having to stay together. It was impossible to ask directly to women whether

they maybe did not miss their husband, but in some cases I had the idea that the women were very able to live without husband. Connecting it to the high percentage (20-80%) of domestic violence in Armenia according to Shirinian (2010) and Amnesty International (2008) who also state that it is very hard to divorce even when a marriage is not working out, as it is seen as shameful. Although I knew about this, during my research I did not see direct proves of this, albeit I did see how men in a family were the ones who set the rules. Keeping the appearance of a good marriage, and the dignity connected to this could be an explanation for this.

She and he and she

According to a woman (Anahit Keolian) who knows many women in the village but whose husband does not go to Russia, the effect of *khopan* on women is really bad. We talk a bit about it, and I state that if two people do this for each other and for your future together, it must be love, because why else would someone do this. But she says “If you don't see one another for so long and many times, the love disappears. If the husband goes for *khopan* many years, it has various effects on the women, like hormonal and psychical.” And we start talking about sex, and she tells “The man who are in Russia go to other women, especially to prostitutes, and they can take diseases. Woman who stay here practically never have sex with another man, but the standards are different for men” [Int 8/5/2013]. Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) observe the same, in both of the countries of their research, Armenia and in Guatemala and they state: “Whereas the husbands in both contexts are expected almost by their nature to have affairs and not suffer adverse consequences for that, the expectations for women are very different” (p. 1252). In Armenia the difference of values regarding sexual behaviour is strong, and starts already very young. While girls are expected to stay virgin until they marry (Temkina, 2010), many guys do not feel manly if they do not have sex, and many start to have sexual intercourse at a very young age [FN 8/3/2013]. Traditionally, Armenian men were seen as sexual actors, while women were seen as passive (Kamp, 2010). The fact that many migrants have sex in Russia, especially if they have sexual intercourse with a prostitute, leads to an increase in sexual transmittable diseases among migrant-woman (Sevovan, 2011).

It was difficult to talk about sexuality with women directly, but I could talk with people about men in general. In case 7 for example, the neighbour jokes about the father of Tamara, that he had a different wife in Russia. Sometimes, people joke about this, and when talking to a woman who was not married but knew many people in the village, I asked how many of the men would have sexual contacts abroad. She stated “most men stay with a different woman in Russia. She can take care of him, men prefer that. But the wife here does not want to believe in this, that's why she does not tell about that.” [Int 10/5/2013]. And when I asked people whether the husband of Haghineh (case 2) would have a different wife there, people said “if a man is gone for so long, you can assume that he has a wife there” [FN27/4/2013]. Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) state that men's infidelity cannot be assumed automatically, as migrants are often socially isolated in the place where they work, but they also acknowledge that it can happen. They state that women sometimes know that their husband engages in an affair, but that the woman did as if she did not know, to keep the marital union intact, both of material reasons as remittances would still come and because their children need a father (Menjívar & Agadjanian 2007: 1253). Most people I talked to about this issue assumed that it was normal that a man had a different wife, and this is also what the Armenian women in the article of Menjívar & Agadjanian (2007) state.

If he does not come back

Inga Edinjikian (the same as in the introduction) tells, when I ask the effect of *khopan* on the family: “*it is bad. They miss him a lot! The only good thing about khopan is the money they get from it. Women become more aggressive if their husband leaves, they are pleased with nothing, because of the distance, and because of the missing. In different ways, you know, health and sexual. It is different when he is far. When the husband is away longer, and he doesn't send money any more, she wants to buy things and she has to buy it on credit. They get stresses because of that. If the husband goes for a shorter time, it is not that much, but if they go longer, they get more stressed, especially if he doesn't come back any more. But very few don't come back at all*”. [Int 10/5/2013(2)]

Sometimes, a husband does not come back, as we could see in the case of Heghineh, and how it was for a long time in the case of Ohanna. I met very few other women whose husband did not come back. For the women whose husband does not come back, it has a very strong influence on their lives, and as Inga told, sometimes women become aggressive. Another woman who had worked in other villages told the same story, and said “the become aggressive because they have to do so much work, and they miss their husband” [FN10/5/2013]. Both the financial need, the workload and the missing give pressure to the woman, and not all women are able to deal with this. I can imagine that this is true, however, I have not encountered any aggressiveness of women whose husband had been gone for long, except for the case of Ohanna (Case 3, 6, 9). In this, it can be seen that the going of the husband, and especially if he does not come back, influences their wife in different ways. First on the aspect material conditions, as the woman does not any longer receives remittances, and therefore does not have money to buy things, which causes stress [G2/5/2013]. Secondly, on the aspect of affiliation, connected to what Wright (2012) said about being separated from a family member for a long period of time, causing a decline in wellbeing. Thirdly, it affects the feeling of dignity of the woman, as in society, marriage is valued, and if the husband does not come back, it might feel also as her failure. However, the last aspect can also be countered, as women in Gandzakar looked with pity on women whose husband had not returned, but also regarded them as strong, as they often had continued their life after he had not come back, and managed.

This not coming back of some husbands does not only affect their own wives, but has effect on all women in their thinking about *khopan*, as illustrated in the conversation between Tamara and her neighbour (Case 7). It was hard to talk about this topic¹, and I could only talk about it with women whose husband did not go, or whose husband had not returned. Men would talk, or more often joke, about it, especially the men who did not go at the moment. The fact that it was hard to talk about it, illustrates the fear that is connected to the topic however, and in some cases I could feel that women were afraid something like that would happen. The fear is related to the different aspects, mentioned above, but it could also be a fear of a discontinuity of the circumstances where she had gotten used to. It seemed to me that many women were very able to live without their husband most of the year, but this aspect of *khopan* made it much harder.

1 My interpreter explained that questions which 'supposed' something, or talked about an uncertainty in the future, were difficult to ask because it would feel for women that if they would answer it, it would become true because they had talked about it. Also, it would seem as if I wanted it to happen, or at least that I would be guilty about it if it happened.

Or he comes back... after a long time

Most women whose husband had gone to Russia and not come back afterwards, had left in the 1990ies. In that time it was harder to find a job in Russia, and many women spoke about the hard time then, when there was very little money, and many husbands were gone, not all of them sending money [Int 8, Int 14/5/2013]. Yet, there are also some stories about husbands that come back a long, long time afterwards, like the husband of Ohanna or other stories [FN9/3/2013, FN10/5/2013].

Often these men have not contacted their family for a long time, and they have not send money to their wife. In most cases, people guess that they have had a wife there and that he has had some problems in the place where he lived in Russia. And, although it might seem easy for a husband to just return 'home', there probably has been a reason for deciding to come back, as he has lost all his dignity and value as a husband in the past years. Yet, he is able to come back, and has the right to live in the house. The house is traditionally inherited from father to son¹, and although women live in the house also, and for example in the case of Ohanna and Perjuhi, they have managed the house together for most of the time, the men have the right to live in it. I told another woman that if this would happen to me, I would refuse the husband who would come back after so long to live in the house. She told that this would probably happen also, but that she did not know of any case where it happened.

Watch television

Most people claim to watch television mainly in the evening. In some houses though, from early morning till late evening the television was on. Even when nobody was watching, it would still be on. Mostly on Armenian channels, and sometimes I would watch programmes like X-factor with the children of the family. One day, I entered the home of an older woman, and she invited me to sit down, and to watch, together with her and a friends, some series with many police men. When the broadcasting stopped, she jumped up, took the broom which laid in the middle of the room on the floor and continued cleaning [Combined fieldnotes].

When Kuehnast (2000) writes about her experience in Kyrgyzstan, at the time when the Soviet Union ended, she talks about the influence of television in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, and she quotes a local colleague who says “you see, in this cultural vacuum other people's fantasies are filling our own emptiness, since we have no other ideology any more” (p.100). And in this she offers two other sources of imagination, namely cultural ideas and ideology, and television. Furthermore, she tells how people do not have money or possibilities for other entertainment “No one attends the theatre anymore. All that seems left is television, It is free and easy while our lives are expensive and difficult” (Kuehnast 2000: 110).

In some households, the television is on all day, and at any moment when a woman does not have anything to do, she will watch television. Some women told that they valued television, because it was one of the few sources of news [Int12], others told that they mainly liked soap-operas [Int11], and some had their favourite series they followed. In some houses, television would be on all day, but in other houses, the television would only be turned on in the evening, and seen as a moment to relax. Some women told that they did not have time to

1 I am speaking about cultural inheritance, as the legal ways do not specify to whom property should be given. With this I mean that it is a general practice that the youngest son with his family will live in the house of his parents, and take care of his parents until they die. Traditionally, also the other sons partake in the division of inheritance, but daughters got only a small part, and only if they have sons (Wallis, 1923).

watch television, as they were busy all the time, but that they were happy if they could sit and watch. Television can be seen in different ways. Firstly, it is a source of information, and can strengthen the feeling of being connected with the nation, or it can be a source of self-development. Secondly, it can be seen as a form of ritual, structuring the day when the children are gone to bed, or like a meal structures the day. Thirdly, it can be seen as a moment to push the time, and not having to think about hard things, or feel that one is tired. Fourthly, it can be seen as a moment to enjoy, as there is no theatre in the village (see picture 2), and alternatives are too expensive, television is still a moment to relax.

In these ways, watching television links with the aspect of interaction, where a woman, together with other, evaluates life, especially with soap operas. Furthermore, it links to inspiration, where ideas for her life can be influenced by the series a woman watches, in that way directing wellbeing.

Hope & imagination

Although in different topics such as television, the issues of hope and imagination were touched upon, the topic deserves special attention. Women base their hope on different things in life, such as money, their children, the development of their country – together with a change in political leaders - and on faith. Most of the time, the way they were looking at the future was influenced by one of these aspects, but at the same time, many women were afraid to have hope or dreams for the future, illustrating the limit to aspire Nussbaum (1993) and Appadurai (2004) talk about.

Money-based hope

I ask Arevik Torlakian, whose husband has left for Russia three months ago, about her dreams for the future, and she says “I don't dream so much. I hope that my children marry, but I don't plan, I am afraid to plan. My heart wants a lot of things, but I don't believe in it. I don't know in which ways it will be good, and that's why I don't really think about it a lot. My ideas, dreams and reality don't match, so I just accept. Yet, I have some hope, because now my husband is in Russia. I hope that he earns a lot of money and comes back to live here again.” (Int 1)

Many women expressed that the material aspects they were missing in their life, would change in the coming years, because their husband would earn the money for it. Most women, when looking to the future, would see their material conditions improve. However, there was a difference between women whose husband had just gone for *khopan* and those whose husband had been going for years. The first group expected bigger change from the money of the husband, while the second group still hoped for improvement of the house, but more like a continuous process of improving. There was also a difference in the expectation of when the husband would not need to go anymore. Although nearly all women expressed the hope that one day the husband would not need to go for *khopan* any longer, women whose husband had not been gone for long were more specific that he would go for a short time.

In this way, it seems that women whose husband has been gone for *khopan* experience more room for their wellbeing to grow, while other women have realised that there are limits on how their material conditions can improve, and how their family settings will change in the coming years.

The role of faith

Appadurai states that aspiration is based on wider ethical and metaphysical ideas (Appadurai, 2004), which is strongly connected to religion. In Armenia, the religion is Armenian Apostolic Christian, and although I heard of people in Armenia who claimed not to be Christian (but atheist or Buddhist) almost everyone in the village is Christian of which the large majority is Armenian Apostolic. I asked women what religion they had, but they thought it was a funny question, as of course everyone is Christian. Yet, faith does not mean the same for everyone. In the part about 'good life' in chapter 4, we have seen that some women put God on number one, while others do not place a high value on faith. People, like Heghineh in case 2, tell that the Soviet Union has had a strong influence on the development of faith in the country. Different practices of faith co-exist; on the one hand there is the official Armenian Apostolic Church with its rules and practices, yet in the village as in many other villages, local beliefs also play a large role. The pictures number 8, 9 and 10 show two places to express faith, together with candles that can be used everywhere as a means of praying. One can go to church to light a candle and pray, to meet God, or to listen to a priest, one can go to a cross-stone, or, as Roza (case 1) told, one can pray at home. During the Soviet-Union, one was not allowed to go to church, and many people prayed at home or went to the cross-stones to express their faith.

Some people see a strong connection between the Armenian Apostolic Church and being Armenian. However, even though most people tell that their faith is important for being Armenian, or God is most important for their wellbeing, very few people can explain how they practice their faith and at what moments they think it is important. Heghineh is an exception, and she tells "I observe that it is weird in our society to talk about religious feelings, even though everyone is Christian. Maybe it is because of the Soviet Union." During questionnaires, I noticed that very few women openly talked about their faith, even though when I asked groups of women to order cards with different words relating to wellbeing, God often was placed at number one. Faith seems to be more practiced in private life than in communities, as, although there is a church in the village (see picture 8), no church services existed, and there was no such a thing as a Christian community.

Another woman, whose husband did not return from Russia, tells "the main reason why I could continue after my husband didn't come back, was that I got strength from God. And my children are very important as well" [G3/5/2013]. It is not totally clear in which way she got strength from God, but it was in the hardest time. I heard this more often in the village, that in very hard times God gives them a reason to continue. It might be that God gives hope for the future, and in that way a reason to continue, or maybe when a person feels alone, and not understood by others, or is afraid to go to other people, God can comfort the loneliness, and in this way a woman is able to continue her life, as the hardest times are less hard because of a belief in God. In this way, faith can help to improve the wellbeing of the women.

Hopes not...

I asked Maremik Khatcherian what she wished for her children, and she said "I wish for them a better life, that they can stay in the country, and they won't have to go for khopan". I reasoned that khopan for her is really bad, and she responded "Yes, that my husband is going for khopan is the worst thing in my life. I think it is true for all women. I like it for him that he has a job, but the missing is really hard" [Int 13].

Conclusion

During the day, it has become clear that a woman is busy all the time, with household tasks and socially, visiting people. In the evening, she is with her family, the people she values most, but her husband is not there. Often she will call her husband at that time, a valuable moment for many women, although it is not possible to really overcome the distance. She continues the evening with some household tasks, and is still making life continue, until she is alone, and has time to reflect. Different things can come to the surface, as loneliness and fear are present in the fact that her husband is gone. Faith, or the other things she is living for can come to the front, and can give her new courage to continue. Imagination for the future of her children may give her good dreams. She can also choose to relax, to watch television, maybe together with some of her family members, and feel as if she is back in the Soviet Theatre. The aspects of wellbeing most related to this chapter are relations and interaction, as in the conversations with her close family members she shapes her wellbeing, and also in the contact with her husband, although he is far. Another aspect is the aspiration, in which hope and fear are both influenced by the absence of the husband, and where other facets of life, such as faith and children have a positive influence. In all these moments, she is working on her wellbeing, although it has not become easy alone, she still finds ways to continue, making the best of what there is.

Conclusion and discussion

Women in Gandzakar whose husband went for *khopan* are continuously shaping their wellbeing, like people everywhere in the world. However their specific circumstances make the way they shape and reflect on their wellbeing unique. In this conclusion I will provide an answer to my research question with help of the model of my conceptual framework. My research question was “How do women in a village in rural Armenia - called Gandzakar -, whose husband participates in seasonal transnational labour migration shape, and reflect on, their wellbeing?”. I will start with explaining agency, and what the role of agency is in wellbeing. After that, I will show how a woman shapes her wellbeing on different levels. This is followed by answering the sub-questions of my research question, which are based on the aspects of the model that influence, and are being influenced by, the process of wellbeing.

Continuity came back in my whole thesis, where a daily life was described, and it comes back in various places in this conclusion. At the end of this conclusion, I will specifically come back to this, and explain its relation to wellbeing in the life of the women. After that I will summarise the positive points of my model, and see how it adds to the understanding of the women who stay at home while their husband goes for *khopan*.

Agency at different levels.

Agency is central to the process of wellbeing and encompasses choices and personal evaluation, while also interaction and relations are important in it. As it is both the capacity to monitor, evaluate and to come to grips cognitively with their social worlds (Long 2001), it is essential for wellbeing, and the core of the process. It became clear in the stories of the women how they monitor and evaluate the world and their life, and how they make choice regarding it. Especially the challenges illustrated the necessity to make choices, and showed the way how women actively shape their wellbeing. Yet, not only in the challenges, but in all aspects of daily life, the women construct their wellbeing, illustrating that agency is not only actively choosing a certain option. Whether actively oriented towards their wellbeing or not, women are shaping their wellbeing in the continuous process of interaction, personal evaluation and choices, which are all part of agency. In this process, I distinguish four different levels towards they are working towards their wellbeing: first, to make life continue, secondly, to go for what she thinks is important, thirdly, to do what she enjoys, and fourthly to accept the hardships she faces.

First, as became clear in this thesis, a woman is busy most of the time, with work in the household, on the land, at a paid job, or taking care of others, like her children or a needy relative or neighbour. If women are not busy, they will visit some relatives or neighbour to drink coffee and to share life. Meals have an important function, both because it is a meeting place and a sharing place for women, and because they structure the different parts of the day. To be busy makes life continue, also in case of difficulties, as when the hands are busy it is easier to keep the body going, and in that way life continues automatically. To be working, hosting and being together with other people are seen as valuable in Armenian society, and in this way, by being busy a woman keeps her own dignity.

Second, during a day, a woman lives out of decisions she makes or has previously made. These choices are based on certain values or hopes, which are confirmed or questioned by herself and the people around her, and in the end decided by her, on the basis of what she thinks

is important. All women with children said their children are the most (or second most) important in their life, and this they show by living for them, doing many of their tasks because of their children and always prioritising the interests of the children in the choices she makes. Also women who have a paid job, and value this job, still value their children much higher. A paid job is at the same time also a way to take care of the family in financial ways, illustrating again that women live for their children. However, apart from children, not all women have the same values, and regarding some issues they make different choices, showing that wellbeing is personal. Relating this goal of doing something what she thinks is important to the aspects of wellbeing, it becomes clear that when a woman acts according to values in society, she keeps her dignity. Therefore, if a woman lives for her children she is seen as a good Armenian mother, as that is the way mothers are seen in society, and by living this way, she confirms these values (Long, 2001). Women see relations as very important, especially family relations, and these relations contribute to the wellbeing of the women, and they make choices towards people. In interaction, values in society are confirmed or questioned. This leads to different outcomes of how women shape their wellbeing, illustrating the notions of plurality and personal underlying wellbeing. Hope and imagination play a role in these choices as well, as future oriented thinking directs the choices women make regarding many issues.

Third, although a woman often enjoys the things she sees as important, there are also cases when she just chooses to do something because she enjoys it, which is the third goal. The time spend with family or neighbours is not only a duty, or used for passing the time, but also treasured by many women, as they not only value relations with the head, but also with the heart. During the day, there are many places where a woman interacts with others, evaluating life on serious and joking ways. These conversations function as part of the process of wellbeing, and are treasured by the women. Furthermore, some of the tasks she does with the goal of enjoyment of which baking cakes is a clear illustration.

The fourth and last goal I want to mention is that a woman is working towards her wellbeing to accept the hardships she faces. Women are not ignoring that they miss their husbands or sons, but they are actively and passively accepting the current reality. There are two ways the women face hardships, and the first I want to call contingent conflict, referring to Nussbaum (1993), and the second one I call tragic choices, referring to Nussbaum (2011) and Sen (1999). I have talked about contingent conflicts in my theoretical framework, and during the day this conflict has become practical, as often a woman had to make choices, combining different commitments in her life, such as the commitment to children and to a job, or to other people in the community and working on the land. Mostly, the contingent conflict can be applied to the spending of time, but sometimes it can also be applied to decisions made in the head of a person. Tragic choices is what Nussbaum (2001) and Sen (1999), in their work on capabilities, call when one is able to put some capabilities in practice, but by doing so, it becomes impossible to practice another capability, because of the social limitations. In the case of women in Gandzakar, this becomes clear in the fact that they let their husband go for *khopan*, even though most women value it very highly that their husband would be at home. Furthermore, the tragic conflict between having a certain standard of living conditions, reflecting her values, and to have her husband present the whole year, reflecting other values and aspects influencing her wellbeing, is an illustration of the limit of her agency to change the situation that creates unemployment. However, in the end it is how she reacts on this challenge that influence her wellbeing.

Aspects of my conceptual model

After understanding the goals with which a woman makes her choices regarding wellbeing, in the following part I will answer the sub-questions of my research questions, which are based on the aspects in my conceptual model, namely material conditions, value & dignity, fulfilling life, and hope & imagination.



Figure 3: Model wellbeing (repeated)

The material conditions have been described mainly in chapter 3, and partly in other chapters. It became clear that there is a reason for women to let their husband go for *khopan* as they do not see how they can continue their life in another way, as they need more money. They need money for different reasons, some of which have to do with material conditions, other with education and values which are more linked to the aspects of life fulfilment and dignity & values. However, a certain material condition is also needed in order to be able to go to Russia. In general, the material conditions improve if the husband is in Russia, and, as we have seen in the introduction, this is one of the clear positive aspects of *khopan*. Another aspect related to why women choose to live for the material conditions are the dignity and values. Hospitality and sharing is a strong value in Armenian society, to have a certain level of material conditions gives a woman more dignity in society and more self-confidence to invite others to her place.

Dignity and value are partly or totally underlying many choices women made. Being a mother is another central value in Armenian society, and being a good mother means to live for her children. However, in nearly all cases, there are more values influencing the decision-making of the woman, as she is also expected to have a certain position in society and to take care of needy people in her neighbourhood. The values in society regarding her position in society and in her family can in some cases limit her freedom to choose for actions that go against these values. However, as values are also constructed by actors, it is possible that she is able to change them. Also, there are cases when someone cannot respect all values in society, which illustrates that wellbeing is pluralistic and that multiple aspects influence the decision-making towards wellbeing, as other aspect than values influence her choice, or different aspects are conflicting, creating a contingent conflict (Nussbaum, 1993). However, the value of being a

good mother is very prevalent in the way a woman shapes her wellbeing.

A fulfilling life is another aspect of wellbeing and I linked this very strongly to affiliation, living with and towards others, working on the wellbeing of other people. The fact that the husband is in Russia most of the year makes it hard to take care and share a close relationship with the husband most of the year, but the children have become even more important for women because of that. Furthermore other direct family is important, and affiliation is put into practice here. This has also become visible in the challenge of sick people, of whom many women took care. Women do partake in meaningful projects, although mostly they do not get paid for this and do not see it as a task, contrary to what Fischer (2012) argues. In the village of my research, the caring for others is more linked to the values in society and the task division of men and women, and it is not strongly connected with a choice for making a certain contribution to the world. However, I do state that this adds to the wellbeing of the women, but this is more linked to the belonging in the society, and the social aspects many of these contacts with sick people also give, together with the respect for the husband if taking care of his family member, and in this way it can be seen as working on the relationship with the husband even though he is gone. However, the relationship with the husband does not always stay a relationship of love, but can change more into a functional marriage, where the wife and the husband both perform their tasks as they are expected to do according to traditional Armenian values, respectively taking care of the children and earning money for the family.

Hope & imagination play an important role in the going for *khopan*, as the expectation of money creates material dreams. Often, these dreams come true, but mostly not as soon as thought in the beginning. The money is also a source of imagining a lifestyle where the money earned in Russia is needed and new expenses make the going of the husband to Russia even more necessary. Often, women hope that their husband will not stay in Russia for many years, yet in practice most of the time the husband does stay in Russia for a long time. But aspiration is wider than only material, as imagining a future with married children and grandchildren also plays a role in the shaping of the daily wellbeing. Furthermore, faith, television create imagination and hopes and fears. *Khopan* does not only create material dreams, as also the fact that the husband is gone and stories about men who do not come back create fear and expectations about the continuity of the marriage. However, many women claim that they do not think too much about the future.

Continuity

The main aspect that this thesis adds to a wellbeing approach is the emphasis on continuity, and during the thesis, it was continually shown how continuity is important in the life of women, whose husband has gone for *khopan*. As mentioned before, this continuity is created in different ways, and I distinguish three ways in it, as first, the process of wellbeing is a continuous process (White 2008), and therefore women are shaping their wellbeing in all facets of life, connecting the different facets by the aim of making choices towards their wellbeing or as input for their wellbeing, and connecting different times to each other. Furthermore, the different tasks in life are all demanding, and she can just keep on working, or being busy in different ways, in this way continuing her daily life. Lastly, because a woman has chosen to live for her children, or values in society regarding motherhood make her to choose for this, and because children create a future orientation in the her life, it makes that life continues, also through hardships of a husband who is not present.

These ways together gives women the chance to make the life continue, which keeps her able to do the things for herself and for others, working on the different aspects of wellbeing, but at the other hand, continuing all the time can make that a woman does not have time enough to reflect on her life, which can cause a limiting of her agency to shape her wellbeing the way she wants it to. One of the central capabilities Martha Nussbaum (2011:34) offers, 'reasoning' is "to engage in critical reflection about the planning of one's life" Yet, as every evening there is a certain break in the continuity of daily life, there is some time to reflect.

The approach of wellbeing, summarised in the conceptual model, is a new explanation of wellbeing, and differs from previous conceptualisations. Agency, as defined by Long (2001) is central to it. Although in some cases agency is incorporated in the explanation of the concept of wellbeing such as in Fischer (2012) it has never a central place. Most aspects used in the model are based on other conceptualisations of wellbeing, such as Fischer (2012), White (2008) and Gough & McGregor (2007), and other aspects are inspired by other authors that have written specifically on a topic such as Appadurai (2004) on aspiration, or Nussbaum (200. ; 2011) and Sen (Sen 2001; Nussbaum & Sen 1993). The inclusion of these different aspects gives a more holistic understanding of wellbeing, as more aspects are included. Furthermore, the combination of these aspects, together with the continuity of life that came up as an important aspect in this thesis, provide an active way of understanding wellbeing, where wellbeing is constantly shaped.

The model is designed to provide an understanding of how an individual is shaping her wellbeing in daily life, which implies that it is not meant to give a straightforward answer on the question how someone's wellbeing is, a statement some authors on wellbeing do make. However, as wellbeing is shaped in daily life, and influenced by different aspects in life, I state that it is impossible to construct a model with a fast, clear method to assess the wellbeing of an individual. Therefore, my model provides a more realistic representation of reality, and therefore it is a useful tool in better understanding the life of an individual, contributing to development practice.

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G (date).....Group of women, dated
Int 1-13.....Interviews (1st version), numbered (see appendix 2)
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List of Appendices

Appendix 1: Map of Gandzakar and environment

Appendix 2: Interviews

Appendix 3: List of women who were informants in my research

Appendix 4: Genealogy Hasmik Rezian

Appendix 1 Map of Gandzakar and environment

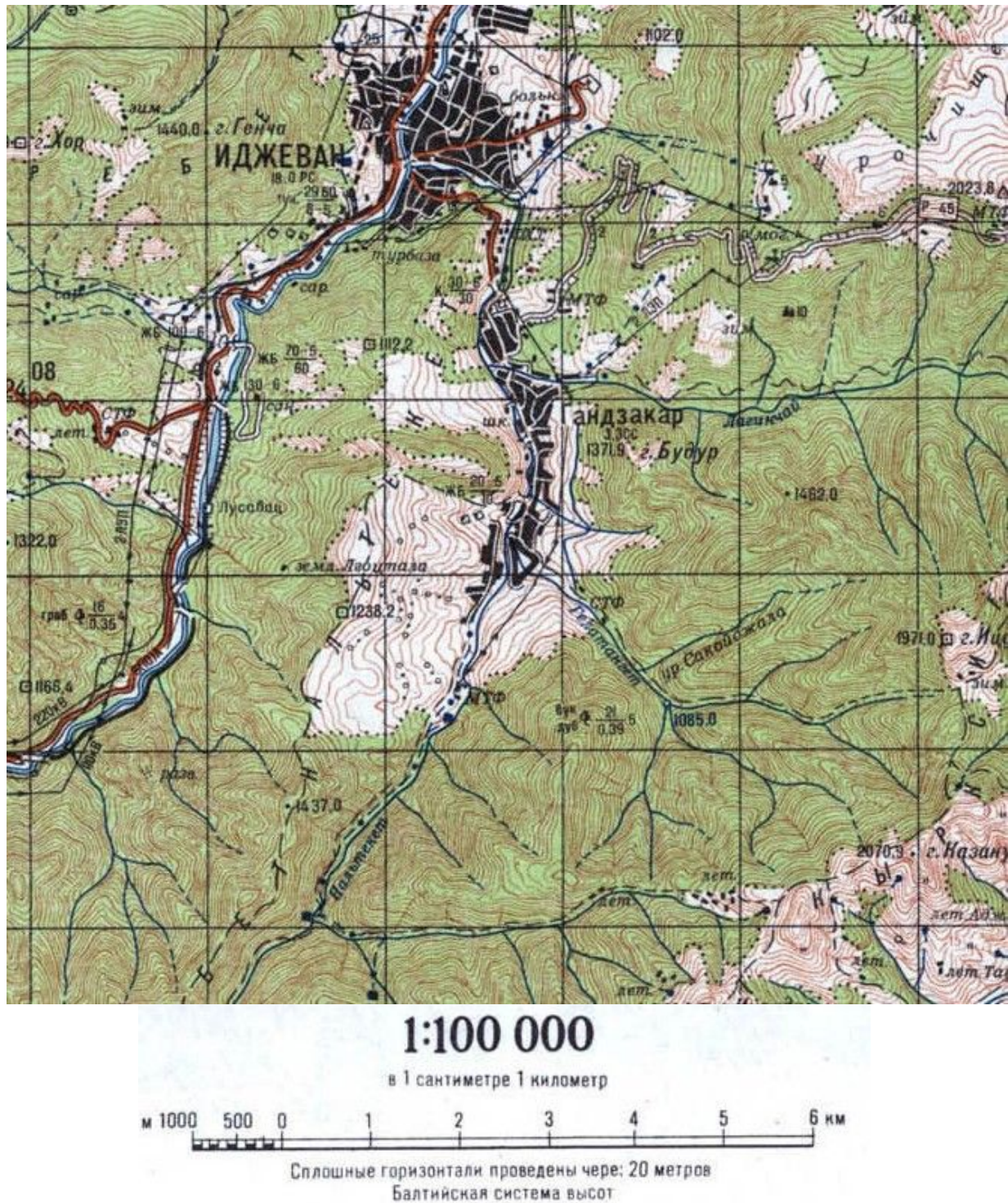


Image 1. Map of Gandzakar and environment (Vlasenko, n.d.)

The names are in Russian, therefore a translation: Gandzakar = ГАНДЗАКАР and Ijevan = ИДЖЕВАН

The map is from 1989, and the village has grown since, as new buildings are built in the north of the village, in the direction of Ijevan. The village is divided in an upper, middle and lower part, referring to the height of the village, and my research took place in the 'upper part' of the village, called վերին (verin) in Armenian and on the map it is encircled with the red circle. This part is also the oldest part of the village, and the oldest buildings date from the beginning of the 20th century, when people first started to build stone houses. On this map, the fields and the forest are clearly visible. However, many of the fields that were used for cultivation during the Soviet Union are now grasslands.

Appendix 2. Interviews

Different interviews

During my research, I have made use of different interviews. First, I had a standard interview, which I would mostly follow, although not always at the same order. In the text, the first version interviews are referred to as [Int 1], meaning interview number 1 with the number varying from 1 to 13.

The other kinds of interviews are referred to as [Int (date)], meaning interview at a certain date. Both the second version as the historical and the secondary interviews are referred to as such.

Interview version I

I would start with an introduction, and I would explained who I was, namely a student, and that I like Armenia, and like to work with women. I am interested in the effect of *khopan*. After that I would ask whether she wanted to cooperate. Often my translator did this introduction for me.

1. Practical

What is your name? (from Int 3) And can I use your name in my writing, or do you prefer a nickname?

- a) How old are you?
- b) What education have you had? (and if work, what work, do you like it)
- c) When were you married?
- d) Where have you lived?
- e) Do you have children? (ages, married, grandchildren?)

2. Living situation

- a) With whom do you live?
- b) Is the house big/small/average?
- c) Do you have running water/electricity/gas?
- d) Do you have land? How much (only around the house, or also another piece? And do you cultivate all?
- e) Do you like the life in this village? What you like, what you don't like?
- f) What means of income does your household have? (Starting from Int7)

3. One day

- a) Can you describe one day from waking up to getting to bed?
- b) What things do you like the best?
- c) What do you not like so much?
- d) In a week, is every day the same? Or what is special at some days?

4. Food

- a) What do you grow?
- b) What do you buy? (all, a lot, little) and where?)
- c) What kind of food do you like best?
- d) What kind of food do you cook often?
- e) Who in your house decides what to eat?
- f) What kind of food does your husband like?

5. Family & Friends (maybe make a network drawing of this?)

- a) Where does your family live?
- b) Where do your friends live?
- c) How often do you see them?

6. Husband khopan

- a) Since when is your husband going for khopan?
- b) How often has he gone (or how long ago did he go the first time)?
- c) How often does he come back? (seasonal, or different, which season?)
- d) Why has he gone?
- e) What is his job? Does he like it?
- f) Who decided? How where you involved in the decision making?
- g) What has changed since he left?
- h) What is different when he is here?
- i) How often do you call him? About what things do you talk?
- j) How often does he send money? Is it enough to live from?
- k)

7. Religion.

- a) Do you have a religion? Which one?
- b) What does it mean for you?
- c) How do you practice your religion?

Dreams & imagination

- a) What were your dreams for your life like 10 years ago? (when you were around 20)
- b) And what are your dreams now?
- c) What influences your dreams and imagination? (hard question... I don't always ask it..)
- d) How is it when you compare it with reality?

Wellbeing

- a) What is wellbeing?
- b) What do you need for is?
- c) How is your wellbeing? (scale 1-10) What would change it?
- d) How is your husbands wellbeing?
- e) And your children's?
- f) And if you compare it with the other people in the village?
- g) And in Armenia?

10. Defining things..

- a) Fulfilling life. Do you have? Why/ What is it?
- b) Hope. Do you have hope? What is it. How.
- c) In general, how do you think people can be trusted? (scale 1-10). Why?
- d) What are important events last year?

11. Gandzakar.

- a) In this village, many man leave for khopan. What is the effect of this on the village?

b) How do you see the future of this village? How do you think it can change?

Do you have questions for me?

Questions I would ask during the second questionnaire

- What is different in your family and in other families ?
- Do you hope your children stay in Gandzakar?
- What would you feel/what would you do if you children would go for *khopan*?
- How do people in the community see you?
- Do you feel you have had enough possibilities for education?
- Who makes most decisions in your household?
- About what kinds of topic do you decide?
- Who has more to say, your mother-in-law or you?
- What was the most difficult period in the time that your husband was in Russia?
- What do you do to make you day a good day?
- Would you like to have a paid job?
- What do you do to keep the relation between you and your husband good, while he is away?
- Do you think one day your husband will be able to move his business here?
- Where do you get hope?
- What was the main financial reason for your husband to go for *khopan*?
- Where can you relax?
- How long do you think your husband has to go for *khopan* still?
- If you had the chance to go to Russia with your husband, would you go?
- How is your health?
- Would you wish your children the same life as you? Why? How different?
- What is your advise to a woman whose husband goes for *khopan* the first time?

Appendix 3. List of women who were informants in my research

During my research I have used different methodologies. In this appendix I have listed the women who were informants during my fieldwork. There were many more, as about 20 extra participated in the participatory groups meetings, and many more I met during my participatory observations on the street, in houses, in shops, in the culture house, the municipality and the kindergarten. Furthermore, I did two interview with men on history.

| Name | Age | Husband gone since | Methodology | Times | Paid job? |
|----------------------|-----|--------------------|---|-------|-------------|
| Arevik Torlakian | 39 | 2012 | Interview (1) (group) | 1* | No |
| Dzovik Babanian | 40 | 2009 | Interview (1) | 1 | No |
| Haykuhi Ermoian* | 31 | 2007-2012 | Interview (1), participatory obs | 3 | Yes |
| Tosya Panosian | 42 | 2000 | Interview (1) (group) | 1 | Yes |
| Sirvard Nilchian | 50 | 1996 | Interview (1) (group) | 2 | Yes |
| Lusineh Akhoyan | 46 | 2003 | Interview (1) | 1 | At home |
| Azniv Ainilian | 33 | 2006 | Interview (1,2) | 2 | No |
| Karineh Gohigian | 51 | 1993 | Interview (1), participatory obs | 2 | Yes |
| Shushan Gevorkian | 34 | 2004 | Interview (1,2) | 2 | No |
| Aghunik Iskyan | 35 | 2003 | Interview (1) | 1 | Yes |
| Tamara Hanemian | 48 | 2003 | Interview (1) | 2 | No |
| Roza Arpagian | 53 | 2005 | Interview (1) | 1 | No |
| Maremik Khatcherian | 33 | 2010 | Interview (1) | 1 | No |
| Perjuhi Hovamesian + | 28 | 2009 | Genealogy, photo, partic obs, interview (2) | Often | No |
| Nina Bezjian | 59 | 2012 | Genealogy | 1 | No |
| Yeraruhi Darukyan | 41 | 1993 | Genealogy | 1 | No |
| Anahit Keolian | 36 | never | Immersion, partic obs, secondary interview | Often | Yes |
| Manik Abassian | 63 | no husband | Partic obs, secondary interview | 3 | Yes |
| Inga Edinjiklian | 33 | no husband | Partic obs, secondary interview | 2 | Yes |
| Hasmik Rezian | 83 | During SU | Life history, genealogy | 1 | Not anymore |
| Heghineh Adamian | 51 | 1994 | Interview (1) | 1 | Yes |
| Astghik Malkhasian | 41 | Never + died | Immersion, partic obs, group, photo | Often | Yes |
| Ishkuhi Malkhasia | 63 | Never + died | Immersion, partic obs, group | Often | Not anymore |
| Liya Kabbendjian+ | 37 | 2003 | Genealogy, Interview (2) | 2 | No |

* Sometimes also the husband was present

+ Sometimes the mother in law would be present as well.

Appendix 4 Genealogy Hasmik Rezian

