



Volha Vysotskaya

# Who goes? Who stays? Who returns?

Migration Journeys  
of Highly Skilled Workers  
from Russia to Germany  
and Back Home



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The subject of this book are migration journeys of highly skilled workers. By focusing on migration as a journey, the research considers all stages of migration (remigration in particular) and complements the approach to the phenomenon with a life-long perspective. In this sense, the prism of migration journeys allows to look at migration motives in a novel manner. The book discloses motive as a complex phenomenon, which may also change over time. The chosen perspective helps to explain why under similar conditions some workers migrate while others do not, and in the same manner, why some remigrate, while others stay put in destination countries. The empirical basis for the case of highly skilled (re)migration from Russia to Germany has been constituted by unstructured interviews with narrative parts, which were conducted by the author in various cities of Germany and Russia.

Volha Vysotskaya holds PhD from Bremen International School of Social Sciences (Germany). She also holds a diploma degree in Linguistics from Minsk State Linguistics University (Belarus). The author has been involved in projects at *Research Network 1989* and is a member of *Changing Europe* network.

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# European University Studies

Europäische Hochschulschriften  
Publications Universitaires Européennes

## **Series XXII Sociology**

Reihe XXII Série XXII  
Soziologie  
Sociologie

**Vol./Bd. 441**



**PETER LANG**

Frankfurt am Main · Berlin · Bern · Bruxelles · New York · Oxford · Wien

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

**Bibliographic Information published by the Deutsche  
Nationalbibliothek**

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the  
Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data is  
available in the internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

Zugl.: Bremen, Univ., Diss.: 2010

ISBN 978-3-653-00958-3 (eBook)

D 46

ISSN 0721-3379

ISBN 978-3-631-60595-0

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Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften

Frankfurt am Main 2011

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## Acknowledgement

The book is based on the dissertation defended at the University of Bremen, at Bremen International Graduate School of Social Sciences (BIGSSS). Therefore, the first word of gratitude goes to BIGSSS for awarding me a Doctoral Fellowship and providing me with an extraordinary environment for focusing on the research as well as for giving me numerous opportunities for sharing and discussing the work in progress with competent colleagues. I would wish to thank Werner Dressel for making the institution not only a working place but also home for all fellows.

Second, I offer my sincerest gratitude to my supervisors, Prof. Dr. Michael Windzio and Prof. Dr. Matthias Wingens who supported my research decisions at various stages of the writing process. The book would not be possible without constant assistance and valuable recommendations of both of the supervisors.

Third, I would like to thank Prof. Dr. Andrey Bukaemskiy as well as colleagues the Centre Independent Sociological Research in Sankt Petersburg in assisting in looking for interview participants. Also I would like to express my gratitude to all the interviewees who took part in the interviewing process in different cities of Germany as well as Russia.

Fourth, I would like to express my special gratitude for the indispensable help of Dr. Chris Armbruster as well as Dr. Magdalena Nowicka whose critically important comments were a source of inspiration.

Finally, I thank my parents for supporting me throughout my studies, my sister Alena for her constant help, my friends Aigul Alieva, Can Aybek, Chris Swader, Alexandra Wangler and my dear Javier for being next to me throughout the process.





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## Introduction

From the 1950s through the 1990s, dramatic political and economic changes caused an immense increase in migration, which triggered an abundance of migration studies in academia. Research on motives for migration reached its peak at the rise of grand scale migration studies. Migration theories needed to provide substantial answers to why migration occurs in particular ways. The process of migration has been constantly changing, and existing theories could not explain this flux. This is why dissatisfaction occurred with the grand migration theories, which produced new approaches and theoretical perspectives but still did not explain motives for migration.

In spite of the general proliferation of migration studies, the research on migration motives has decreased. New perspectives mostly focus on explaining the general patterns of migration rather than paying attention to the changing phenomenon of migration on the micro level (see also chapter 2).

The current research focuses on migration motives. Its contribution is twofold: consolidating the existing research on the subject on the one hand and filling in the missing spots in the research on migration motives by exploring migration as a dynamic process on the other hand.

The logic of the presentation of the current chapter is not the same as the logic of the research exploration. While the research has been conducted as an exploratory investigation, so that the specified path of the exploration is only articulated at later stages, the current chapter inverts the logic of the analysis, which aspires to be straightforward.

The current research thus departs from the discussion of the literature on the subject with the purpose to point both at the main contribution and at missing points of the theories and perspectives of migration studies. In particular, the research will discuss two important lacunae in migration research. In order to make up for the shortcomings in the topic under investigation, the research will adopt its own framework, namely of migration journeys.

The first shortcoming of migration research is its tendency to overlook migration motives as complex, transforming and interrelated. In order to compensate for this, the current research will explore the complexity of these motives with the purpose of clarifying their transformation and interrelation.

The second shortcoming of migration research is its discontinuous perspective on migration. In order to fill this missing spot, the research will include all stages of migration (remigration in particular) and complement it with a life-long perspective. Investigating the migration process as a whole and dynamic process will confirm the direction of the current research towards migration journeys. Remigration will be approached as part of the migration process, dependent on and defined by preceding stages of migration. Furthermore, by in-

cluding remigration into the migration journey framework one emphasizes that the migration process can no longer be regarded as a mere move from one place to the other but a complex process with a number of stages along the way. Additionally, remigration is not the final stage along the migration timeline and may be followed by further migration. When the missing gaps are filled in, migration is seen as a dynamic process. By incorporating migration journeys into the exploration of migration, the research attempts to resolve certain puzzles in migration studies, such as why under similar conditions some workers migrate and some do not, or similarly, why some remigrate, while others stay put in destination countries.

The case of highly skilled migration from Russia to Germany is a particularly vivid example of how migrants construct motives. The particularity of the group of highly skilled workers who move from Russia to Germany is explained on the one hand by cross-border migration and relative geographic proximity and on the other the liberalisation of the migration inflows of the group of highly skilled workers into developed countries who experience a shortage of skills.