From Tajikistan to Russia and Back: Understanding Changes in Gender Relations Through the Lived Experiences of Tajik Migrant Workers in Russia

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FROM TAJIKISTAN TO RUSSIA AND BACK: UNDERSTANDING CHANGES IN GENDER RELATIONS THROUGH THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TAJIK MIGRANT WORKERS IN RUSSIA

by

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DISSERTATION
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Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers

Abstract

This dissertation is the story of Tajik migrant workers who have lived and worked in Russia. It examines how gender relations of power change in the context of labour migration through the lived experiences of the migrants. The study asks the overarching research question: How do gender relations change in the context of Tajik labour migration to Russia? Following the social constructionist epistemology, gender is framed through the lens of post-structural, intersectional, and transnational feminist theories. The study employs a conceptual framework that integrates the following into a coherent whole: feminist theories of gender relations, the general context of international migration, and the unique context of Tajik labour migration.

The qualitative methodology of narrative inquiry is employed to generate rich, qualitative stories. Twenty-one participating Tajik migrant workers (10 females and 11 males) were interviewed in Russia and in Tajikistan. The stories were analyzed by utilizing two types of analysis within narrative inquiry: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. Both types of analysis provide critical examination of how gender relations change in the everydayness of participants’ lived experiences.

Findings highlight a constant tension between the changes and continuities of patriarchal structures in which gender relations are continued and reproduced at the same time as they are transformed, thus creating new forms of gender power relations. This study disputes that labour migration is driven only by economic factors. Without denying the impact of economic factors, the study presents other push and pull factors that place gender relations at the centre of labour migration. Implications for social work practice, theory, and research are discussed.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my father, who unfortunately passed away before its completion; and to all the migrant workers across the world.
Acknowledgements

The creation of my dissertation was a long and tumultuous journey, full of highs and lows. This long path gave me the opportunity to grow as a dedicated feminist, a reflexive scholar, a passionate social justice educator, and a dreamer who always believes that a better, kinder, and equitable world is possible. There are a number of individuals who supported me in this journey. Without them, this work would not be possible.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to all the migrant workers I met both in Tajikistan and in Russia who shared with me their rich stories, their continuous struggles, and their unbroken dreams. While listening to these stories, I was astonished by the migrant workers’ internal strength, profound resilience, endless sacrifices, and deep dedication to their families and loved ones. This dissertation exists because the generosity of the migrant workers I met during my journeys in both countries. I am grateful to them.

I also owe my heartfelt gratitude to the members of my Dissertation Advisory Committee: Drs. Martha Kuwee Kumsa (Chair), Shoshana Pollack (Co-Chair), Madeleine Reeves, and Louise Grogan. This work would not have been possible without your caring mentorship, strong guidance, incisive critique, and endless support and encouragement. I am blessed to have met you all and worked with you during my dissertation process.

I would like to express the deepest gratitude to my dear, caring, nurturing mentor and supervisor Dr. Martha Kuwee Kumsa, who offered endless support and encouragement during my doctoral studies. Martha, from my first baby steps in my doctoral program, you went through this entire journey hand in hand with me. You did not leave me even after your long-deserved retirement. Thank you for being with me, and
for laughing and crying with me. Together we shared sadness, and we shared joy. Together, we discussed stories and reflected on their deep meaning. Even though we come from different continents and generations, we found many points of similarity in our struggles against oppression and striving for equity. With you, Martha, I have always felt safe and sheltered. In our trusting relationship, I was not afraid to ask questions. I offer my enormous gratitude to your generosity, and to all of the answered questions, strong advice, critical insights, and courage you have given to me. You shared your critical reflexivity lens and your passion for qualitative research with me. Your love for people and for your students was also transmitted to me, and I will treasure this in my life journey. You are a living example of a genuine, caring, insightful, and nurturing mentor who modelled to me how to become a good mentor myself. I offer my deep thanks to you for all your critical insights, suggestions, and care.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Shoshana Pollack for her continuous support, advice, and guidance. I started my doctoral journey with you, Shoshana, in the theory course where you taught me to look into the structures and processes more critically by grasping the dynamics of power and privilege. From reading Foucault together and identifying power on different levels, I embodied that learning and have carried it through the writing of my dissertation. In our work together and also when I had the privilege to join the Walls to Bridges training and class, I learned what classroom safety really means, and what safety means in mentor-student relationships. I understand how feeling safe and being Self is important in learning. Shoshana, you gave me the opportunity to deeply realize the meaning of safety and how to be Self, accept Self, and carry Self forward in my whole doctoral journey. For this, I am very thankful.
I owe a debt of gratitude to Dr. Madeleine Reeves for her deep and insightful guidance through my dissertation process. Madeleine, after becoming acquainted with your work, reading your critical manuscripts, and being profoundly impressed by your research on the fluidity of borders and Central Asian migrants, I wished to invite you to join my Dissertation Committee. Thank you for accepting my invitation and being with me through this whole journey. Your comments and suggestions really helped me to strengthen my work and look at areas I had not thought of before. With you, I learned what it means to look at the world and analyze like an anthropologist. I am eternally grateful for that.

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Louise Grogan for her support and advice. Louise, I greatly appreciate your feedback, support, and encouragement during the dissertation process. With you, I learned about power and privilege within patrilocal families in Tajikistan, and I was introduced to numerous sources about labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia. Thank you for discussing the stories with me and highlighting their important messages. I am particularly thankful for being welcomed to your home, for sharing food together, and for discussing culture, migration, and women’s rights in Tajikistan. I offer my heartfelt gratitude for your encouragement and support during my writing process.

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thank my previous classmate from Tajikistan, Malika Bahovadinova, for our shared ideas and conversations about labour migration. Thank you all for your generosity and care.

I would have never started the doctoral journey without the support of my family and ancestors. My grandfather, who has not been with us for over 25 years, remains my dearest life mentor. He taught me the importance of education by his personal example of striving for knowledge, fairness, and love and respect for people. The unconditional love of my dear mother, Mavjudi, who is very special to me, always gives me the strength and courage to continue. I am thankful to my father Yusuf, who was always proud of me, and who was so happy to know that I had started my doctoral program. I know you dreamed of seeing me complete it. Even if you are not with us in this world anymore, I hope you see and hear me from Jannah.

I would not be on my doctoral journey without the immeasurable support given to me by my family. I would like to thank my beloved daughter Amina, who always supports, encourages, and believes in me. Amina, thank for your endless love and curiosity. Thank you for being my first reader of the composite stories, and for sharing your mature opinion about them. I am always proud to listen to you and see how you learn about social justice, equity, and feminism. I am thankful to my little son Fariz, who arrived in this world while I was writing my dissertation proposal. With your smiles, your cries, and your hugs, I wanted sometimes to quit, to postpone, and to continue. Thank you for your love, and for patiently waiting for your ayasha to finish the work and start playing with you. The trampoline metaphor I discussed in this dissertation came to my mind while I was playing with you on a trampoline. I would also like to sincerely thank my dear husband Rakhim for his continuous support. You always encourage me and
make me believe that there is a light at the end of my writing tunnel, and I am humbled to recognize that I am slowly discovering this light.
List of Abbreviations

ABD – Asian Development Bank
CERIA - The Central Eurasia – Religion in International Affairs
FMS – Federal Migration Service
GMG – Global Migration Group
ODI – Overseas Development Institute
ILO – International Labour Organisation
IOM – International Organisation for Migration
RSFSR - Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund
UN DESA – United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs
UNDP - United Nations Development Program
UNIFEM - United Nations Fund for Women
USDS – United States Department of States
USSR – United Soviet Socialist Republics
UN Women - United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
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Introduction

Before I told my mother about my decision to migrate, I called my uncle who worked in Russia. I told him I could not watch how my mother is suffering. She was not sleeping, because she was working days and nights. She has a small child. My brothers needed food, they needed clothes. Soon, my youngest brother will need to go to school, and my middle brother will need to study in a college or University. But we cannot afford it. I told my uncle that my mother will not allow me to leave, and I did not have money to buy the ticket. So, I asked my uncle to lend me money to purchase a ticket. And he supported my decision and helped me.

Three days before my departure, I told my mother that I was leaving to seek work in Russia. My mother was crying and telling me “Please don’t leave; let’s return the ticket before it is too late.” But I told her that I had decided. I decided to leave to help them. My grandmother was telling my mother: “Don’t let your son go to Russia, he will find a girl and establish a family there. And he will abandon you like his father did.” And my mother asked me before I left: “Son, you will never do that to me, right?” And I told her, “Ochajon (Mother), I will never leave you alone!”

This is an extract from one of the stories I present in this dissertation. It highlights the complexities between staying and leaving for labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia. It also highlights the constant renegotiation of gender relations that is at the heart of this study. This research presents the story of Tajik migrant workers who move to Russia in pursuit of work. I have sought to understand how gender relations change in the lived experiences of Tajik labour migrants in the contexts of their migration to Russia and their return to Tajikistan. I start from the theoretical position that gender, like any social
construct, is a fluid and relational concept (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995; Paechter, 2006, 2018; Schippers, 2007) that is transformed through the experiences of migration. Therefore, I argue that gender relations change in the context of migration, and to understand the transformation of gender relations in the communities, it is necessary to study migration experiences (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). In this study, I ask the overarching research question: How do gender relations change in the context of Tajik labour migration to Russia?

I have aimed to understand how gender relations change in the lived experiences of Tajik labour migrants through qualitative research methods. Specifically, I conducted a narrative inquiry (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990) because I consider it one of the best ways to understand and represent the experiences of people (Taber, 2010). To inform my work, I have chosen theories that critically engage conventional notions of gender (Butler, 1993, 2001; Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2006, 2018), intersectional feminism (Crenshaw, 1998; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016; Ahmed, 2017), and transnational feminist theories that critically engage the hierarchical, North-South global power relations (Caplan & Grewal, 1994; Razack, 1995; Mohanty, 2003; Moosa-Mitha & Ross-Sheriff, 2010; Ross-Sheriff, 2007).

Throughout this dissertation, I argue that the desire to migrate for labour is not only connected with the desire to improve economic conditions, as largely discussed in migration literature, but also as enactment and confirmation of masculinity, as well as an escape from societal control, especially for women. I demonstrate that, because of migration, gender relations are in a constant, complex relationship between transmission and reproduction of old gender norms and transformation and production of new ones. I
illustrate this process as jumping on a trampoline that highlights these constant tensions, where ‘the jump’ represents change in gender relations and the ‘falling back’ represents coming back to the norm. The transmission and reproduction aspect of the tension shows that traditional patriarchal gender relations are enacted through repetitive acts within the rigid regulatory frame of the trampoline that seeks to maintain old gender relations. The transformation and production aspect of the tension shows the impact that each jump has on the rigid structure of the trampoline. It shows the ‘wear and tear’ and the swaying of the trampoline’s rigidity as a cumulative effect of many jumps and collective resistance. My desire is that the trampoline is shaken and eventually dismantled, and that new emancipatory structures will be imagined. In this work, I examine the lived experiences of migrant workers, and highlight some complex moments when binary social norms and expected gender performances are destabilized and challenged.

The fluidity of gender and gender relations is emphasized by recent theoretical developments. For the context of my research, however, my analysis remains within the heteronormative male/female binaries which are strongly entrenched within Tajikistan society. I also highlight the diverse experiences of change in gender relations within male-male, female-female, and female-male relations and demonstrate the areas where gender relations have transformed or created the foundation for future transformation. Even though ‘change’ is usually constructed as something settled and concrete, I point to the fluidity of change, and I demonstrate the transformative potential of ‘becoming different’ through everyday practices that create change. Though this is only partial and unfinished, like every jump on the trampoline, it still destabilizes traditional patriarchal gender scripts (Butler, 2001). Therefore, I understand change not only as something
settled, rigid, and determined, but also as something not quite determined and unknown. The process of transformation destabilizes the rigid gender structures and norms, creating opportunities for something new. The new could be also unknown, but it brings new possibilities, feelings, experiences, and emotions. Inspired by Foucault, Butler (2001) argues that

... it is important not only to understand how the terms of gender are instituted, naturalized, established as presuppositional, but to trace the moments in which the binary system of gender is disputed and challenged, where the coherence of the categories are put into question, and where the very social life of gender turns to be malleable and transformable. (p. 12)

Therefore, in this dissertation, I try to grasp both settled changes and fluid processes that challenge and destabilize the norm. These processes potentially lead to the exploration and embodiment of something new that could be more equitable and socially just.

For this study, I generated rich qualitative narratives by interviewing 21 female and male migrant workers both in Russia and in Tajikistan and conducted an analysis of narratives and narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). Analysis of narratives employs paradigmatic reasoning, resulting in the “description of themes that hold across the stories” (p. 12). In the second type, narrative analysis, “researchers collect descriptions of events and happenings and synthesize and configure them by means of a plot into a story or stories” (p. 12). Hence, “analysis of narratives moves from stories to common elements and narrative analysis moves from elements to stories” (p. 12). In this dissertation, I followed the analytical procedures suggested by Polkinghorne (1995), and I
employed both methods of analyses. I believe these methods of analyses not only reinforce the findings, but they also complement each other.

Specifically, for the analysis of narratives I carried out thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and developed an overview of emerging themes. For narrative analysis, I developed composite stories that highlighted the everydayness of experiences and their holistic nuances. In both analyses, I illustrate how gender relations are reproduced, and at the same time shattered, transformed, and changed through the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers. In the final chapters, I focus on reflections and implications for social work practice and research.

Personal Connection to the Research

This dissertation is the story of participants. It is also my own personal story in terms of both the subject of changing gender relations and the context of labour migration. Following others (Oke, 2008; Pillow, 2003), I find that the researcher and the research are inseparable. In this research process, I followed Kumsa’s advice (2016) not to bury the “I.” On the contrary, through this work I tried to excavate the “I” and hear my own voice during the research process. I echo Absolon (2011) in calling the study a ‘me-search’ process, as this research and the whole doctoral process have been a ‘me-search’ journey for me. I embarked on this intellectual path full of questions, anxieties, and concerns. I also stepped forth with great curiosity, aspirations, and dreams. I dreamt of making sense of these anxieties and concerns as I delved into the unknown. My research on the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers is largely driven by my passion for social justice in both gender relations and labour migration. Below, I start by positioning
myself as a researcher in relation to this study before I position the study within the literature, argue for its importance, and introduce the oncoming chapters.

Gender Relations

My genuine interest in understanding gender relations is far from neutral. Living personal and professional experiences with gender inequalities, I bring my embodied knowledge that shapes the personal lens through which I conceptualize and understand gender relations. These gender relations are important for me not only as a researcher, but also as a person and as a woman.

I come from a country where abuse and discrimination of women are unfortunately widespread. Tajikistan Demographic and Health Survey (2017) reports that at least 26.4 per cent of women aged 15-49 experience lifetime physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence in Tajikistan. It also indicates that the percentage of women who have experienced physical violence since age 15 increases. While growing up and living in this country, I witnessed these realities. I witnessed that discrimination against women can occur regardless of their education and professional status. I grew up raging against the gender discrimination that is deep-seated in the communities and workplaces where I lived and worked. The feeling of deep unfairness, inequality, and anger made me seek justice through critically thinking and learning more about gender relations. This sense of unfairness and resentment facilitated my decision to construct my research on gender relations.

My interest in how gender relations change in the context of migration also comes from a deeply personal learning journey. Over the last 15 years, I have lived in five countries, including Tajikistan. Through my personal experiences of moving across
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various borders and living in different countries in North America, Central America, and Europe, I came to realize that gender relations do change with migration experiences in the varying contexts of other cultures. Gender relations are not naturally given; they are negotiated and re-negotiated, assessed and re-assessed, and re-established through the complex processes of gendered power relations. These insights fuel my interest not only in understanding how gender relations change but also in uncovering how we, as feminists and social justice activists, can make the world a gender-equitable place.

I remember a conversation I had many years ago with one of the female human rights activists in Tajikistan who said: “...my human rights end after 5 o’clock when I go home.” Although she said this sarcastically, it helped to crystallize my sense of dissent with what she was asserting. This quote demonstrated to me the clear division between gendered private and public roles, responsibilities, privilege, and oppression. However, I refuse to passively swallow that. I refuse to live the life I must live as constructed for me to be “normal,” and I refuse to follow a set of rules just because I am a woman. I refuse that for my children, who are expected to perform a certain way. They are told not to cry or demonstrate emotions because masculinity does not allow that, and they are told not to act a certain way because it goes against the norm of femininity. I want freedom. I want equity. And, I want that not only for me, but more importantly for my loved ones, for the communities in which I live and work, and for the larger local and global society. However, I am starting with myself, as Mahatma Gandhi advises us to be the change we want to see in the world. I am learning how to be this change by refusing to be implicitly obedient.
I see myself as a life-learning feminist qualitative researcher seeking deep meanings and reflections, and relishing changes born out of these reflections. Echoing Sara Ahmed (2017) and other scholars with whom I stand in solidarity, I deeply believe that feminism is a lifelong self-assignment practiced everywhere. For me, feminism is both a movement and a shelter, where we critically engage the walls of oppression, and at the same time a place of comfort and sorrow, where we grow our solidarity and spirit. This study is my compass toward the feminist journey where we come together as people and meet and share our transnational stories. These stories lift us up, take us down, and make us even more resilient in our struggles. I see this research journey as a place of comfort and sorrow, a place of gendered stories of oppression and resilience.

My personal, lifelong learning process of becoming, speaking, and performing as a feminist is directly connected with this work. Through the stories I heard, from the texts I read, and within the intellectual discussions I entered, I am learning what it means to become a feminist and to speak and perform as a feminist. Echoing other feminists (Crenshaw, 1989; hooks, 1984; Ahmed, 2017), I also place gender relations in interconnection and interlocked with other social processes such as race, religion, age, class, and immigration status, to name just a few. I seek to understand change in gender relations through interlocking systems of oppression and privilege. Through my dissertation, I seek to understand and demonstrate to others the system of macro- and micro-level structures that prevent us from re-imagining, re-building, and re-performing a more equitable society.
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Labour Migration

My decision to research gender relations within the context of labour migration is also far from neutral. I chose this context not only because Tajikistan is one of the stock countries for labour and its population is highly dependent on the remittances of migrant workers, but also because labour migration touches my family and me very deeply. My father was one of the labour migrants from Tajikistan to Russia who left the country at the beginning of the 2000s like most Tajik migrants. Not only was he an exceptionally talented medical doctor, a university professor, and the head of a department within the medical university where he treated patients and taught students, he was also a chief kidney specialist for the whole of Tajikistan. As with everybody else, however, he was pushed to leave the country to seek better employment opportunities in Russia. Once there, all his privileges and highly-specialized qualifications notwithstanding, he had to start working as a regular medical doctor in one of Moscow’s clinics. My sister, who was a young medical university graduate with an honours diploma in medicine and a newly trained neurologist, joined him to work as a doctor too. This family story sparked my interest in research connected to labour migration. It is a familial experience for me and, in fact, for many people of Tajikistan.

However, reflexive questions of justice stormed my critical mind. If my family, who are highly educated professionals, faced discrimination, how bad would the experiences be of Tajik migrant workers who are not as highly educated or as privileged? Without question, labour migration is an extremely uneven field not just within the category of Tajik migrants but also between Tajik migrants and the broader Russian society. It is a very complex field full of inequalities and inequitable power relations.
The experience of these inequalities and the complexities of intersecting power and privilege is firsthand and heartbreaking for me. It leaves permanent and deep marks on my life and in my journey through this doctoral research. In March 2020, as I was busy writing this dissertation, my father suddenly passed away in a Moscow hospital. It was so unexpected as he was in good health. He was still working in Tajikistan and had come to Moscow to visit family. My father and I had planned to meet in April in Tajikistan, and I was working very hard to complete writing my dissertation so I could give him the good news that I was moving the ‘ice’ for which he had been waiting for so long. He spent all of his life in academia and medical practice. I think he dreamed of seeing me as one of his colleagues, for both of our fields are concerned about the well-being of communities. I had imagined how hearing the completion of my dissertation would put a big smile on his face. I had imagined how he would sweep me off my feet with his bear hug and tell me how proud he is of me. My parents supported me in many tangible and intangible ways; they had wanted to see me complete this work. Adding to my internal emptiness, as if grieving the loss of my dear father was not hard enough, my grief was multiplied by the discrimination and neglect with which he was treated during his last few days in Moscow. My family members who were by his bedside were reminded one more time of the intertwined effects of everyday racism and ageism. For me, it was also a painful reminder of the subject of my writing: how hard it is for an ordinary Tajik migrant worker in Russia. In my initial writing, I was highlighting the importance of legal documents and access to citizenship for Tajik migrants in Russia. It came crashing down on me that legal documents and citizenship are not enough to protect migrants if discriminatory attitudes and behaviours of people remain the same. My sister,
who has worked as a medical doctor for number of years told me that for the first time in her professional career she saw indifference from her colleagues who look down on Central Asian patients as second-class citizens. In addition to racism, age also added a layer to the discrimination. There was no interest in treating ‘second-class’ elderly people. My father, at the age of 72, still worked with students and treated patients, but for them he was just an old Tajik. His high level of education, the decades of highly specialized professional service he gave to that land, his citizenship, and his orderly legal documents could not protect him from racism and ageism.

The grief from my father’s loss and the bitter experiences surrounding his passing only magnified the importance of my research. As I write now, I feel a surge of indignant energy to seize the opportunity of my dissertation to seek ways of making the experiences better for Tajik migrant workers in Russia. I am acutely aware that not even this experience or my own experience of discrimination and injustice as a Tajik grants me an insider’s position in the experiences of Tajik migrant workers in Russia. Rather, I position myself as both an insider and an outsider, limited by both positions but also amplified by them at the same time. I acknowledge the privilege I have in comparison with many migrant workers from Tajikistan. I am well educated; I am from a well-educated middle-class family; I speak several languages; and I see myself as an independent woman who can work in various analytical capacities. All these privileges mitigate the experience of being a Tajik migrant worker in Russia. My privileges shelter me from many of the challenges faced by the participants in this research, but at the same time, just as many of them have, I too have faced discrimination because of my Asian facial markers. Just as many of the participants have experienced, police stopped me on
the streets in Russia and asked for my documents. I was humiliated at the airport, searched by the security personnel, and questioned about my abilities.

However, these experiences are not only in Russia; they are everywhere. Xenophobia, racism, and the supremacy of whiteness cross many national boundaries. Even in Canada, the stories of ‘backward’ Tajiks fill the minds of people I meet. A few months ago, with my son, I was reminded of my ‘backwardness’ in the public library in the city where we currently reside. In a children’s corner, where I was sitting and playing with my son and talking to him in Russian, I met another parent who was there with their child. Quickly, they approached me with a question in Russian, asking me where I am from. When I answered that I am from Tajikistan, with a facial expression of surprise they told me that they never knew Tajiks could even speak Russian. This parent was relatively new to Canada, close to my age, and from another former Soviet republic with whom we lived under the framework of “druzhba narodov” or “friendship of peoples” (Sahadeo, 2018; 2019), and they never knew that Tajiks could speak Russian? As if Tajiks were not part of the many people from different former Soviet republics? For me, this comment was like saying that we Tajiks are too ‘backward’ to be able to speak Russian.

I encounter similar experiences in different places and spaces. These stories remind me that racism and discrimination are alive; they exist. They are everyday realities, whether visible or masterfully hidden. However, at the same time, it would be unwarranted to say that all migrants experience racism in the same way. It is equally unwarranted to say that experiences of discrimination are the only stories. No, there are stories of equity, support, care, empathy, and compassion. Unfortunately, they are fewer;
but they exist. However, I maintain a genuine and sacred hope that these stories would increase and multiply. As both an insider and an outsider to the experiences of gender relations among Tajik migrants, I bear responsibility to present these stories in ways that diminish inequalities and discrimination and enhance equity and social justice, the principles which are greatly embedded in the social work profession.

For me, this research has been a process of embodiment and disembodiment of knowledge, of learning and unlearning at the same time. I am tremendously thankful to the research participants who shared their deep stories with me and helped me to develop new learning. I still believe in a better world where we can all contribute. I believe that by understanding the complexities of gender relations and by identifying and naming the challenges migrant workers are facing, together, we can re-imagine other realities and develop new possibilities.

**Positioning the Research**

This research of examining the changes in gender relations through the lived experiences of Tajik labour migrants is carried within the broader processes of migration and gender transformation. To position this research within the larger body of knowledge on the subject, I review both the context of global migration and the subject of changing gender relations within this broad context of labour migration.

**The Context of Labour Migration**

*Global Trends*

The number of international migrants worldwide increases rapidly every year. In 2019, it reached approximately 272 million from 249 million in 2015, up from 153 million in 1990 (Migration Data Portal, 2019). In 2019, two-thirds of all international
migrants were concentrated in just 20 countries, including these top five countries: USA (51 million), Germany and Saudi Arabia (approximately 13 million in each), Russian Federation (12 million), and the UK (10 million). Today, approximately one person out of every 30 in the Global South is a migrant. Out of 272 million migrants, 164 million are migrant workers, which is approximately 60.3 per cent of the total population of international migrant workers. Migrant workers leave their usual countries of residency to seek employment in other places (Migration Data Portal, 2019), and according to the International Labour Organization (2018), 42 per cent of these migrant workers are women. It is important to acknowledge that Russia is one of the largest host countries for migrant workers. Schenk (2018) argues that in reality Russia could be a second-most populated country by migrants in the world as many migrant workers come from visa-free countries and do not always obtain work authorization.

The literature on the effect of global labour migration is enormous. Numerous studies analyze migration from different perspectives. Many international agencies, such as UN, ILO, World Bank, and others, are developing their programs for supporting or protecting migrant workers worldwide. Many of them analyze the complex relationships between migration and development. UN DESA (2017) points out that migration could be a driver for development, a consequence of development, and an inherent aspect of development. Together with entrepreneurship and diaspora engagement, remittances are one of the biggest contributions the migrant workers add to economic growth. The World Bank (2018) estimates global remittances in 2018 at USD 689 billion, including flows to high-income countries; and officially recorded annual remittance flows to low- and middle-income countries at USD 529 billion. Besides monetary remittances, there are
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non-monetary remittances which may include technological devices, medicine, clothing, equipment, and other goods. The focus of my dissertation is not to understand the effect of remittances on economic growth in Tajikistan. However, I believe an understanding of this effect is important to grasp the economic context of Tajikistan, which is highly dependent on remittances.

Researchers generally agree that remittances positively affect economic growth in many, but not all, developing countries. Analyzing the nexus of migrant workers’ remittances and economic growth in the example of Nigeria, Oladipo (2020) conducted a detailed literature review on remittances and demonstrated positive economic growth in a number of countries. Yet economic growth is not the only result of global labour migration. Migrant workers also contribute to cultural, social, and political life in both the country of origin and the host country. However, with the rise of nationalism, radicalism, and discourses on the threats to national security, many people share the sentiments of non-migrants by blaming migrants for economic instability, lack of jobs, increased criminality, spread of diseases, etc. Schenk (2018) eloquently points out that the “civilized” and “modern” countries of destination for many migrant workers are becoming the “terrifying incubators of fear and xenophobia” (p. xi).

One of the global political milestones to change anti-immigrant perceptions, and more importantly to highlight the role of migration in global development, was the adoption of the Declaration of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). In order to improve the global situation, the declaration discussed three main target areas: 1) migration governance to facilitate orderly, safe, and responsible migration for the purpose of ensuring human rights protection of migrant workers and increasing the
capacity of developing countries to provide disaggregated data on migrants; 2) *migration and development*, largely focused on education and remittances; and 3) *human trafficking*, calling for ending violence toward women and children together with forced labour and sexual exploitation (UN DESA, 2019).

Another step was the New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants (2016), which also stemmed from the international need to protect migrants. This declaration promised to strengthen international cooperation for migrants and refugees. As a result, two international compacts were adopted by the UN, including the Global Compact on Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (2018) supported by 152 out of 193 UN Member States. The compact represents a non-legally binding, international framework to promote international cooperation for addressing the challenges of migration, establishing 23 different objectives (UN DESA, 2019, p. 57). Russia supported the Global Compact on Migration (RF Statement to the UN, 2019). How it will be operationalized between Tajikistan and Russia, making tangible contribution to migrant workers’ lives, is not yet very clear. I remain sceptical toward the effect of the compact on the ground. Even though the compact demonstrates international acknowledgement that global migration is a common global issue which should be analyzed and regulated on a global level, it remains a symbolic non-legally-binding act and thus may not have legal effect on national legal and political systems. However, I am still hopeful and interested in observing if the compact will have any effect in changing migration bureaucracy and services geared toward migrant workers in Russia, and how it, in turn, will implicate gender relations.
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Overview of Tajik Labour Migration

Globally, Russia is recognized as one of the largest countries of immigration in 2015, and Russia is named by Schenk (2018) as an “immigration magnet” (p. 1). I agree that Russia serves as a labour magnet for many migrants from the former Soviet Union who seek employment in Russia. However, Schenk (2018) also argues that members of the immigrant population in Russia are “chronically underestimated, not capturing many of the millions of Central Asian workers occupied in the informal economy” (p. 2) who can come to Russia without a visa and stay for a period of 90 days. According to Schenk, the real number would reach between 16 and 18 million people and would place Russia as the second-largest country in the world to host migrants (p. 2).

The Russian Federation is the destination country for approximately 95 per cent of migrant workers from Tajikistan (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017). Although the real number of migrant workers travelling from Tajikistan to Russia is not available, official data suggests that annually, between 700,000-800,000 or more Tajik citizens migrate to Russia for work (FMS data, 2015). According to Pettinger (2013), at least 12.5 per cent of Tajikistan’s population is in labour migration. In August 2015, approximately 985,000 Tajik citizens were in Russia, and 626,000 of these were migrant workers (FMS data, 2015) who were largely concentrated in Moscow and Moscow region, Saint-Petersburg, the Khanty-Mansiysk Autonomous District, and also the Sverdlovsk, Kaluga, Samara, Novosibirsk, Tyumen, and Volgograd regions. Ryazantsev (2016) argued that Tajikistan provides the second-largest number of migrant workers to Russia after the Republic of Uzbekistan. The migrants from Tajikistan largely fall into two groups of workers: 1) seasonal, constituting approximately 75 to 80 per cent; and 2) those who remain for
extended periods and largely lack legal status (Ryazantsev, 2016). In a study by Ryazantsev (2016), female migrant workers from Tajikistan reported that they live in Russia “permanently (36%), came for a year (43%), came for several months (9%), and other (9%) did not have any regularity” (p. 98).

In Russia, many of these Tajik migrants take on low-skilled jobs largely in construction, landscaping, or service industries. According to the FMS for 2010, Tajik migrant workers worked primarily in construction (44%), trade (14%), industry (11%), services (5%), agriculture (4%), and transportation (3%). By 2014, Tajik workers were primarily working in services (42%) and construction (29%) (Ryazantsev, 2016). However, this data is not segregated by sex, and so the actual number of men and women engaged in these industries is unknown.

What makes people migrate for work? In other words, what are the “push” and “pull” factors? Studies analyzing migration pathways from Tajikistan to Russia are usually constructed through the lenses of migration theory, which argues for specific “push” and “pull” factors to labour migration (Lee, 1966; Parkins, 2010). Lee suggested that migration largely depends on positive and negative factors at the place of origin and destination. Economic, cultural, political, and environmental negative factors can push people from the countries of origin, and similar positive factors can pull them to the countries of destination (Hoffmann et al., 2019). In the case of Tajikistan, the “push” factors, including political instability, high level of poverty, and high level of unemployment, forced many people to migrate to countries where better employment opportunities were offered (Chiovenda, 2013). The collapse of USSR and the brutal experience of a civil war not only took the lives of more than 50,000 people but also
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displaced 500,000 refugees to Afghanistan and one million internally (Rajeev, 2006, p. 6). The economy, and the whole social and political order of Tajikistan, was utterly shattered. This, along with the discarding of the already fragile economic order (Nourzhanov & Bleuer, 2013; Scarborough, 2016), contributed to pushing people to seek employment in Russia. In addition, the Russian economy is considered one of the fastest growing economies in the region mainly because of the large oil and natural gas reserves and inherited technologies from the Soviet Union.

According to Reeves (2014), the legacy of the USSR and a shared history is an important “pull” factor that attracts migrant workers to Russia. While Russians and Tajiks follow different religions (Orthodox Christianity and Islam respectively), they share a common Soviet culture because of union under the USSR. However, Scarborough and Bahovadinova (2018) argue that labour migration from Tajikistan and other Central Asian countries to Russia started even during the Soviet period when there was an ‘excess of labour’ in the Southern Soviet Republics and a ‘shortage of labour’ in Soviet Russia. According to these authors, “labor migration from Tajikistan to Russia in recent years has been built directly on the structural and discursive framework instituted during the final decade of the USSR” (p. 2). The Soviet state developed a plan to attract workers who could work in Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and establish a fluid labour market into the Soviet economic system.

During the first years of perestroika in the beginning of 1980s, workers, primarily men, started to temporarily migrate from Tajikistan to Russia as contract workers (limitchiki) (Scarborough & Bahovadinova, 2018, p. 6). The labour migration from Tajikistan was largely restricted to the provision of contract workers to individual
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Russian factories; however, these workers did not enjoy the same rights and protection as regular industrial workers. As discussed by Scarborough and Bahovadinova (2018), the many economic and other difficulties migrant workers faced while living in RSFSR caused them to return to Tajikistan. Institutionalized labour migration did not work to the extent that was planned by the Soviet structures, especially in the midst of the increased poor conditions before the collapse of USSR. However, stimulated by the increased privatization and marketization, interestingly enough it worked after the collapse of Soviet Union. People had more freedoms and were responsible for finding jobs for themselves, in contrast with the Soviet State that previously had to provide jobs to Soviet people. Thus, these structural changes initiated by the Soviet elite established the roots for labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia.

In addition, it seems that familial or friendship networks contributed to the decision of migrants to migrate and find a job while in Russia. Migrant workers trusted the networks which could be recognized as another “pull” factor. New Economics of Labor Migration (NELM) theory discusses the significant role of this network which affects migration choices and patterns. According to NELM theory, these networks could reduce the migration costs and at the same time promote more migration (Murakami et al., 2019, p. 25).

Labour migration from Central Asia to Russia has grabbed the attention of many scholars across the world. Chudovskikh and Denisenko (2014) suggested that the number of migrant workers in Russia is approximately 8 to 10 million, while Schenk (2018) argues that the real number is approximately 16 to 18 million (p. 2). Central Asia, which consists of five former Soviet Union Republics, including Tajikistan, is one of the biggest
regions which sends migrant workers to Russia. As labour migration became a new important reality in these countries that are highly dependent on remittances, social scientists and economists started to pay greater attention to the phenomenon. As a result, multiple studies of the different social and economic aspects of migration were published. While many of these studies do not engage gender relations of migration, as labour migration from Central Asia to Russia is largely perceived as a “male phenomenon” (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017, p. 88), the body of literature analyzing labour migration from a gender perspective is growing (Reeves, 2011, 2013a; Kasymova, 2012; Grogan, 2013; Thieme, 2008; Ibanez-Tirado, 2018, 2019; Thibault, 2018; Zotova & Cohen, 2020).

Especially for women, the flow of migration is usually dictated by social and cultural acceptance. In more traditional patriarchal societies with specific gendered expectations, women migrate less for labour and more for family care and for personal liberation from societal control (Herrera, 2013, p. 474). The importance of social and cultural acceptance of female labour migration is clear in Central Asian countries too. For example, among Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, the main stock countries for labour migrants from the Central Asian region, the number of female migrants differs. For example, women from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan leave for migration far less often than men, while women from Kyrgyzstan constitute almost one-half of the Kyrgyz population of migrants in Russia (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017; Alekseyeva, 2019). Rocheva and Varshaver (2017) suggest that gender relations in Kyrgyzstan are better positioned than they are in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; hence, it is more socially and
culturally accepted for women from Kyrgyzstan to migrate to Russia than their counterparts from other neighbouring republics.

Even though social and cultural acceptance is an important factor to consider while analyzing female labour migration, this acceptance should be analyzed in the context of other factors. For example, one might argue that a contributing factor of increased female migration from Kyrgyzstan to Russia is a ‘lighter’ immigration regulation for the citizens of Kyrgyzstan because this country is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. This membership allows Kyrgyz citizens to work in Russia without patent (AUCA News, 2018), hence attracting more migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan. I also question if gender relations in Kyrgyzstan are more equitable than they are in the neighbouring countries of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. Women experience different forms of gender-based violence in Kyrgyzstan. Domestic violence and bride kidnapping for forced marriage (Shields & Buchanan, 2006; Borbieva, 2012) are two of the saddest examples that prove this point. UNDP Kyrgyzstan reports that 83 per cent of women experience different forms of violence such as domestic violence, sexual violence, early marriages, and bride kidnapping. In addition, recent videos published in social media of ‘honour’ beating of female Kyrgyz migrant workers by their male counterparts (Gabdulkhakov, 2019) underline the deep-rooted patriarchy in the country, a patriarchy which also migrates from Kyrgyzstan to Russia. Although an analysis of female migration from Kyrgyzstan is beyond the scope of this dissertation, I contend that gender-based discrimination and specific societal control can serve as another push factor for labour migration.
In this dissertation, I specifically discuss how societal control pushes some women to seek labour in Russia. Furthermore, other factors play an important role in female migration. If men are largely attracted to construction industries, women are more pulled to domestic work. Tomei and Belser (2011) indicate that there are approximately 43.6 million female domestic workers around the world. Famous labour migration corridors for female domestic work run from Indonesia to Malaysia, Philippines to United States, Bangladesh to Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates, and India to United States, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates (Sijapati & Nair, 2014). As Ross-Sheriff (2007) argues, it is necessary to understand how global capitalism pulls women into migration. Women from Central Asia are also embedded in this global migration flow and primarily attracted to domestic and care work in Russia. In the next section, I discuss more gendered experiences of migration from Tajikistan to Russia and provide a gender-informed understanding of this labour migration corridor.

The Subject of Gender Relations

Soviet Tajikistan

The building of Soviet Tajikistan was gendered from its inception. As suggested by Caplan and Grewal (1994) and Razack (1995), understanding the history and culture of people is important for analyzing the current gendered experiences. The building of Soviet Tajikistan is one of the biggest gendered projects implemented in the country by the Soviet State; hence, I would like to briefly discuss this as well.

Before its inclusion into the Soviet Union, Tajik society was primarily communal with people living together in big families. The division of labour was gendered and sharply divided between male breadwinners and female housekeepers (Kasymova, 2007,
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p. 143). The Soviets came to Tajikistan with the ‘civilizing’ mission to liberate people from feudalism. Central Asian women were constructed as the beneficiaries of the liberation mission, as Soviet rulers perceived them as weak, submissive, oppressed, and abused. Lenin claimed that Muslim women of the Soviet Union are “the most oppressed of the oppressed and the most enslaved of the enslaved” (Tadjbakhsh, 1998, p. 168). In order to emancipate Tajik society and instil ‘modern’ Russian values, the Soviet State implemented a specific campaign to unveil women. This was called *Hujum*, when a veil was constructed as oppressive, and by unveiling the women, Soviets believed they were advancing women’s status in society and thereby ending the subordination of women (Kasymova, 2007, p. 35). According to Kasymova (2007), Soviets made a strategic decision to prioritize gender in Central Asia (p. 13).

However, this so-called ‘civilizing’ mission was written on women’s bodies. Women had to be stripped from their cultural and religious symbols. This campaign did not only target women but also aimed to destroy Islam and its practices and traditions (Khalid, 2007, p. 75). Unveiling propaganda was strong and orchestrated by the Soviet rulers. Media and other culturally-appropriate means such as poetry and plays were used to imbed one important message in people’s minds: to take off the *paranja* (the veil) which was constructed as oppressive. As Khalid describes (2007), Women’s Councils or *Zhenotdel* organized public meetings, where women publicly took off and burned their veils. However, this campaign was met with violent resistance as unveiling was perceived by the local Tajik population as dishonouring and shameful. Women’s bodies became the battlefield between the Soviets, who wanted to infuse modernity with ‘civilization,’ and the local population who wanted to keep the traditions. As a result, women were
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harassed, killed, and mutilated by husbands, brothers, fathers, and neighbours (Kasymova, 2007, p. 35).

Northrop (2004) has argued that wearing a veil became not only a matter of religion and tradition, but also a resistance strategy to an outside colonial power. Thus, Tajiks did not want the veil to disappear. With Soviet intervention in Central Asia, Tajiks felt their gender relations were threatened. Harris (2004) argues that the Soviet emancipation agenda in Tajikistan aimed to ‘emasculate’ men and to ‘defeminize’ women. Tajiks resisted this attack by sturdily keeping their traditions, culture, and religion within their private spaces of homes and families. Thus, men’s and women’s gender roles were defined and maintained within the communities.

After much resistance from the local population, *Hujum* was stopped in 1929 and *paranja* did not disappear until 1950 (Khalid, 2007, p. 75). It started to disappear in the 1950s largely because of World War II when the whole Soviet State had a common goal to defeat Nazi Germany. During these years, the masses of non-Muslim people such as Russians, Poles, and later East Germans were evacuated or forcibly deported to Central Asia. Many men from Central Asia left the region and joined the Soviet Army to fight against Nazi Germany. This migration trend brought a dramatic shift to Central Asia where intercultural contacts among different nationalities started to emerge. In addition, many orphans from all over the Soviet Union, especially from Ukraine, Russia, and Belorussia, were placed with local families in Central Asia (Northrop, 2004) and new interethnic marriages started to appear in the whole region. Interethnic marriages were considered an important tool to modernize the “backward” Central Asia region and emancipate women (Edgar, 2007). Paradoxically, while the Soviet State strived to
emancipate women and free them from ‘backward’ traditions, it simultaneously designed the policies to support the traditions related to reproduction and motherhood, where women were portrayed as mothers of the nation (Roche, 2016).

Soviet rulers tried to engage more women in public life by providing them with education and work, and by lobbying for their involvement in higher educational institutions (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002). Men who did not allow their female children to attend school were prosecuted by the state. These policies, despite their differences, still share some similarities with colonial Britain in India where “white men are saving brown women from brown men” (Spivak, 1993, p. 93). In a similar way, the Soviet men were ‘saving’ Tajik women from Tajik ‘backward’ men by providing Tajik women with ‘opportunities.’ The USSR provided many opportunities for women largely in public life by ensuring access to education and work; hence, by the 1970s, approximately “50 percent of all workers were women” (Harris, 2004, p. 37) who participated in social spheres such as education, health, and culture. As a result, women had a heavy weight on their shoulders: they had to study, work, care for children, and look after their households (Behzadi & Direnberger, 2020). They were offered more public opportunities, but their numerous responsibilities in private life did not change.

Because of Soviet policies, many women became active participants in building Soviet Tajikistan. However, their private lives remained largely untouched by the Soviets. The status quo continued with women facing violence, early and forced marriages, and subordination while being overwhelmed by the household duties. Hence, the process of women’s ‘empowerment’ and their mythical striving for gender equality “turned out to have been rather superficial and formal, as the Soviet regime itself soon
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proved to be just another manifestation of patriarchal power” (Kasymova, 2007, p. 35). Women were needed as workers and reproducers of the nation. Thus, some scholars still questioned if emancipation policies had any effect in Tajikistan (Samiuddin & Khanam, 2002). The state still perceived women as weak and in need of men’s protection. The state functioned in the role of a man and provided different social and economic benefits for women to ensure their participation in public life (Kasymova, 2007, p. 46).

Harris (2004) argues that women are still encouraged to demonstrate their submissiveness and accept male domination. Following the collapse of USSR, women started to ‘desovietize’ and move toward the re-establishment of pre-Soviet gender roles. I argue, however, that with time and the assimilation of different ethnic groups, including Russians, Ukrainians, East Germans, Jews, Koreans, and others, transformation of original gender norms took place in Tajikistan, especially in urban areas. Rural areas were able to ‘protect’ their cultural traditions and gender-assigned roles more than in urban areas. With the collapse of USSR and the ensuing civil war in Tajikistan, masses of national minorities and Soviet Tajiks from urban areas left the country. More people from rural areas moved to the cities, bringing cultural traditions and gender-assigned roles with them. Thus, these population movements contributed to enhanced gender projects that Schippers (2007) would call hegemonic femininity and Connell (1995) calls hegemonic masculinity. Although these gender roles have not been frozen in time and have been changing, they have also seen continuities over time. I follow Butler (1993) in naming such changes performances and the continuities as performativities. I concur with Butler that gender relations are not static: they produce and reproduce; they transmit and transform. In current Tajikistan, hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are
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not the same as they were in the 1920s or earlier but instead have obtained another social shape. In this dissertation, I illustrate specific examples of these processes.

*Tajik Migrant Workers*

Men constitute the majority of Tajik migrants in Russia (OHCHR, 2012). Traditionally, Tajik gender roles construct men as the head of their households and responsible for earning a living (Reeves, 2013a); thus, men are usually the ones who are *pushed* to seek better economic opportunities in Russia. Men from Tajikistan usually migrate to Russia alone. Women and children travel less with their fathers/husbands due to economic and societal hardships such as high rent rates, discrimination, nationalism, and language barriers (Olimova & Bosc, 2003; ILO, 2010). However, as Kasymova (2012) suggests, regional variation is also important in understanding women’s migration from Tajikistan to Russia, as women from specific regions tend to migrate more than women from other regions of Tajikistan. In addition, women’s migration rate varies for married and divorced women.

Oishi (2002) argues that economic concerns are more important for male migration, and many developing countries support labour migration of their unskilled workers. This is the case for Tajikistan as well. Remittances are still largely spent on consumption, and serve “as a buffer to shock” (Murakam et al., 2019, p. 40) for many people in Tajikistan with no tangible contribution to longer-term economic growth. Marat (2009) argues that even though remittances help families to survive in the midst of economic instability, they do not necessarily contribute to sustainable economic development as the “earned capital is exceedingly spent on consumption and traditional celebrations” (p. 19). Marat (2009) indicates that only a small portion of remittances is
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invested into businesses and on education. I argue that education is important for equitable gender relations, which I discuss in the literature review, in the thematic overview of the findings and in the reflections sections. Also, one of the downsides of remittances is the possibility of having a “negative impact on the labor market supply of the household members left behind” (Murakam et al., 2019, p. 40). For example, women whose husbands are in migration would have less opportunity to participate in the labour force than women whose husbands are not in migration.

Masculinity scripts in Tajik society construct men as the head of the household and the breadwinner for their family (Reeves, 2013a). These traditional masculinity scripts serve as one of the “push” factors for labour migration. Men need to fulfill their role of being a provider who is able to earn a living to support their family and their elderly parents (Zotova & Cohen, 2020). Reeves (2013a) suggested that during the Soviet regime hegemonic masculinity in Central Asia was associated with military service in the Soviet Army. Social recognition was acquired through military service where men obtained skills required for family and community. Today, according to Reeves (2013a), this source of social recognition has shifted to temporary labour migration. Reeves (2013a) also suggests that successful labour migration experiences bring social recognition and validation of their masculinity. Furthermore, labour migration experiences are complex and interwoven with power and privilege. While men are socially accepted and privileged after their return from successful labour migration, they are simultaneously oppressed while working in Russia due to continuous discrimination and abuse. Reeves (2013a) suggests that the period of work in Russia is another important factor in confirming a man’s social status in society together with the outcomes of
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migration experiences, leaving men in a more disadvantageous position if the labour migration experience was unsuccessful.

In contrast, femininity scripts in Central Asia dictate that women should ‘stay put,’ wait for their husbands, and care for the children and elderly (Reeves, 2011); thus, fewer women migrate. In addition, young, non-married women do not usually leave for migration due to anticipated problems with their future “marriageability” (Reeves, 2013a, p. 308). Reeves argues that women play one of the central roles in migration decisions, although the ‘marriageability’ factor may vary from one society to another and it can either prevent or facilitate women’s migration.

Even though labour migrants from Tajikistan are predominantly male, some women have started leaving for migration. Approximately 18 per cent of migrants from Tajikistan are women (Polytaev, 2015). Kasymova (2012) notes that women from northern and GBAO regions have a greater tendency to migrate than women from other regions of Tajikistan. On a policy level, there are no major barriers for women to migrate to Russia for work. However, on the cultural and micro levels, female migrants from Tajikistan may face more challenges while deciding to migrate. As Kasymova (2012) indicates, women’s migration is more critiqued by the Tajik society, including by the religious leaders who suggested banning female migration because some women are forced to be involved in prostitution while working in Russia. This ‘protectionist’ gesture sends a message to the public that Tajik women should not travel to Russia for work, and it constructs the image that women in Russia are engaged in sex work.

Most women migrate with their husbands, while others migrate alone or in rare cases with their children (Kholmatova, 2018). Unfortunately, many migrant workers who
are mothers cannot take their children with them to Russia. Some decide to leave their children with grandparents or with relatives. If staying with relatives or grandparents is not possible, some children are placed in orphanages (UNICEF, 2012). Due to the recent bans and changes in Russian legislation toward migrant workers, many men currently cannot return again to Russia for work. Nine state institutions can ban any foreign citizen from re-entering Russia. There is some anecdotal evidence that female migration can increase in these circumstances.\textsuperscript{1} By the end of 2015, approximately 330,000 Tajik migrant workers were banned from re-entering Russia (Troitskiy, 2016, p. 22). In these circumstances, if men cannot re-enter Russia, then their female partners have to migrate to support the family. This serves as one of the ‘push’ factors for some women. However, I would like to note that not only were men banned from re-entering Russia, many women were banned as well (Zotova & Cohen, 2020).

Kasymova (2012) argues that ‘push’ factors are more complex for women than for men. Women do not only migrate because of economic instability, even though this ‘narrative’ is one of the most acceptable in society. The whole migration decision-making process is more complex for women and intersects with other factors such as education, specific locality, previous participation in the labour force, marital status, level of emancipation, etc. Hence, it is necessary to take these intersecting factors together when analyzing women’s migration.

Female migration is also driven by specific gender ‘pull’ factors, as demand for “female workers in service industry” is high in Russia (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017, p. 99). The service sector in Russia is growing, thus increasing the demand for a female

\textsuperscript{1} Discussion with one of the labour migration experts in the Human Rights Center, Dushanbe
workforce. Employers in the private sector are often interested in hiring temporary labour on an informal basis (UNIFEM, 2009). According to a survey conducted by UNIFEM among female Central Asian migrant workers in Russia, 54 per cent of women saw labour migration as not a matter of choice, but rather a “force” due to social and economic hardship (UNIFEM, 2009, p. 9). Women from Tajikistan work mostly in the cleaning industry (Tyuryukanova, 2011).

Work in the service industry is not new for women. While mainstream masculinity scripts in Tajikistan place the onus on men to earn a living, traditional femininity dictates that women should bear the caring for family members, cleaning, cooking, and other household responsibilities. Women in Tajikistan traditionally learn how to perform traditional gender roles very early in life, as a good wife is supposed to do all the household chores. Reeves (2013a) indicates that after marriage a young bride is expected to demonstrate “service” (hizmat) for her parents-in-law, her husband, and his relatives (p. 318). A mother-in-law usually instructs her daughter-in-law how to perform the daily duties in running a household. Service or hizmat is one of the forms of hegemonic femininity in Tajikistan. A good woman must please her parents-in-law. As a result, many women from Tajikistan possess good skills in cleaning, cooking, and other services, thus making them more attractive to potential employers in Russia.

Even though women from Tajikistan are attractive to potential employers in Russia, they face numerous challenges. In fact, Rocheva and Varshaver (2017) indicate that women from Central Asia in Russia are the most vulnerable group because of the significant language barrier. This is especially true for women from Uzbekistan and Tajikistan who undergo the worst living conditions and lack access to medical services.
Tyuryukanova (2011) suggests that approximately 34 per cent of female migrant workers from Tajikistan are not fluent in Russian and have significant language barriers, while 56.6 per cent have good fluency in Russian (p. 13).

The new migration regulations that were recently introduced in Russia in 2015 place migrant workers in an even more vulnerable position by increasing their undocumented status. These regulations can have a greater effect on women who may receive lesser wages than men and who could be employed in private households where they try to remain invisible to Russian police on the streets. Zotova and Cohen (2020) argue that re-entry bans and harsher migration legislation in Russia place Tajik women migrants in a more vulnerable position as they face gender discrimination. Paradoxically, together with the harsher rules, Russia recently simplified its law on citizenship by allowing migrant workers to apply for citizenship, albeit with certain criteria being met including language, health, and connection with the country (Rogoza, 2014). In addition, the resettlement program (programma pereseleniya) also attracts professionals from Tajikistan who are granted Russian citizenship. Although there is not yet any published work on that issue, it is my contention that instead of attracting foreign workers, the state has decided to open legal pathways for migrant workers by granting Russian citizenship to those who follow the criteria and would like to live in Russia permanently. Rather than sending the remittances abroad, this capital could be spent in the country. This ‘convenient’ workforce, who requires less monetary investment, will be able to contribute to the Russian economy and thereby become active citizens contributing their share to tax wealth. Furthermore, by adopting new migration and citizenship legislation, the state would like to ‘Russify’ newcomers by making them understand and adopt Russian
identity, morality, manners, and values. The government would like ‘convenient’ workers who will be beneficial for society. According to my understanding, these relationships are not just ‘user’ or ‘taker’ relationships. These relationships have the potential to be mutually beneficial and reciprocal, because while taking the labour the government also offers citizenship, the promise of social protection, and access to health care. However, as language skills are one of the prerequisites for obtaining citizenship, and female migrants have fewer Russian language skills than men do, they have fewer chances to participate in citizenships and resettlement programs. Some women from Tajikistan do not fall into the ‘threshold’ of ‘convenient workers’ constructed by the Russian state. On the other hand, it is my contention that if any of the partners were to obtain Russian citizenship and move to Russia permanently, the families could be reunited and would no longer suffers from the long-term separation due to labour migration. However, this may be the case for married women only.

In this section, I have positioned my study within the global migration patterns and the subject of changing gender relations within this broad context of labour migration. I have demonstrated some of the gendered ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of Tajik labour migration to Russia, forcing more men who are constructed as ‘breadwinners’ to migrate to Russia and seek employment for the purpose of supporting their families (Reeves, 2013a). While men are constructed as family providers and expected to migrate for labour to Russia, women, on the contrary, are expected to ‘stay put’ (Reeves, 2011), wait for their partners, and look after their families in Tajikistan. As the initiation of the migration journey together with the initial decision-making processes is intricately gendered, the whole pathway to Russia and back to Tajikistan is gendered as well. I echo
other scholars (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Mahler & Pessar, 2006; Reeves, 2013a) and argue that gender relations change in the midst of labour mobility; hence, my study is specifically focused on understanding the nuances of change in gender power relations. The knowledge produced from this research is important for expanding international scholarship on gender in the context of labour migration, which is highly prevalent in our rapidly-growing globalized world. The knowledge produced is powerful as it highlights how gender is intricately interconnected with specific socio-economic and political contexts, religion, and culture. Butler (2001), inspired by Foucault, has argued that “knowledge and power are not finally separable, but work together to establish a set of subtle and explicit criteria for thinking about the world” (p. 12). Knowledge produced can illustrate the nuances of change and transformation and also shed light on international social work research and practice connecting global labour migration issues with local practices. Ross-Sheriff (2011) argues that “social workers need information on many gendered aspects of international migration” (p. 234) and this study contributes to Ross-Sheriff’s call.

The Importance of this Research

So why is this study so important? It is important because it makes several central contributions to international social work research, theory, practice, and policy development, and to broader production of knowledge.

This study makes a solid contribution to international social work research, highlighting the fundamental necessity of developing culturally, religiously, and contextually relevant social work practices. This study also illustrates the important lesson that “social work practice in specific countries cannot be understood in isolation
from their particular historical, cultural, social and economic contexts” (Anand & Das, 2019, p. 6). In this era of heightened globalization, understanding the experiences of migrant workers as their struggle with the transformation of gender relations is an important area of social work, particularly international social work. I draw upon Moosa-Mitha’s and Ross-Sheriff’s (2010) critique of social work as dominated by white and Western ideologies. I argue for the necessity to develop new social work practices which are specific to specific people in specific socio-political-cultural contexts. I seek to make an important contribution to social work development from a ‘[non]-universalized’ Western perspective, a perspective which is usually blind to the peculiarities and differences between people in different parts of the world.

Secondly, understanding these transformative struggles in the context of global migration is crucial for social work in major Western countries depending on migrant labour for their survival and growth. Canada is one of these countries which depends heavily on migrants, both permanent and temporary. The struggles of migrant workers are rich sites for social work practice, and this research helps to elucidate the needs, challenges, and dilemmas migrant workers face. Social workers need to understand that women are more vulnerable to violence, discrimination and oppression than their male counterparts; however, the “scope of social work scholarship on women migrants’ issues is not commensurate with the scope of the needs” (Ross-Sheriff, 2011, p. 233).

Thirdly, this study is important because it provides rich areas from which to theorize gender relations in the midst of transnational labour migration. I highlight not only how gender norms are destabilized in the midst of labour mobility, but also how gender experiences of Tajik migrant workers in Russia are influenced by both local and
international realities. Transformation of gender relations is a vital area for social work as it upholds the values of equity and social justice.

Last, but not least, there is a paucity of gender-informed social work policies and programs to support current and returned migrant workers and their families in Tajikistan. Equally, there is lack of gender-sensitive social work programs for both documented and undocumented migrant workers in Russia. This study provides an understanding of the needs of migrant workers and possible recommendations for the potential development of culturally and socially appropriate programs and policies, both in Tajikistan and in Russia.

My research is definitely not that of a single warrior in the battle for equity for migrant workers. Instead, I join other scholars including Grogan (2013), Hegland (2010), Reeves (2013a), Kasymova (2012), and Thibault (2018) and other scholars who also shed light on understanding the impact of migration on gender relations in the context of Tajikistan. I seek to build my work on these studies, and through the stories of migrant workers, I aim to demonstrate the pathways of change in gender relations. As a result, I believe my study makes a valuable contribution to the field of international social work, labour migration, and gender relations.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

I begin by providing a brief *introduction* where I discuss the purpose of the study, its overarching research question, and my personal social connection to this question. I also situate the study within global migration patterns and illustrate the importance of this research.
In Chapter One, I offer a critical review of the following key theoretical concepts which inform my study: social construction of gender, intersectional feminism, and transnational feminism. In this chapter, I also provide an examination of the contextual literature on changes in gender relations as a result of labour migration both on a global level and in Tajikistan. I conclude this chapter by identifying the gap in the literature to which my study aims to contribute.

In Chapter Two, I focus on the ‘how’ question and illustrate the research process by delving into methodological considerations. In this chapter, I illustrate how narrative inquiry is the most fitting qualitative research method for this study, and I illuminate how it resonates with my epistemological and theoretical positions. In addition, I describe the analysis process I followed in this study.

Chapter Three and Chapter Four are devoted to the presentation of findings. I start the discussion on findings by providing a thematic overview. Chapter Three discusses changes in gender relations by presenting the metaphor of a trampoline, as it acutely highlights the tension between transmission and transformation of gender relations. In this chapter, I construct ‘jump’ as representing the ability to transform gender relations. I illustrate this transformative ability through four major themes: 1) education as transformative; 2) becoming different; 3) the jump for power; and 4) morphing gender relations of power. Chapter Four presents migrant workers’ composite stories which were developed using narrative analysis and storying method (Baron, 2007; Polkinghorne, 1995). In Chapter Five, I discuss personal reflections and some of the reflexive moments I encountered during this study. In Chapter Six, I discuss implications for social work theory and practice.
Chapter One: Literature Review

In this chapter, I critically review three bodies of the literature that I find relevant for making sense of the changes in gender relations as played out in the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers who travel to Russia temporarily for work and of those who return to Tajikistan. In the three sections below, I review theories of gender as a social fluid relational construct, explore changes in gender relations in international migration, and examine changes in gender relations among Tajik migrants to Russia. I finish by articulating the gaps in knowledge and develop a niche for my research.

Theories of Gender Relations

Social Construction of Gender

Social constructionist theories position gender as constructed within social relations, which means that gender is a fluid, relational, ongoing, and changing concept. Vance (1989) suggests that gender is not natural, but rather the product of human history and action; hence, gender is socially constructed within specific contexts. However, as Lorber (2007) points out, the social construction of gender begins “with the assignment of sex category on the basis of what genitalia look like at birth” (p. 55). Thus, the process of gender construction begins when babies are divided into boys and girls. Based on their assigned sexes, girls and boys perform gender roles dominated by feminine/masculine binary gender relations. A girl performs as feminine by embodying special ‘feminine’ behaviours and strictly-bordered roles which are assigned to girls. If they deviate from the regulated traditional ‘border’ of feminine performativity, girls tend to be perceived as deviants and not normal. Corresponding masculine behaviours are expected for boys as well. Nevertheless, the construction, expression, and roles of femininity and masculinity
vary between traditions and cultures. To add a further complexity, as noted by Boyd and Grieco (2003), gender and expressions of masculinity and femininity are socially constructed; hence, they could be re-constructed. Thus, I understand gender as a “relational concept” of social structure (Connell, 2002, p. 9) which changes over time, space, culture, and experience.

Defining gender as a “symbolic system,” Cohn (1993) uses:

... gender to refer to a symbolic system, a central organizing discourse of culture, one that not only shapes how we experience and understand ourselves as men and women, but also interweaves with other discourses and shapes them – and therefore shapes other aspects of our world. (p. 228)

According to Cohn (1993), the symbolic system is dichotomized where the “first term of the ‘opposites’ is associated with male, the second with female... [and] our society values the first over the second” (p. 229). Cohn (1993) argues that this symbolic system of gender relations has specific templates of ideals where people make sense of themselves, others, as well as their relationships with each other.

Connell (1995) connects gender relations with power, arguing that “gender is far more than individual traits somehow connected with bodily difference… it is a powerfully effective social practice” (p. 157). For Connell, gender is a social practice, where “bodies are both agents and objects of practice” (p. 159). Connell refers to this as a body-reflexive practice which does not belong to the individual but involves social relations where one’s social world is formed; thus, “gender is a social practice that constantly refers to bodies and what bodies do, it is not social practice reduced to the body” (p. 159). Connell (1995) posits the concepts of masculinity and femininity as
“gender projects” that are “dynamic processes of configuring practice through time, which transforms their starting points in gender structures” (p. 160). For Connell (1995), these gender practices of masculinity and femininity are social constructions referring to bodies as either female or male, but they are not determined by biology.

In theorizing, Connell largely discusses the concept of masculinity and its multiple forms as: 1) *hegemonic* – the practice that allows men to dominate over women; 2) *subordinated* – largely referring to the practice of heterosexual men dominating over homosexual males; 3) *marginalized* – an exploited or oppressed group which shares the same features as hegemonic masculinity, but which is socially marginalized; and 4) *complicit* – those who accept patriarchy, but who are not defending it (Connell, 1995, p. 164). Hence, for Connell (1995), gender hegemony occurs not only when femininity is subordinate to masculinity, but also when other masculinities are subordinate to hegemonic masculinity. Through identifying different types of masculinity, Connell illustrates that gender is not only about subordinate femininity and hegemonic masculinity, but also about subordination of other masculinities in relation to hegemonic masculinity. Connell (1987) does not elaborate on femininity in this theorizing, and instead suggests that more theorizing and research are needed; nevertheless, Connell (1987) argues that “all forms of femininity in this society are constructed in the context of the overall subordination of women to men,” and for this reason “there is no femininity that holds among women the position held by hegemonic masculinity among men” (p. 187). However, Connell has been criticized for treating femininity as the Other of males and masculinity, and for theorizing femininity in relation to masculinity which could lead to the conclusion that femininity could not be conceptualized without the masculinity.
Paechter (2018) challenged that “femininity is usually conceptualized in comparison with masculinity” (p. 121) or defined in relation to masculinity; thus, it is problematic to analyze femininity as the absence of masculinity. Pyke and Johnson (2003) divided femininity into ‘hegemonic’ and ‘subordinate,’ arguing that hegemonic femininity is the relationship between white femininities with other non-white femininities. Nevertheless, Schippers (2007) critiques this argument and points out that within this binary framework there is no possibility of understanding hegemonic and subordinate femininities within one race or ethnic group. Schippers (2007) points out that there is no understanding of “how men benefit from the relationship between hegemonic and subordinate femininities” (p. 89) within the same culture. In my study, I point to some of the areas and illustrate how men benefit from the relationships between different femininities. Schippers (2004) theorizes about femininity and develops her own understanding of hegemonic femininity:

... hegemonic femininity consists of characteristics defined as ideal for women that establish and legitimate hierarchical and complementary relationships to hegemonic masculinity, and by doing so guarantees the dominant position of men and the subordination of women. In the contemporary gender order, those features of femininity which are most silently hegemonic are heterosexual desire, physical vulnerability and weakness, and compliance. Both hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity are hegemonic in that they are constructed as normal, inevitable, desirable, and they reify difference and hierarchy through their relationship to each other – together, they guarantee and legitimate male dominance. (p. 24)
For Paechter (2006), hegemonic femininities and masculinities are not placed in equal positions. Questioning hegemonic femininity, Paechter (2006) states “there can be no hegemonic femininity, because being in a hegemonic position is also about being in a position of power...” (p. 8). To Paechter, there are “different power relations inherent in how individuals relate to hegemonic masculinities” (p. 8) and hyperfemininity (which is a more powerless position) or even normative femininity. As Paechter (2006) posits, distancing from hegemonic masculinity “is about giving power,” while distancing from stereotypical femininity “is a claiming of power” (p. 9).

Furthering this theorizing, Paechter (2018) argues that hegemonic gender order is deeply embedded in human understanding, and we, as human beings, ‘consent’ to and accept male domination and exploitation as natural (p. 123). For her, hegemonic femininity is paralleled with hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic femininity should be conceptualized in relation to other femininities, but not as “subservient Other to a particular form of hegemonic masculinity” (p. 127). As Paechter (2006) argues, it is when we “free ourselves from binary conceptions of masculinity and femininity, that we can re-imagine who we can be” (p. 8). Along with Paechter, I argue that femininity and masculinity are not about being weak or strong, powerful or powerless; instead, it is about how their differences and commonalities are constructed in ways that sustain and maintain the traditional order of gender relations.

Butler (1993) has also extensively analyzed gender. For Butler gender is not natural, but rather performative, meaning that it is produced through repetition of certain practices and acts. For Butler, gender is about doing, and this perspective is key in separating Butler from other feminist theorists who argued that gender is socially
constructed. Butler develops further the social construction of gender, claiming that
gender is performed, and through this performance it constructs the gender reality. Butler
argues that performativity is

... not a singular ‘act’ for it is always a reintegration of a norm or set of norms,
and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present. It conceals or
dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition… so, performance is a
discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names. (p. 12-13)

So, while performativity is a continuation of a set of norms and practices which
can reproduce gender relations, performance has the power to produce new gender
relations. Performance is an exercise of power which acts as a discourse that could
materialize as soon as we name/verbalize it (Butler, 1993, p. 225). Thus, according to
Butler, doing gender has both the performative enactment of traditional gender order and
heterosexual gender relations as well as the active performance of producing new gender
relations.

Butler’s vision of gender as performance gives an opportunity to rethink the social
reality. Through performing the certain gender acts, the reality could be re-constructed.
When a number of feminist scholars demonstrated gender through the symbolic systems
of femininity and masculinity, Butler stepped further and shifted the focus to gender that
exists through performance and through enactment. Hence, gender exists beyond the
binary of male and female. Gender exists when it is performed in relationship to
somebody else. These relationships are not settled but fluid, and they could be performed
differently for various people we encounter. For example, in the context of migrant
workers, gender is performed to their mothers, partners, children, colleagues, community
leaders, and each individual differently. Performance of gender is not something settled, and it is not the same through each encounter. On the contrary, it is fluid and always changing in the relationships with each individual.

Through performance, we can enact traditional gender order, but equally, we can transform gender order by performing something new. By performing we are enacting our gender and hence contributing to the creation of a new social reality that is hopefully more just and fairer. My study, informed by Butler’s theorizing on performance and performativity, illustrates how everyday micro gender practices are contributing to transformation and transmission of gender relations. By understanding these nuanced practices, we can engage in intellectual conversations and analyze how gender relations could be re-imagined, re-performed, and hopefully transformed. Butler’s lens gives me hope that we as human beings have the power to transmit and at the same time transform the social reality. By deviating from socially-accepted or traditional gender scripts and enacting new gender performances we can destabilize the previous reality and construct a new one which is more fluid, open and just.

**Intersectional Feminism**

More aspects of human subjectivity and identity than just masculinity and femininity influence change in gender relations. Crenshaw (1989) introduces the concept of intersectionality to problematize the tendency to treat gender and race as mutually exclusive social categories.

Intersectional feminism critiques the dominant feminist movement for focusing on a homogenized notion of patriarchy and gender while ignoring other forms of systemic oppression including race, class, sexuality, ability, and age to name a few. Gender
relations are therefore intertwined with other forms of social inequality and power systems which influence the experiences of women and establish new experiences of oppression (hooks, 1992; Byrne, 2006; Hill Collins & Sirme, 2016). For Ahmed (2017), “intersectionality is a starting point, the point from which we must proceed if we are to offer an account of how power works” (p. 5). For Ahmed (2017), feminism should always be intersectional. Hill Collins and Sirme (2016) share a similar vision, explaining intersectionality as follows:

Intersectionality is a way of understanding and analyzing the complexity in the world, in people, and in human experiences. The events and conditions of social and political life and the self can seldom be understood as shaped by one factor. They are generally shaped by many factors in diverse and mutually influencing ways. When it comes to social inequality, people’s lives and the organization of power in a given society are better understood as being shaped not by a single axis of social division, be it race or gender or class, but by many axes that work together and influence each other. (p. 11)

This notion of intersectionality informs my analysis as I seek to explore changes in gender relations. Gender intersects with many other social identities, producing different structures of oppression and privilege in the lived experiences of migrant workers. My notion of power is guided by Foucault (1998) who argued that power is not only exercised by the government and sovereign “agency”; instead, “power is everywhere” and “comes from everywhere” — in this sense power is neither an agency nor a structure; it is a relationship (p. 63). I also use Hill Collins and Sirme’s (2016) notion of power as influencing gender relations in ways that are both distinct and
interconnected at the interpersonal, disciplinary, cultural, and structural levels. My analysis of changes in gender relations is informed by all these levels of power relations. In addition, as Razack (1995) argues, “gender story is a ‘partial and skewed story’ when it is divorced from history and culture” (p. 50); hence, I pay specific attention to culture and history.

In addition, I follow the advice of Samuels and Ross-Sheriff (2008) for researchers who are employing intersectionality theory. Specifically, together with other suggestions, they argue that researchers “must attend to interlocking privileges as well as oppressions” (p. 5). In this study, I analyze both the privilege and oppression of migrant workers, as these experiences are connected and not mutually exclusive.

**Transnational Feminism**

Transnational feminism extends the discussion of intersectionality, arguing that geographical location and history are important to understand gender relations within the intersections of nationhood, race, economic exploitation, and world domination of global capitalism. Caplan and Grewal (1994) problematize global feminism, which has its roots in American liberal feminism as directly connected with Western cultural imperialism, and propose the notion of transnational feminism that embraces a diversity of feminism and understands issues in multiple contexts and meanings. Along with Alexander and Mohanty (1997), they argue against universalizing women’s experiences in different parts of the world. Mohanty (2003) highlights that patriarchy is experienced differently in different socio-political and cultural contexts, and that women across the globe do not have homogeneous desires, dreams, and experiences as women are not a “singular, monolithic subject” (p. 17). Further, Mohanty (2003) and Ahmed (2000) argue that
Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers

dominant feminist global rhetoric is constructed through the common narrative about “Third Word” women, who are usually portrayed as powerless and continuously victimized by their societies. This rhetoric usually illustrates that white Western women save “Third World” women.

As Razack (1995) argues, the West has constructed “imperial frames” (p. 50), portraying itself as a “…civilized, rational, scientific, culturally and morally superior entity in relation to the East, while the East became uncivilized, irrational, unscientific, culturally inferior and immoral” (p. 49). Thus, women from the ‘Global South’ function as victimized, oppressed, and in need of a generous helping Western hand. While a transnational feminist lens underlines these unequal and racialized gender relations, Mirza (2012) adds a specific discussion on how Muslim female bodies have become a battlefield in the symbolic war against Islam and Islamization. In the Western war against terror, Muslim female bodies are constructed as a threat, thereby symbolizing the ‘barbaric’ Muslim Other. More than a religious practice, wearing hijab becomes a symbol for the oppression of Muslim women who are portrayed as passive and voiceless victims of their backward communities. As Mirza (2012) argues, such discourses position Muslim female bodies in the middle of the battlefield between Western Islamophobia and Islamic patriarchy. Together, these studies underscore the necessity of questioning the narratives emanating from the Western gaze and examining gender relations within the economic and cultural hegemonies in which people are embedded. My research responds promptly to their call for an engagement with people’s narratives and subjectivities to make sense of any change in gender relations within these systems of domination.
Drawing on the theorizing of prominent transnational feminist scholars, I contend that without a transnational analysis of gender relations, my work will reproduce the universalizing gestures of global feminism and dominant Western cultures. My critical analysis of participants’ narratives presents an understanding of gender relations in their peculiarities, agencies, and specificities. For example, the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers in Russia include Muslim women. My critical analysis of their lived experiences moves beyond the universalizing Western gaze of women’s oppression and presents participants’ stories through a more nuanced gaze that considers the religious and Islamophobic dynamics taking place in the world today.

Changes in Gender Relations: International Migration

To understand unique aspects of changes in gender relations in the context of Tajik labour migration, it is important to understand the background of international migration. Indeed, my research demonstrates how the narratives of participants are embedded in broader local and global contexts. Hence, in this section, I review the literature on gender relations within the context of international migration.

In the 1990s, social scientists started to pay more attention to the possible impacts of labour migration to families and communities. International studies argue that gender is one of the significant aspects in the migration experience (Pedraza, 1991; Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Carling, 2005; Lutz, 2010; Brettel, 2016). Previously, labour migration was largely associated with men, where women usually followed them (Pedraza, 1991). For example, many studies focused on men who were motivated to leave to seek employment in other countries in order to support their families back home. However, with increased “feminization of migration,” or what Saskia Sassen (2003) calls “feminization of
survival,” more scholars started to theorize women’s experiences in migration (Sassen, 2003; Tittensor & Mansouri, 2017; Sijapati & Nair, 2014; Zlotnik, 2003). ILO reports that approximately 42 to 44 per cent of migrant workers worldwide are women (ILO, 2018).

Previously, migration studies did not use gender as an analytical tool but rather used sex as a variable to compare men and women. Over the last 20 years, migration scholars have started to look at gender as a “signifier of power relations and a lens to examine institutions, social norms, policies, and identities within migration processes” (Herrera, 2013, p. 472). However, gender as an analytical tool is not enough. As Anthias (2012) contends, gender must be examined as intersecting with other social inequalities such as race, class, age, nationality, etc. Concurring with Anthias’ contention, my research demonstrates that the intersection of these systems with gender provides sharper understandings of gender relations of power within the migration processes. Based on my critical analysis, I argue that the context of international migration, along with theories of gender relations, constitutes an integral part of the conceptual framework that takes us to a deeper understanding of participants’ lived experiences.

As participants’ experiences in my research show, gender is a central concern in every stage of the migration process. Migration decisions made within the household are usually gendered. Indeed, numerous studies demonstrate the centrality of gender in the decision-making process in a diversity of experiences in different countries. Some studies suggest that women decide to migrate to avoid forced marriages, early marriages, female genital mutilation, or potential gender-based violence (Fleury, 2016). Moreover, there is diversity among female migrant workers in terms of who tends to migrate more than
others. Migration flow is usually dictated by social and cultural acceptance. In more
traditional, patriarchal societies with specific gendered expectations, women migrate less
than their male counterparts for labour (Herrera, 2013). As I discuss in the introduction,
the number of female migrants differs among the republics of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan,
and Tajikistan. While women from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan leave for migration less so
than men, Kyrgyzstan women constitute almost one-half of Kyrgyz migrants in Russia
(Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

Besides social and cultural acceptance that prevents or supports female migration,
there are other important factors playing a crucial role in attracting women to labour
migration. If men are largely attracted to construction industries, women are more pulled
to domestic work. Besides domestic work and care, female migrant workers are also
pulled toward entertainment and leisure work. For example, in the UK in 2004, this type
of work visa was the second-largest category. Japan is another country which attracts
women, primarily from the Philippines, to work in the entertainment industry. This type
of work may include sex work in which women may become vulnerable to sex trafficking
(Fleury, 2016).

My analysis of Tajik migrant workers’ narratives makes a unique contribution to
this collection of studies by further complicating the gendered nature of international
migration and adding the nuances of age, religion, marital status, family status, and
kinship structures. I demonstrate how migration can serve as a catalyst for change in
gender power relations as women become more active participants in receiving and
sending the remittances, participate in the decision-making processes of their families,
and are included in the labour market. In the next section, I discuss changes in gender
relations on different levels: individual relations, interpersonal relations, and social relations.

**Individual-level Changes**

Individual-level changes imply increased autonomy, decision-making power, and self-esteem, particularly among women. The roles of women who become receivers of remittances can change as they become more autonomous in decision-making processes (Mahler & Pessar, 2006) and in managing resources (IOM, 2010). The research demonstrates that in countries such as the Philippines and El Salvador, remittances increased women’s autonomy and contributed to the establishment of small businesses operated by women (Fleury, 2016). Ultimately, changes on an individual level with increased agency and autonomy contributed to the community level as well when women started their own entrepreneurships.

Hondagneu-Sotelo (1992) argues that the absence of men also offers conditions for fostering women’s autonomy. The expansion of women’s roles and responsibilities ultimately contributes to self-esteem as well. Research from Bangladesh suggests that women whose husbands are in migration enjoy more authority in decision-making related to food, housing, healthcare, and children’s education (Hassan, 2018). While many studies argue that women benefit from labour migration because it contributes to their empowerment and autonomy, Hugo (2000) calls to question this generic sense of empowerment, arguing that empowerment differs from context to context and from the type of migration.

Furthermore, women’s autonomy and decision-making may depend on kinship structures. For example, in a study in India, Desai and Banerji (2008) indicated that the
level of women’s autonomy depends on whether women who are receivers of the remittances live in extended families or nuclear families. Women living in nuclear families face greater responsibilities but also enjoy higher autonomy and power in decision-making processes, while women living in extended families enjoy lesser power and autonomy. Grogan (2013) also found a similar pattern in Tajikistan. Thus, if women are left alone with their children to manage their own household, they are more likely to become autonomous than they would be from living with their extended family members. When living with extended family members, women are subjected to control. Female obedience is expected in many societies.

However, it is necessary to understand women’s autonomy in migration contexts in a more nuanced way. Arias (2013) argues that even though women become wage earners, “they are neither independent nor autonomous” (p. 444). Arias (2013) does not believe that wages in the context of migration lead to women empowerment. Instead Arias (2013) argues that most of these women have been abandoned, divorced, or widowed, or they have stopped receiving money from their spouses, and they have usually been left alone to take care of their children. In this situation, women do not have the opportunity to establish independent households as they embark on migration as a survival tool for them and their children. Most of these women leave their children in the country of origin and must return to the same norms of gender relations imposed upon them by brothers and fathers (Arias, 2013).

As I demonstrate in the coming chapters, most of these individual-level changes in gender relations affirm the lived experiences of Tajik labour migrants in my research. For example, women who receive remittances have become more autonomous in
decision-making and gained more public status within their communities. However, as shown in the next two sections, my analysis positions individual-level changes in gender relations within the cultural, religious, family, community, local, and global context of migration in which they are embedded.

**Changes in Interpersonal Relations**

As my analysis of participants’ narratives demonstrates, changes in interpersonal relations represent how gender relations change within families and communities as women become stronger in the context of migration. Remittances can contribute to women’s autonomy, as some studies discuss, but they can also influence interpersonal relations among partners and extended families. Martone and colleagues (2011) illustrate that a husband’s migration can affect family relationships when migrants’ wives have to move in and live with their in-laws while their partners are in migration. This as a result can complexly affect interpersonal relationships between wife and husband as well as parents-in-law. Hence, remittances can be a source of both empowerment and disempowerment, and improved and deteriorated relationships.

International migration studies suggest that women are more likely to receive remittances regardless of the gender of remitters (Petrozziello, 2013). While male migrant workers remit money to their wives, female migrant workers send the remittances to other women who are taking care of their children or to their parents (IOM, 2010). In terms of the amount, at the global level, female migrant workers remit approximately the same amount as male workers; however, women send higher portions of their income than men (IOM, 2010). Thus, in a few countries in Asia, families decide to specifically send their female migrants for work (Sijapati & Nair, 2014). For example, Bangladeshi
women working primarily in the Middle East send approximately 72 per cent of their wages back home (Kabeer, 2007, p. 44). Sibling order is another important factor for some countries, such as in Thailand where middle daughters are more likely to migrate and remit the money because they are less likely to have an inheritance. Female migrant workers from Thailand remit more money because of the family pressure and expectations (Fleury, 2016).

The findings of my study show that remittances can also be used as a tool for further control of women. Not only do mostly men control remittances, but also even when women control them, they are used to further control other women. A poignant example is from my study which illustrates how sisters-in-law or mothers-in-law could be ‘in charge’ of the kelin (the daughter-in-law, ‘the outsider from the family’) and control the remittances. This marginalizes some women and empowers others in ways that benefit the overall patriarchal control of all women. Therefore, women may receive remittances but may not have the decision-making power of how to spend them.

Studies are not in consensus about the decision-making process around spending remittances and how they impact interpersonal relationships, especially within families and kin. Findings from different countries suggest different results. Some studies show that men are usually in control of remittances and, even when they remit to their wives, men still decide how remittances must be used (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Kyle, 2000; Herrera, 2013). In Bangladesh, men in some cases send remittances to other males in the family rather than to their wives. This ultimately makes women even more dependent on their male in-laws and other family members, thereby increasing women’s vulnerability to poverty and abuse of women and their children (Debnath & Selim, 2009). Studies in El
Salvador and Colombia also indicate that men tend to send remittances to their mothers or other relatives who may use the remittances to control wives’ behaviour (Fleury, 2016).

Moreover, usually the men take it upon themselves to decide the amount and frequency of remittances; ultimately, these decisions can control women. If women work outside of the home, some husbands in migration insist that they leave their jobs, threatening to stop sending remittances if they do not comply (Menjivar & Agadjanian, 2007; Arias, 2013). Another study by Hoodfar (1993) demonstrates that male migration in Egyptian society had strengthened traditional gender relations where women are perceived to be dependent on men as other male relatives moved in to supervise or take care of the women left behind by their husbands. It is my contention that in all these cases, remittances affect gender relations in ways that consolidate power in the hands of some male remitters and male family members, further marginalizing and controlling some women. However, as my study illustrates, the remittances may also empower older women and mothers while further marginalizing younger women and wives.

Just as the presence of remittances changes gender relations in ways that marginalize some women, the absence of remittances also changes gender relations in other ways. Studies demonstrate that lack of remittances motivates women to find employment in the informal sector (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1992). Women who do receive remittances are less likely to join the labour market in comparison with women who do not receive remittances (Orrenius & Zavodny, 2012; Arias, 2013). However, participation in the labour force does not automatically improve gender relations. Work becomes a burden for many women where their other responsibilities, including childcare and
looking after the household, do not change (Boyd & Grieco, 2003). In addition, lack of remittances can bring an extra burden for women who must work more to compensate for the absence of their husbands (Paris, 2005).

The lived experience of Tajik migrant workers in my study shows that when women become migrant workers, their gender power relations also change as they become breadwinners and decision-makers of their own earnings. As international studies also affirm, female migrants who are senders of the remittances can obtain a new role of ‘breadwinner’ for the family, a role that is traditionally given to men in many societies across the world. The new role of breadwinner gives women more confidence and acceptance from society (Fleury, 2016), and acquisition of property provides them higher status as well (Adhikari, 2006).

Remittances also influence the gender relations of the next generation through improving children’s education and welfare in general (UN Women, 2013). Fleury (2016) suggests that when women receive remittances, education, health, and family welfare usually improve. A study in Nicaragua (Macours et al., 2008) concludes that seasonal female migration positively affects early childhood development. In the Republic of Congo, Pakistan, and Ecuador, remittances increase education, especially for girls (Fleury, 2016). Mansuri (2006) suggests that temporary parental migration resulted in 54 per cent increase in girls’ education. Moreover, girls from migrant families complete an average of 1.5 more years of schooling than girls from non-migrant families. A study by Antman (2012) among male Mexican migrant workers in the U.S. suggested that girls’ education improves because of parental migration. Girls’ education is very important for achieving gender equity worldwide, as girls are disproportionately affected by inability to
attend school due to various economic, cultural, and political reasons. However, older girls could have less school education as they are faced with more household burdens.

As I contend in the upcoming chapters on findings, my research positions girls’ education in broader intersectional and transnational gender relations. For example, some migrant fathers who have worked in Russia and returned to Tajikistan grieve how they failed to educate their daughters. In some families of participants, girls are like second mothers to younger siblings because of parental migration. Lack of remittances forces mothers to work, leaving younger children in the care of older daughters. While the literature supports my findings on girls’ education, it also affirms my analysis that boys’ education can equally worsen because of migration as boys are sent to migration at an early age to support the family or to follow the parent who is also in migration (Fleury, 2016). In their study, McKenzie and Rapoport (2010) argue that not only girls’ but boys’ education can deteriorate as a result of parental migration.

**Changes in Social Relations**

By changes in social relations, I primarily mean changes in traditional gender norms and gender relations within social structures and communities. While some women may see improvements in gender relations, many women experience increased vulnerability due to labour migration. For example, in some instances migration can result in strengthened traditional gender norms, especially when they are ‘under attack’ (Martin, 2004). The desire to maintain the traditional gender norms can result in increased domestic violence and abuse against women (Martin, 2004; Fleury, 2016). However, as my analysis of participants’ narratives demonstrates, men are not the only keepers of traditional gender relations; women can do the same. The lived experiences of
participants show how patriarchal structures are deeply embodied in women’s lives and everyday practices both in the form of culture and religion. Affirming Martin’s arguments (2004), some of the Tajik women migrant workers in my study willingly performed their traditional gender roles when their cultural values were attacked in Russia. However, my findings also indicate how migration facilitates possibilities of change in gender relations in society. Affirming my findings, Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) indicates that men who migrate for labour alone are more likely to start sharing household responsibilities with their wives after return, rather than men who migrated with their wives from the very beginning.

Furthermore, research suggests that some women decide to migrate because of experiencing domestic abuse or gender-based violence (Petrozziello, 2013; Fleury, 2016). Some migrant women are looking for freedom and more equitable gender relations. Working in more equitable societies with less gender-based discriminatory practices can influence gender equality in their home countries. As studies show, returning migrant women are less likely to accept intimate partner violence (Ferrant & Tuccio, 2015) and they enjoy more freedom of movement and reduction of domestic violence (Hassan, 2018).

However, another body of literature suggests that women, more than men, are exposed to greater risk of sexual exploitation and violence because of labour migration (ODI, 2016). Due to inherent employer-employee power imbalance, female seasonal migrant workers in Canada from Mexico report being sexually exploited by the employers in their workplace, including sexual abuse and being forced to perform sexual acts under the threat of deportation (Weiler, 2018). Women migrants are also more
vulnerable than men migrants due to the rise of commercial sex worldwide where they become more susceptible to deception and sexual exploitation (Voronova & Radjenovic, 2016). Another area where changes in gender relations place female migrants at more risk than men is undocumented migration. While undocumented male migrants take the risk of forced labour, undocumented female migrants are more vulnerable than undocumented male migrants to being trafficked for sex work (McCracken et al., 2013). ILO (2003) suggests that one of six undocumented female migrants are coerced into sex. While all undocumented migrants are treated as non-citizens and robbed of access to basic human rights protection and services (GMG, 2013), female migrant workers are more likely than men to be paid less wages and to live in more vulnerable situations (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

Changes in social relations and structures are also observed due to the impact of labour migration on health, sexuality, and fertility trends. Migrant workers usually face very little access to health services, live in overcrowded housing, and work in construction and other industries where they face risks to their physical and mental health (Caxaj & Cohen, 2019). Female migrants are more impacted, as they also need reproductive health services (Fleury, 2016) and they are more vulnerable than men to the negative consequences of acquiring sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS (Ferrandiz-Mont & Chiao, 2020).

Migration also changes traditional reproductive cycles of women, as women in their reproductive age must renegotiate their fertility plans and practices to postpone getting married and having children (Collantes, 2016). In contrast, male migrants have no worries about a ticking biological clock. The use of contraception is another tenuous area
that affects female migrants more so than their male counterparts. Because childrearing responsibilities fall on the shoulders of women, they seek long-term contraceptive methods to prevent unwanted pregnancy. However, infidelity concerns and gossip result in greater restrictions and control over women and women’s bodies (Henrickson et al., 2019).

In summary, changes in gender relations of power set off by labour migration are complex. As my research shows in the upcoming chapters, understanding these broad changes requires close attention to how they play out at the specific levels of personal empowerment, interpersonal relations within families and communities, and societal relations, structures, and norms. However, breaking down these changes into specific levels does not produce adequate analysis without another specific contextual factor of Tajik migration because gender relations among Tajik migrant workers have unique cultural and historical nuances. This specific context is reviewed in the next section.

**Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Labour Migration to Russia**

Studies on gender relations among Tajik migrant workers usually construct a male/female binary where men are breadwinners or patriarchs and women are marginalized and oppressed victims. Except for a few studies by authors including Reeves (2013a), Thibault (2018), and Kasymova (2012), a number of studies fall short of engaging the complexities of relationships, the multiplicity of labour migrants’ subjectivities, and the interconnections between being breadwinners, patriarchs, victims, and successful workers. For example, a study by IOM (2009) constructs a new category of “abandoned wives,” referring to women and children who remain in Tajikistan after mass male labour migration while husbands and fathers start new families in Russia and
escape from the financial responsibility of supporting their families in Tajikistan. Although “abandoned wife” is a term that is contested for ruining women’s agency, many organizations in Tajikistan still use it because it helps to justify fundraising activities for various development projects (Bahovadinova, 2018). In addition, I argue that this term originates from liberal feminism that usually constructs “Third World” women (which is already a highly racialized and problematic term) as victims of abuse, violence, and male domination.

My contention is that, just like in the above review of international migration, gender relations among Tajik labour migrants also change in complex ways and in intricate interactions with the changing familial and community relations as well as broader intersecting social, economic, and political contexts.

**Familial Relations**

As Harris (2004) proposes, in order to understand gender power relations in Tajik society, it is necessary to understand family relations. Family is the space where decisions are made and the roles of men and women are crafted and recrafted. Roche (2017) also highlights the importance of understanding the complexities of a family system, which is the backbone of Tajik society. Male and female participation in any sphere of life is traditionally decided in the family by the older generation, primarily by the men and the mothers-in-law (*hyshtoman*) (Harris, 2004). In such a disproportionate division of power in families, some women are marginalized and exploited within their families by men and by older women who wield power. In what Paechter (2006) calls hegemonic femininity, older women become gatekeepers of traditional gender relations, making sure these
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relations are passed down from generation to generation. Harris (2004) notes that younger women are still pressured to be submissive and accept male domination.

To demonstrate the complexity of women’s power in Tajik society, Roche (2017) cites the proverb: “Zhenshina odnoi rykoi kachaet kolibel, a drygoi ypravlyaet mirom” [The hand that rocks the cradle is the hand that rules the world.]” Women’s power, especially the power of mothers and mothers-in-law, is highlighted in many plays and comedies in the country. Although women are portrayed as victims in some previous research (IOM, 2009), I notice that studies published especially in the last five-seven years highlight the agency of women and the complexity of migration. Along with Reeves (2013a) and others, I dispute the reductionism of the breadwinner/victim dichotomy, as it masks the complexities and diminishes our understanding of the changes in gender relations resulting from migration.

Because family is a central institute in Tajik society, demonstrating power and gender hierarchies, many parents of migrant workers urge their children to get married. If a male migrant worker is not married, the parents may insist that the son return and marry in Tajikistan, usually after saving some capital for the marriage. Only married sons can “determine their place in community” (ILO, 2010, p. 17), which means to be a head of a household, take care of parents, establish a family, and take leadership roles in their families. Gender relations are dictated by tradition where Tajik men and women have specific roles and responsibilities, although men working in Russia may be influenced by the norms, traditions, and values of the host state. As well, women who remain in Tajikistan may take on untraditional roles and responsibilities. When husbands return from labour migration (temporarily or permanently), most women return to their previous
gender roles as usually demanded by the husbands, the extended family, and the community (ILO, 2010).

A traditional family in the Tajik context is patrilocal, where men have a responsibility to support elderly parents and younger siblings. Although the Soviet agenda has encouraged nuclear families to live in separate households, this has not fully worked especially in rural areas (Harris, 2004; Behzadi & Direnberger, 2020). Women who live in nuclear family households have more decision-making power and are less dominated by the parents-in-law and other in-laws than women who live in patrilocal families with their in-laws. Research on patrilocal families suggests that some women become even more vulnerable and marginalized when their male partners leave because of labour migration (IOM, 2009). While some women who live in patrilocal households do not have access to remittances and decision-making power, older women who have son/s in labour migration retain more decision-making power and have access to remittances within the family structure (Grogan, 2013). Studies indicate that mothers-in-law become even more abusive and authoritative toward their daughters-in-law under these circumstances (Hegland, 2010), thus demonstrating the complexity of gendered power relations even among women within the family. In addition, the recent bans in Russian migration legislation have undermined equitable gender relations and reinforced traditional gender hierarchies, leaving more women under the pressure and control of extended family members (Zotova & Cohen, 2020).

**Intersectional Relations**

Changes in gender relations among Tajik labour migrants are also intersectional, dictated not only by the male/female traditional gender roles, but also by their
intersections with ethnicity, regional belonging, religion, nationality, class, age, family structure, in-laws, marital status, sexuality, and fertility. As such they are also dictated by families, communities, the state, and society at large. Here I review only a few examples of gender relations of power and the differential impact on women as gender intersects with age, marital status, and sexuality.

Age has a significant effect on gender relations in Tajikistan, as reviewed in the familial relations above. Even beyond the family, the older the person is, the more power they generally wield. Roche (2014) discusses age as a concept which is largely neglected in the literature. In order to understand changes in gender relations among Tajik labour migrants, it is important to comprehend them in relation to age-specific categories of people. For example, as Thieme (2008) argues in her analysis of female labour migrants from Kyrgyzstan, migration experiences are different for different age groups and generations even among the same gender category. Thieme finds that middle-aged women who migrate face deskillling, and must juggle between being mothers, breadwinners, workers, and daughters whereas younger women who decide to migrate seek liberalization and escape from traditional gender relations.

Marital status is another intersection that has different impacts on men and women. As a result of migration, a number of marriages end up in divorce. In the widespread Tajik practice of arranged marriages organized by family members, men and women may not know each other well before marriage (Thibault, 2018). When marriage breaks down, however, divorced men could be viewed as innocent ‘victims’ and draw sympathy and support from families and communities whereas divorced women could be
blamed and shamed for the breakdown and could be subject to humiliation, isolation, and ostracization.

Furthermore, husbands can dissolve religious marriages the moment they revoke nikh and say taloq (divorce). Women face difficulties claiming alimony if their marriage was only religious (nikoh) without civil registration. It was common for married women to receive text messages revoking nikh and giving them religious divorce, although the government has since declared that the practice is not legitimate under Islamic law (Najibullah, 2009). Divorce also results from increased family conflicts when returning male migrant workers come home to changed gender power relations with their wives having taken on more leadership roles (ILO, 2010).

Divorce has also contributed to increasing polygamy with differential impacts on gender relations of power, though polygamy is widely practiced under Sharia law. For many women in Tajikistan, polygamy became a strategy of accessing resources and power by becoming a second wife or by accepting the second wife of their husband (Cleuziou, 2016). As a survey indicates, one man in 10 is in polygamous relationships (Dodarkhujaev, 2015). According to Al-Jazeera, every year approximately 14,000 male migrant workers from Tajikistan establish new families in Russia; of these migrant workers, approximately 30 per cent already have families in Tajikistan (Al-Jazeera, 2013). However, Reeves (2011) suggests that migrant workers live in very harsh realities, with limited resources for romantic relationships; thus, the number of ‘second families’ could be “considerably fewer than the densely circulating rumors” (p. 567). Indeed, wives who accompany their husbands to Russia face lack of intimacy due to overcrowded accommodations (Kalandarov, 2012). Wives who remain in Tajikistan, fearing that their
husbands will start a second family in Russia, try to have more children with the hope that their husbands will not leave them (Olimova & Bosk, 2003).

Sexuality is another intersection with differential impact on men and women. Labour migration has a great impact on sexual relationships. While most Tajik migrant workers live and work in Russia without their partners, according to a study by Ryazantsev et al. (2014) only approximately 10 per cent of female spouses came to visit their partners while they worked in Russia. Unmet sexual desires during their long stay in Russia have caused male Tajik migrants to have sex with sex workers, share one sex worker between several of them, or find temporary wives and establish a “guest marriage” (p. 177). While this study by Ryazantsev and colleagues does not provide information on the unmet sexual desires of women, another study suggests that Tajik women are less likely to become involved with high-risk sexual practices in comparison with Uzbek and Kyrgyz women. Men from Tajikistan are more likely to have unprotected sex than Tajik women (Zotova & Agajanyan, 2014). Men’s promiscuous sexual relationships in Russia contribute to the transmission of STI and HIV in Tajikistan. Labour migration is a main factor contributing to the increasing spread of HIV in Tajikistan (WHO, 2015). Men are more likely to have unprotected sex and contract a sexually transmitted disease. Overall, the number of people living with HIV/AIDS is increasing in the country (UNDP Tajikistan, 2015). This puts wives and newborn babies of labour migrants at risk of HIV and other STIs. However, it is also important to note that migrant workers have less access to HIV testing and reproductive health in general while living and working in Russia.
Moreover, in 2010 regulations managing health services for temporary visitors changed in Russia, creating less access to health care for temporary migrant workers. One of the examples is the cut of services for female migrant workers who are no longer able to receive free health care to monitor their pregnancies (Rocheva, 2014). As a result, migrant workers from Central Asia started to establish their own health infrastructures in Russia. One of the well-known examples are private ‘Kyrgyz clinics’ established by Kyrgyz doctors, primarily in Moscow, which attract migrant workers from Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. In 2017, there were more than 20 officially registered, licensed private clinics in Moscow city (Kashnitsky & Demintseva, 2018). However, these clinics are not accessible in other places. In addition, migrant workers are reluctant to visit other clinics due to discrimination and precarious legal status in Russia. In sum, these conditions create more challenges to migrant workers to access health care services, including reproductive services and STI/HIV protection.

**Gaps in Knowledge**

My brief review of the above three bodies of the literature reveals a gap in knowledge that I seek to address in my research. My contention is that theories are not formulated in a contextual vacuum and contexts are not free of theories. I argue that they are implicated in each other, influencing changes in gender relations through their interaction. My study enhances our understanding by combining gender theories and the contexts in which they interact into a conceptual framework for my analysis.

Feminist theories of gender relations, including masculinity and femininity, intersectionality, and transnationality, are critical for my work; however, they have not been widely used in ways that highlight the transformation of gender relations in the
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context of labour migration. Studies of changes in gender relations in international migration are important in highlighting binary gender relations and women’s marginalization. However, they rarely address the intricate processes of transformation in gender relations and the complexities and intersectionalities of social, cultural, political, economic, and religious factors that are critical for my research. While most studies on Tajik labour migration provide critically important information on the lived experiences of migrant workers, many of them fall short on the experiences of changing gender relations among migrant workers. I draw on the few studies that do focus on gender relations and further probe the changes in gender relations in the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers.

By connecting these three different bodies of the literature, I seek to address the knowledge gaps they leave in their separation. I argue that change in gender relations has multiple layers and multiple interconnected pieces which are not necessarily spoken loudly or performed publicly. Many of them are masterfully hidden and could be symbolic gestures of power. I seek to engage these unseen and unheard processes to enhance our understanding about changes in gender relations. I hope to create space for the transformation of gender relations, which are equitable. By making this space, I hope to re-imagine possibilities for egalitarian relations to be created and sustained. I do so by asking the following overarching research question and sub-questions:

**Overarching research question:**

*How do gender relations change in the context of Tajik labour migration to Russia?*

**Research sub-questions:**
How do Tajik migrant workers experience their gender roles before migrating to Russia?

How do Tajik migrant workers experience their gender roles while in Russia?

How do Tajik migrant workers experience their gender roles after they return to Tajikistan?

How do their experiences of gender roles in different contexts affect their relationships with their partners (spouses)?

How do their experiences of gender roles in different contexts affect their relationships with their families and communities?

In the next chapter, I focus on methodology and illustrate the research process to find answers to the above-mentioned questions.
Chapter Two: Methodology

In this chapter, I engage the “how” of my methodological strategies to address the above research questions. I start with my social constructionist epistemological position and discuss the theoretical framework emerging from this epistemology. I also discuss the methods of data generation and analysis as well as credibility considerations informed by the theoretical framework and epistemological positions I take.

Epistemological Position

The central question of epistemology is how we know what we know. As Absolon (2011) notes, epistemology is a process of knowing, including how we come to know who we are and what we do. Thus, this process of knowing also includes how we come to know and embody gender norms and gender relations based on those norms (Tanenberg & Kemp, 2002). I understand gender norms and gender relations as not given, natural, or biological; instead, they are relational processes and socially constructed (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018). By this, I do not mean that biology, psychology, and other factors do not influence gender relations; they do. What I mean by social construction is that gender norms and gender relations are relational processes and they are interpreted, re-interpreted, negotiated, and re-negotiated in different contexts and different cultures; and these processes are not totally objective or very subjective (Cohn, 1993; Lorber, 2007). Thus, social constructionist epistemology underlines these complexities in research. In this study, I seek to understand these processes of how participants construct and re-construct gender relations in their lived experiences in the context of their labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia and back.
Another epistemological angle I take is based on the fluidity of genders and gender relations of power. As recent theoretical developments demonstrate, gender is no more the male/female binary (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2018). People know who they are not only as men and as women, but as many genders between these polarities. Social constructionist epistemology also assumes multiplicity of social reality where genders and gender relations of power are constructed through lived experiences and in interactions with other people in various contexts. However, for the purpose of my research, although it limits the richness of multiple gender relations, I take the epistemological stance of the reductionist male/female binary construction of gender relations. I take this stance because I am acutely aware that gender is divided into male and female in the dominant understanding of gender relations in Tajikistan. Within this binary construction, however, I will follow others in expanding the male/female binary to include female-female and male-male gender relations of power (Connell, 1995; Paechter, 2018; Schippers 2007). I seek to explore how women’s and men’s traditional relationships with their spouses, family members, and community as a whole change with migration. Specifically, I highlight how women and men engage, negotiate, and re-negotiate power relations in their experiences of migration, and how gender relations are transformed by labour migration experiences of Tajik migrant workers while they are in Russia and when they return to Tajikistan.

I take these angles of social constructionist epistemology because the objective of my research is to explore changes in gender relations of power in the context of labour migration as participants negotiate and re-negotiate gender relations in different contexts. These contexts which influence gender relations can be social, cultural, political,
economic, or religious. I start from the assumption that how participants know what they know and how they negotiate gender relations differs across the contexts (Herrera, 2013). I argue, however, that gender relations change not only when people migrate to a different culture. They also change when new ideas and cultures migrate to them and unsettle their traditional gender relations, as I argued above in the case of Soviet Tajikistan (Kasymova, 2007).

I intended the three bodies of literature that I reviewed in the last chapter to attest to the epistemology of social construction of gender relations. The theoretical framework that informs my methodology emerges from this epistemology. For this theoretical framework, I link together the three bodies of literature in specific ways that highlight changes in gender relations of power in the context of labour migration. Thus, I explain changes in gender relations of power based on feminist theories while I use international migration and local Tajik migration respectively to provide the broader global and local contextual processes that influence these changes.
Visually, I depict my theoretical framework below.

**Figure 2.1**

*Theoretical Framework*

- **Feminist Theories**
  - Gender relations - fluid, ongoing, constructed within social relations
  - Traditional gender relations created and sustained through systems of hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity
  - Disrupt hegemonic male/female gender relations
  - Intersectional theories - gender relations change with age, class, race, sexuality, religion, marital status, family status, etc.
  - Transnational theories analyze how Western feminism and imperialism impact the gendered experiences of women, and argue for local and context-specific analysis of gendered experiences

- **Tajik Migration**
  - The process and product of economic, social, political context
  - Disrupts traditional Tajik gender relations
  - Tajik gender relations of power negotiated, re-negotiated in the process of migration
  - Changes in gender relations of power in families and communities both in Russia and in Tajikistan
  - Gender relations of power – both change and remain the same during migration to Russia and after return to Tajikistan

- **International Migration**
  - Responds to global economic and political processes
  - Influences the flow of Tajik migrant workers
  - Provides global context for changing gender relations
  - A catalyst for improvement of gender relations of power
  - Pulls women and men into different areas of labour
  - Changes gender relations of power through remittances

Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers
Narrative Inquiry

To understand transformations in gender relations of power in the lived experiences of Tajik labour migrants while in Russia and when they return to Tajikistan, I chose narrative inquiry as the most fitting qualitative research method. This qualitative approach resonates the most with my epistemological and theoretical position. By itself, narrative inquiry is an approach integrating both methodological and epistemological/conceptual components. As an epistemological and conceptual approach, narrative inquiry resonates with the social construction of gender while representing the lived experiences of gender relations as narratives that can be constructed and reconstructed in various contexts. There are diverse ways in which researchers have adopted and developed narrative inquiry (e.g. Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; 2000; Xu & Connelly, 2010; McAdams, 1985; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2007, 2011; Spector-Mersel, 2011). In developing narrative inquiry as a research methodology, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggested the concepts of interaction and continuity that placed an individual within social context and where the experience grew out of other experiences, thus representing the continuum of past, present, and future (p. 2).

As a methodological approach, narrative inquiry is particularly suited for generating stories of participants’ lived experiences because narratives are one of the strongest means of sharing stories and experiences (Holman Jones, 2016). For Clandinin and Connelly (2006), stories are the portal through which we enter the world and make meaning. Specifically, they argue:

... narrative is the phenomenon studied in inquiry. Narrative inquiry, the study of experience as story, then, is first and foremost, a way of thinking about
experience. Narrative inquiry as a methodology entails a view of a phenomenon. To use narrative inquiry methodology is to adopt a particular narrative view of experience as phenomena under the study. (p. 477)

According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), narrative inquiry “is the study of the ways humans experience the world” (p. 2). Riessman and Speedy (2007) also argue, “a central area of narrative study is human interaction in relationships – the daily stuff of social work, counselling and psychotherapy” (pp. 426-427). Thus, this method resonates well with social work ethics and practice. Furthermore, narrative inquiry is described as one of “the best way(s) of representing and understanding experiences” (Taber, 2010, p. 16). Kim (2015) argues that experience is the starting point and the key term in narrative inquiry. From the diverse ways in which narrative inquiry has been used in qualitative research, I pulled out the following three common threads to make sense and meaning of changes in gender relations in the lived experiences of migrant workers from Tajikistan:

1) Personal narratives are embedded in broader societal discourses, stories, and myths. The lived experiences of migrant workers from Tajikistan are neither fantasies nor individual idiosyncrasies. I interpreted participants’ personal narratives as embedded in these broader societal discourses, stories, and myths. Furthermore, the language in which participants narrate their lived experiences is neither neutral nor innocent. Using my theoretical framework as my interpretive ‘compass,’ I asked: what meanings do I make of participants’ narratives, and how are these narratives linked to broader societal, cultural, and religious narratives of gender relations? What embodied narratives do I hear?

2) Narratives are positioned within broader unequal societal relations of power. The narratives of migrant workers position them within broader societal relations of power. I
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interpreted these narratives through the lens of my theoretical framework, and asked: how do participants narrate their lived experiences, and how do these narratives position them with broader gender relations of power?

3) Personal narratives have functions; they have points to make. In order to gather people’s stories, I decided to conduct interviews as they serve as a narrative device allowing people to tell stories about themselves (Porter, 2000). Migrant workers narrated their lived experiences in ways that positioned them in relation to their audience. Again, I used the lens of my theoretical framework and interpreted the construction and reconstruction processes involved in the fluidity of gender relations. However, I also understand and acknowledge that I am not a neutral interpreter of experiences in this study because I am partial and because I influence the ways in which participants narrate their lived experiences for me as their audience. As I interpreted, I asked what functions do participants’ narratives try to achieve? Why do they narrate their experience in this way and not in other ways? What point are they trying to make? What stories are they telling? What message are they trying to get across to their audience? As a supportive audience, I took deep reflexive notes on how I influence the construction and reconstruction of these narratives and on how I interpreted and made sense of these narratives.

Narrative Interview

I chose narrative interview as the main strategy of generating rich narrative data for the specific purposes of my research because this strategy resonates most with my epistemological, conceptual, and methodological positions, as I discuss above. Although narrative interview follows a flexible format, I decided to construct my interview guide as
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semi-structured with multiple probing, open-ended questions to motivate participants to narrate their experiences and share their stories (please see Interview Guide in Appendix 2). Narrative interviews allow for a flexible and relaxed discussion in the form of conversations in mutual and reciprocal ways that mitigate power imbalance between participants and researchers (Denzin, 2001; Kvale, 1996; Jindra & Jindra, 2019). For me this was very important. I wanted to shift power to the participants, even though I am acutely aware that it is not fully possible to accomplish this shifting of power. Furthermore, narrative interviews allow for “spontaneous and uninterrupted account in which the participant attempts to relate reflexively to their own experience” (Szczepanik & Siebert, 2016, p. 2). During each interview, I strived to establish a space for spontaneous and uninterrupted stories to emerge.

I adapted my interview process according to Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s (2000) suggestions for narrative interviews. The authors identified five main steps: 1) preparation, 2) initiation, 3) main narration, 4) questioning phase, and 5) concluding talk (p. 61). During the interview process, I was particularly mindful of the suggestion regarding main narration. Active listening and explicit encouragement through body language and other non-verbal signals are required to continue the narration. During the interview, I used facial expressions, leaning, and smiles in relation to what participants were saying. This procedure encouraged the participants to continue the interview, and it also encouraged me to listen to my body language more attentively. I also used signals such as “I see,” “yes,” and “hmmm.” to encourage the narration. When needed, I used follow-up and clarifying questions to understand the story better.
Jovchelovitch and Bauer’s (2000) ‘concluding talk’ phase was done after the interview. These talks were also enriching when the participant and I continued the conversations and experiences and views were shared. In sum, the five phases suggested by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) were helpful during the narrative interview, and I used these processes in ways that reflect the lived realities of migrant workers.

**Participants**

After my research proposal was approved by the Research Ethics Board of Wilfrid Laurier University, I reached out to potential participants and invited them to my study. I prepared an Informed Consent Form that included information about the study in three languages: English, Russian, and Tajik (please see Appendix 1). I invited potential participants who were working in Russia, and I also invited those who have worked in Russia and since returned to Tajikistan.

**Selection Criteria**

For the specific purposes of my research, I constructed and reconstructed my selection criteria before I finally settled on utilizing several strategies for the selection of prospective research participants. Thus, participants had to meet the following requirements:

1) They must be citizens of Tajikistan who live permanently in Tajikistan and work temporarily in Russia. This is to reflect the ethnic diversity in Tajikistan. My research is not limited to ethnic Tajiks but includes other ethnicities such as Uzbeks, the second-largest ethnic group in the country. Thus, the term Tajik migrant worker in my research refers to migrant workers who are citizens of Tajikistan but who are not necessarily ethnic Tajiks.
2) They must have lived and worked in Russia for at least six months. I believe a minimum of six months of living and working in Russia is needed to experience a different social reality in a different social, political, economic, and religious context to be able to reflect on some changes in gender relations.

3) They must be older than 18 years of age. While I have no cap on the upper limits of age, I chose the cut-off lower limit of age 18 simply because this is the legal age of an adult in Tajikistan. The Research Ethics Board requires additional regulations for children under the age of majority. This automatically excludes children, particularly boys, who enter labour migration at a younger age.

4) They must not have acquired Russian citizenship. There are many Tajik citizens who over time obtain Russian citizenship, and this enables them to access services in Russia which ordinary migrants from Tajikistan are not able to access. This criterion of citizenship helps me to focus on migrant workers from Tajikistan without Russian citizenship because their experiences of oppression and marginalization may be different from those who hold Russian citizenship. These experiences intersect with gender relations differently.

**Participant Invitation**

I invited participants largely using word of mouth (snowball sampling) where I encouraged the first few participants to share the information about the study with their friends, colleagues, roommates, and other acquaintances who met the selection criteria. In Tajikistan, through my contacts at a local NGO which runs programs for migrant workers, I invited several participants from regions of republican subordination (RRS) that are close geographically to the capital Dushanbe. I also used strategies of convenient
access, especially in Russia where I was living close to many supermarkets and met several migrants from Tajikistan. It was convenient for me to invite some participants after meeting them at these supermarkets.

This strategy has the potential to exclude prospective participants who have problems with documentation. Although I encouraged participants to share information about the research study with others, those with documentation issues may have been unable to come out to the supermarkets or reluctant to meet with me. Participants in my study, whether they were invited in Tajikistan or in Russia, represented several regions of Tajikistan: Dushanbe, RRS, and the South. As regional belonging was not in my selection criteria, I was not able to recruit participants from other regions. However, some participants who were from Dushanbe have ‘roots’ in other regions of the country.

**Participant Profiles**

After inviting potential participants who met these criteria, I interviewed 21 labour migrants from Tajikistan who had lived and worked in Russia between six months and 10 years. These 21 labour migrants consisted of 10 women and 11 men living both in Russia and in Tajikistan at the time of the interviews. I interviewed 9 participants in Russia and 12 in Tajikistan. Some participants moved between Russia and Tajikistan regularly or occasionally: working in Russia, returning to Tajikistan, and later re-entering Russia. Others travelled only once and spent a short amount of time in Russia. Most participants were ethnic Tajiks and a couple were Uzbek workers from Tajikistan.
Table 2.1

Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Tajikistan</th>
<th>Russia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>6 men and 6 women</td>
<td>5 men and 4 women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of women</td>
<td>from 29 to 43 years</td>
<td>from 25 to 47 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of men</td>
<td>from 23 to 49 years</td>
<td>from 23 to 53 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status for women</td>
<td>4 married and 2 divorced</td>
<td>3 divorced/widowed, 1 married</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital status for men</td>
<td>5 married and 1 divorced</td>
<td>3 married and 2 single</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children for women</td>
<td>None to 4 (average 3)</td>
<td>None to 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of children for men</td>
<td>None to 5 (average 2-3)</td>
<td>None to 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education for women</td>
<td>From 4 years of primary schooling to university graduate</td>
<td>From 7 years in school to vocational training (PTU)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level of education for men</td>
<td>From high school graduate to university graduate</td>
<td>From high school graduate to vocational training graduate (PTU)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Narrative Data

To generate narrative data, I interviewed all 21 participants both in Russia and in Tajikistan (nine in Russia and 12 in Tajikistan). In Russia, I interviewed four women and five men, mostly in Moscow city and its suburbs because most labour migrants from Tajikistan work there. In addition, due to my frequent travel to Russia, I am more familiar with this city than other cities in Russia. Out of the nine interviews I conducted in Russia, I recorded eight. I did not record one interview because the participant did not want to be recorded. However, this participant allowed me to take detailed notes during the interview. Initially, three workers did not trust me, and the first question they asked was
if I was a journalist. Interestingly, although I spoke separately with each participant and each of them asked me this question. This situation suggested to me that some Tajik migrant workers do not trust journalists, especially in Russia, perhaps due to fear of disclosing their irregular status, their names, and their place of work. Perhaps some Tajik migrant workers fear deportation.

For the interviews, I asked the participants to choose places where they felt comfortable. I conducted some of the interviews in a food court inside a mall, in quiet areas of a big park, at their place of work, in cafeterias and restaurants, and in Chaihanas (tea house) in Moscow. I conducted all interviews where participants suggested.

In Tajikistan, I interviewed six women and six men. Of the 12 interviews, I recorded nine. Three interviews were not recorded – one because of technical malfunction of the recorder and two because two participants did not want to be recorded. In all three cases, however, I was able to take detailed notes during the interview with the permission of participants. I conducted my interviews in Dushanbe and in the regions of republican subordination (RRS) that are geographically close to Dushanbe. Finding a comfortable place for the interview was easier in Tajikistan than it was in Russia. I met with participants in my apartment, in participants’ houses, in cafeterias, and in community places offered by the local NGO.

With the purpose of developing a holistic understanding of participants’ lived experiences, I started the conversation in both countries by asking about their life story. I began by asking them to describe their family of origin and what an ordinary day looked like, and then I slowly moved to asking questions with the intention of understanding their pre-migration and migration experiences. Finally, I asked participants to describe
their experiences of gender relations. I also asked questions about their experience during travel and first arrival to Russia. My intention was to understand the life of every participant as holistically as possible. The interviews lasted between 60 and 110 minutes. I conducted these interviews in the languages of Russian and Tajik. Some of the interviews were conducted purely in Tajik or Russian while many were conducted in both Tajik and Russian. I conducted all interviews between July and September 2017.

**Interpretation (Data Analysis)**

Scholars assert that transcribing constitutes the first steps of data analysis (Bailey, 2008; Brandenburg & Davidson, 2011; Lapadat, 2000). They argue that transcribing is not an innocent process of converting the recorded interviews into written text but rather a political process of interpreting, including, and excluding information. For this reason, I chose to transcribe the interviews myself in order to be immersed in participants’ narratives in times, places, and situations.

As I transcribed and translated between the languages, I found that some expressions are not fully translatable and lose their meaning. For example, I had difficulty translating Russian or Tajik jargon words which were important for the context. I remember one of the participants had mentioned during the interview: “*Mne ne v padly esli moya zhena stala rabotat.*” If I translate this from Russian to English, it would be something like: “I don’t mind if my wife started to work”; however, this translation does not convey the whole meaning, because when the participant said: “*mne ne v padly*” he referred more to how society might shame him because his wife is working. My translation could not convey the same meaning. Another example is from the Tajik language when one of the participants shared that she should not go to the bazaar alone:
“bo sari luch munkin gashtan nest” [not to show off herself to the public with an ‘open/uncovered head]. Being with ‘an open head or uncovered head’ actually refers more to being without a husband than being without a headcover. These are just two examples of the interpretive nuances, but I experienced many more. When I was not fully satisfied with the translatable meaning, or when some words were very important in order to understand the context, I included them in the original language together with the translation.

I also noticed the extent to which my subjectivities and personal positioning were influencing the processes of my interpretation despite using my theoretical framework as my interpretive lens. I took detailed reflexive notes to document the ways in which I influence not only the stories participants tell in the interview but also how I interpret their narratives in my analysis away from the participants.

Transcribing all the interviews with these considerations was not easy. However, it was even more challenging to analyze the narratives because I was aware that there are many ways of interpreting, and that narrative inquiry has diverse ways in itself. Thus, I went back to Riessman’s (2011) advice of employing a “family of methods” in order to analyze narrative interviews. Polkinghorne (1995) elaborates on two major configurations of narrative inquiry. In the first configuration, qualitative researchers treat participants’ narratives as text, search for common threads and structures, and code them into themes and subthemes. In the second configuration, narrative researchers treat participants’ narratives as stories and organize them around a plot with beginning, middle, and end. Polkinghorne (1995) calls the first type analysis of narrative that describes the overarching themes while the second type is called narrative analysis, where the common
elements, as life events, are crafted into stories. I chose to do both types of analysis because I see both aspects of narrative analysis as complementary and not necessarily contradictory. I explored all the themes and subthemes of participants’ narratives, including commonalities and differences, as an overview. To delve deeper into the stories, I completed a narrative analysis and presented the stories through a play, stressing important life milestones in relation to the migration journey. Below, I describe my processes of completing the two types of analyses.

**Analysis of Narratives**

Treating participants’ narratives as text and discourse, I followed other researchers’ suggestions for thematic analysis. Particularly, I followed the step-by-step guidelines that Braun and Clarke (2006) offer. They present thematic analysis as a flexible and accessible method of data analysis that can be used with multiple epistemological and theoretical approaches in qualitative research. This flexibility of thematic analysis ably lends itself to my social constructionist epistemological and theoretical framework, and I used it in order to make sense and make meaning of changes in gender relations. I tried to explore both the surface explicit meanings and the deeper implicit symbolic meanings of participants’ narratives of gender relations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

I started with immersing myself in the data, listening to the interviews, and taking important notes to identify some of the themes and patterns. Then, I read and reread the transcripts several times to further immerse myself in the data. While reading and rereading, I coded chunks of the material. I used descriptive and interpretive codes and highlighted some of the significant text in different colours. I coded and clustered codes...
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into themes and subthemes and then pulled out the overarching theme. I worked in three languages, doing the initial coding in Russian. Later, when I clustered the themes and subthemes into categories, I started to translate parts of the transcript that were relevant for the emerging themes.

As a qualitative social work researcher, I acknowledge that I am not neutral in this process of analysis. While immersing myself in the interviews and developing the themes, I acknowledged my own social positions as a Tajik Muslim woman, as a mother, as a daughter, as a wife, and as an immigrant. Even though I was mindful about my personal social locations, they still impacted the analysis during the process of highlighting the prevalent themes and experiences of participants. Furthermore, while internalizing and embodying participants’ stories, I cannot claim neutrality and objectivity. Just as participants’ narratives are co-constructed in our interviews, this analysis is also co-constructed as a result of the meaning-making processes and relationships that emerged during the interviews. This is consistent with narrative inquiry, which “recognizes that the researcher and the researched in a particular study are in a relationship with each other, and both parties will learn and change in the encounter” (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 9).

I went through the step-by-step guide of Braun and Clarke (2006), namely familiarizing myself with participants’ narratives; generating initial codes; searching for themes; reviewing the themes; and defining, refining, and renaming themes. After exploring processes of changes in gender relations in the narratives of participants across all the themes in the entire body of the data, I came up with an overarching theme in the final process of my thematic analysis. I realized that changes in gender relations in the
experience of participants are not linear; rather they consist of one step forward and two steps back. Gender relations are not entirely transformed but they are not entirely returning to tradition either. They go back and forth between tradition and transformation (Butler, 1993). To illustrate and represent this back-and-forth process, I use the metaphor of gender relations as trampoline, which I discuss in more detail in the next chapter. This insight came to me as I was playing with my children on a trampoline. As the trampoline metaphor captures the essence of my findings, I named it as the overarching theme of my entire analysis. I organized the major themes into four, namely: 1) Education as transformational, 2) Becoming different, 3) The jump for power, and 4) Morphing gender relations of power. In addition, I organized several subthemes under each of these four major themes.

**Narrative Analysis**

While the above thematic analysis allowed me to analyze participants’ narratives and present an overview of commonalities, differences, as well as interconnections from across the body of the data, here narrative analysis brings me deep into constructing participants’ narratives into stories (Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman, 2011; Barone, 2008). Thematic analysis gives us an overview of the whole data corpus (Braun & Clarke, 2006); however, it is not enough to unleash the depth and richness of the stories of participants. Narrative inquiry offers a range of strategies to organize narrative data into stories, especially in individual stories and stories of case studies (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Xu & Connelly, 2010; Polkinghorne, 1995; Riessman & Speedy, 2007).

Regrettably, it is not possible for me to tell the rich individual stories of all 21 participants in the context of my dissertation. In addition, the diversity of participants’
life circumstances, experiences, and the contexts in which they generate their narratives makes it hard for me to plot and develop a single story that represents the experiences of all participants. This is particularly difficult because stories are very sensitive to contexts, especially when exploring the transformation of gender relations. It is very difficult to plot even a single composite story that represents experiences of all participants, as other researchers have done (Taber, 2013; Wertzi et al., 2011; Willis, 2011; Zwi & Mares, 2015). Therefore, while I follow their strategies for plotting composite narratives, I also expand on their work and plot several composite stories to tell participants’ stories from multiple contexts and diverging experiences.

There are several main reasons why I decided to plot composite stories rather than individual stories. First, I realized that I am not able to represent all 21 stories I collected in this dissertation due to spatial constrains. The richness of the stories and the experiences shared by the participants are remarkable, and I strived to represent the depth of their struggles and achievements. Plotting the stories through composite stories allowed me to represent this depth. I also believe that composite stories are more powerful and effective than individual stories because they merge highlights from several narratives on the same topic. Through developing the stories, I tried to distill and highlight the complexities from all the stories I collected. Besides the gendered experiences, I strived to demonstrate the everyday struggles and the social reality of the migrant workers. Furthermore, the composite stories allowed me to illustrate the diversity of experiences as I demonstrated the experiences of younger and older, married and non-married, with and without children, divorced and widowed men and women. Composite
stories allowed me to capture the diversity of experiences and intersecting web of identities and social realities that influence changes in gender relations of power.

I also chose to present participants’ narratives in first-person voice. The choice to present composite stories in first-person voice comes with ethical concerns, but I believe the benefits outweigh the risks. For example, composite stories may fictionalize participants’ narratives, but as researchers argue, fictionalizing has benefits. It protects the anonymity of participants’ identities and the confidentiality of their stories. It also helps in highlighting the richness of their stories without exposing participants (Caine et al., 2017). I see composite stories as artistic representation of findings that conveys meaningful message through evocative expression of feelings, thoughts, and behaviours (Adame et al., 2011). It helps tell participants’ stories in holistic and relatable ways reflecting their experiences. I incorporate some fictionalization to construct the stories and connect them together. I follow researchers who view such representation as a good research practice of reciprocal giving where I thank participants for their contribution by reporting their stories in a format that is appealing and accessible to them (Gupta & Kelly, 2014). Furthermore, I see first-person story as a just and fair way to present participants’ stories. I want the participants to speak and be heard. I want their realities and struggles to be visible in a holistic way that highlights their whole life while still focusing on changes in gender relations. Presenting my analysis in this way also invites readers to engage with the lived experiences of participants holistically and to understand their experiences.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) emphasize the importance of three-dimensional approaches in narrative inquiry with a focus on interaction (personal and social),
continuity (past, present, and future), and situation (physical places or the storyteller’s places). Following them, I present the composite stories according to three major points in time in a migrant worker’s life: 1) Pre-migration life and decision to migrate, 2) Arrival to Russia, work, and connection with Tajikistan, and 3) Life after return/thinking about return. This timeline helped me to creatively combine the above three dimensions of narrative inquiry in each composite story. The first dimension, the interaction of the personal and the social, is narrated through the everyday lives of participants who embody familial, communal, and societal norms. The stories are narrated through the second dimension of continuity of timeline as pre-migration, within migration, and post migration. The third dimension, the situation, narrates the stories in the different contexts of Tajikistan and Russia. Although this strategy seems to break down the stories chronologically, according to my theoretical framework, it helps to examine the changes in gender relations as a process of interacting with the various local and global contexts of migration. The process highlights how theories of gender relations and the transnational contexts of labour migration interact and reinforce each other.

I must note here that chronological order is not how participants shared their stories. It is my creative intervention to present the stories in poignant ways. Participants’ stories were not linear. My analysis sought to bring cohesiveness to the stories and plot them in a chronological order of unfolding events and turning points as suggested by Clandinin and Connelly (2000). Chronological linearity is the structure I imposed to highlight the holistic process of the changes that take place during all phases of the migration journey. My imposition of structure raises ethical concerns about the unequal power relations between researchers and participants. I am acutely aware of the power
differentials. My reflexive notes are full of concerns and justifications. I construct these composite stories with the same ethical considerations by which I constructed the thematic analysis of participants’ stories.

Any format of presenting findings raises ethical concerns. I seek to minimize the harm that I may cause by making my process as transparent as possible. Like in the thematic analysis, participant anonymity is protected by using pseudonyms. None of the names in this dissertation are real names. Each of the characters in the composite stories represents the stories of several participants. I creatively combined them both for ethical reasons (Caine et al., 2017) and for esthetics (Adame et al., 2011). Ethically, I protect the anonymity of participants by fictionalizing the characters. Aesthetically, I bring out the holistic stories by artistically presenting them as a play.

The stories I constructed here are largely verbatim accounts of participants taken from the transcripts. In the stories, I also illustrate some of the emotions and body language that were taking place during the interviews. To reflect the diversity of participants’ life circumstances, I imagined the composite stories as a play in the characters of eight migrant workers in conversation with each other. The play is divided into two acts and six scenes that are woven together by a narrator who links the stories back to the theories (Holman Jones, 2016). Act 1 presents a conversation of four men and Act 2 presents a conversation of four women. Each Act is sub-divided into three scenes: Pre-migration Stories, Working in Russia, and Stories of Return. I segregated the conversation by gender where four women characters and four men characters share their stories separately. This is to honour the combined religious and cultural norms of
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participants. What gives coherence and structure to the composite stories is that each character speaks to the above three milestones and the three scenes of the play.

Credibility Issues

When I think about credibility issues in qualitative research, I go back to Lincoln and Guba (1985). They prompt me to ask how, as a qualitative inquirer, I can persuade my audience that my findings are worth paying attention to. According to them, the value of qualitative research is strengthened by its trustworthiness. To establish trustworthiness, even though I relied heavily on one data collection technique, I analyzed interviews using two different methods of analysis: analysis of narratives (thematic analysis) and narrative analysis. In contrast with quantitative research, the credibility of qualitative research is appraised by the process of ‘trustworthiness.’ Lincoln and Guba (1985) outline four main criteria for assessing the quality in qualitative research: 1) Credibility, 2) Transferability, 3) Dependability, and 4) Confirmability. These criteria underline the confidence in the truthfulness of the findings. While researchers have critiqued and expanded this work, I follow the most common strategies currently used: member checking, reflexivity, and thick description (Shenton, 2004). Below, I discuss how I followed some of these processes to ensure trustworthiness.

Member Checking

Member checking is considered one of the most important processes of improving the credibility of a study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Shenton, 2004; Tracey, 2010). It involves the checks related to the accuracy of the data collected. These checks can be made “on the spot” during the interview to verify some information, and/or at the end of the interview. The transcripts could also be shared with the
Participants to negotiate meanings. Another strategy for member checking is to send the initial findings to the participants and to have conversations with them during member checking meetings (Shenton, 2004).

In my study, I was not able to conduct member checking after the interviews with all the participants. However, during the interviews, I asked many probing and follow-up questions to ensure the accuracy of the stories. Many participants, especially those in Russia, shared only their phone numbers with me. Many did not have electronic means of communications other than their phones, and some were reluctant to share them too. However, I was able to have conversations about some of the initial themes and to verify my initial findings with three participants.

Reflexivity

I took detailed reflexive notes during my field research and throughout my process of data analysis. I used these reflexive notes for two main purposes. One is to document my research processes, the decisions I make and why, the strategies I develop, and what factors I consider in the development of ideas, concepts, themes, and strategies of analysis. This serves the purpose of keeping an audit trail (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The second reason was informed by Kumsa’s (2016) argument that “intentionally or unintentionally, our deeply ingrained ways of knowing and being in the world, our internalized epistemologies have immense impact on our research” (p. 608). Hence, I wanted to identify my own biases and document how my subjective processes, including my identities and subjectivities, influence my research whether I am interviewing, transcribing, or analyzing the narratives.
Further, I used reflexive journaling to keep track of how both my power and privilege and my vulnerability influence my interpretive process and what lessons I learn. My reflexive notes served as a source of new knowledge through critical exploration of my own practices and experiences as I was pushed toward the unfamiliar and the uncomfortable (Pillow, 2003).

Engel and Schutt (2017) suggest that researchers should know themselves and identify their biases and preoccupations even before analyzing qualitative data. I took this as an opportunity to identify my embodied values and social norms, not just as a researcher but also as a good reflexive practice in my everyday life. For example, I identified a tendency to pathologize women and focus more on their victimization than agency. Another example emerged very clearly during my process of narrative analysis. I met many participants whose parents were divorced and felt that I could connect and relate with them immediately. I also come from a family of parents who divorced when I was very young. Themes connected to ‘search for freedom’ or ‘escape from societal control’ were very close to me as well. Sometimes our stories merged and the identity boundary between us blurred. There were times in my analyses when I asked myself: Is it me talking or is it the participants? Furthermore, some of the biases, values, or beliefs remain invisible to me. I discuss some of the reflexive moments (Pillow, 2003) in Chapter Five.

**Thick Description**

Credible qualitative research should provide rich accounts from participants (Denzin, 2001; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ponterotto (2006) identifies five essential features of thick description: 1) accurately describing social actions within their
appropriate context; 2) capturing thoughts, feelings, and webs of social interaction; 3) assigning motivations and intentions to social actions; 4) describing the context and specifics of social action well so that readers feel they experienced a true story; and 5) promoting thick interpretation which leads to thick meaning so that findings resonate with readers (pp. 542-543). Without such ‘thick description,’ readers cannot determine if the overall findings are trustworthy (Shenton, 2004).

As much as possible, I described participants’ narratives in their fullest and holistic contexts in the process of my analysis, both in analyzing narratives and in narrative analysis (Polkinghorne, 1995). I provided thick descriptions of not only the contexts and the individuals but also the webs of interaction, for example with members of families and communities. In the thematic analysis, I provided rich direct quotes to enhance the thick description of themes. In the narrative analysis, I took different narratives of participants and creatively plotted composite stories in ways that I believe will make readers experience the full richness and power of participants’ stories. I intend these strategies of enhancing thick description to also enhance the credibility of participants’ stories and trustworthiness of my findings.

**Presentation of Findings**

In the next section, I present the findings in two chapters. In Chapter Three, Gender as Trampoline, I discuss the overview of findings from my thematic analysis of narratives. In Chapter Four, Composite Stories, I present stories emerging from my narrative analysis. In these, I demonstrate how stories of gender relations are embedded within the holistic context of everyday life.
Chapter Three: Gender Relations as Trampoline

In this first of two chapters on the findings of my research, I use a range of analyses in narrative inquiry (Riessman, 2008; Polkinghorne, 1995). In this chapter, I present the overview of findings emerging from my critical analysis of narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) organized into themes and subthemes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the next chapter, I move from analysis of narratives to delve deeper into narrative analysis and present composite stories of participants.

In this overview, I present the overarching theme of ‘gender relations as trampoline’ in the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers. ‘Gender relations as trampoline’ highlights the tension between transmission and transformation of gender relations as it interweaves the notions of reproduction and production (Butler, 1993). The metaphor symbolizes this dynamic tension between the reproduction of old gender power relations and the production of new ones. Trampoline has firm structures in its overall frame, symbolizing the transmission of rigid patriarchal structures, and it has flexibility in its springs and elastic stretching fabric, symbolizing the dynamic change and transformation in gender relations of power.

When children play on the trampoline, I take the jump as representing change in gender relations as the ability to transform. I also take the jump as the decision to migrate, and I consider the trampoline’s elasticity to stretch in response to the jump as the transformative change instigated by migration. As the falling back represents a return to the norm, I take the tendency of the trampoline to rebound to its normal frame as a return to the transmission of traditional gender relations of power. However, I draw on Butler (1993) to argue that rebounding rarely returns the trampoline to its initial rigidity just as
falling back rarely returns the jumping children to the same position. There is tension between transformation and continuity of gender relations. Transformation shows the pushback that each jump imposes on the rigid structures of the trampoline. I believe that the cumulative effects of many jumps and collective resistance results in the wear and tear and swaying of the trampoline’s rigid structures. The tension between change and continuity is an ongoing struggle in my findings. However, my hope is that the trampoline will be dismantled eventually, and new emancipatory structures will be imagined.

The overall findings of my research demonstrate this tension between transformation and transmission of gender relations as discussed here and in the next chapter. Below, I discuss the overarching theme of “gender as trampoline” by organizing this overarching theme into four major themes: 1) Education as transformative, 2) Becoming different, 3) The jump for power, and 4) Morphing gender relations of power. I discuss several subthemes under each of these four major themes.

**Education as Transformative**

Education as transformative of gender relations emerged as one of the major themes from my analysis of the narratives of some participants. Although this may come across as simply stating the obvious, participants did not always know the transformative impact of education on gender relations of power. They realized that more in the process of their migration to Russia and especially after they returned to Tajikistan. While the sense that education transforms gender power relations is at the core of participants’ narratives, that transformation was hidden in the narratives emphasizing the importance of education for children, for girls and women who remain in Tajikistan, and for the men
and women migrants themselves. It was also embedded into narratives emphasizing education as a pathway to a good life with well-paying skilled jobs and as a rescuer from labour migration and discrimination in Russia. Under all these layers is the silent assumption that educated people hold stronger gender equality and power in their marital, familial, communal, and societal relations in the broader Tajik society.

The importance of education as transforming gender relations has its roots in the era of Soviet Tajikistan where it was enacted as education for women and girls. In this case, the jump on the trampoline and the resulting transformation of gender relations was not set off as a result of Tajiks’ migrating to Russia but largely as a result of Soviet policies implemented in Central Asia and consequent ideas migrating to Tajikistan. As studies indicate, Soviet leaders wanted to educate women in Tajikistan to ensure that women would join the workforce of workers in building communism (Kasymova, 2007; Tadjbakhsh, 1998). Before Tajikistan became a part of USSR, the majority of Tajik women did not have access to education. The Soviet state tried to draw more women into public life by providing them with access to education and by establishing specific quotas for higher education institutions. Previously, only 0.1 per cent of women in Central Asia were educated (Kamp, 2006, pp. 29-30). During the Soviet era, access to education increased so significantly that the country had a literacy rate of almost 100 percent, and the literacy rate among women was equal to that of men. Moreover, higher education was free, and students received stipends provided by the government and they had guaranteed jobs after graduation. Soviet rulers wanted women to receive education, and approximately 50 per cent of all workers were women with secondary and higher
education (DeYoung et al., 2018). Those measures and developments were believed to increase women’s participation in the labour force.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the Tajik Civil War that followed from 1992 until 1997, the trampoline of gender relations tended to fall back to its normative state. Gender inequality in education increased significantly. Although the enrollment of girls at primary and secondary levels is still relatively high (48 per cent to 43 per cent), only 29 per cent of women constitute tertiary students (ADB, 2016). Many young girls dropped out in the seventh or eighth grade. Such rebounding of the trampoline has a harsh impact on gender relations of power, although the falling back does not return to the same position.

Despite the deterioration of women and girls’ education in ‘new’ Tajikistan, the Soviet era’s emphasis on the importance of education seems to be imprinted in the minds of ordinary people. Some of the participants in my research indicated that one of the main reasons for their migration was their children’s education. Global studies on labour migration affirm my findings by indicating that many migrant workers migrate to support their children’s education or to save/remit money for education (UNICEF, 2010; Fleury, 2016). However, I see this desire to search for better education as one of the pathways to more gender equitable relations. As studies suggest, for the migration process to provide sharp insights, gender must be explored within interlocking systems of inequality (Anthias, 2012; Reeves, 2013a; Thieme, 2008). In analyzing the transformative effects of education on gender relations, I place gender as intersectional with inequalities in age, race, class, nationality, period of migration, marital status, and familial and kinship structures.
For example, some male participants who returned to Tajikistan from labour migration in Russia felt remorse that they did not make sure their daughters had tertiary or professional education. Other male participants thought their lives would be better if their wives had education and could work in well-paying jobs. Still others dreamed about having higher education for themselves or giving their children good education so that they could have access to better jobs in Tajikistan. In this case, they would not have to migrate to Russia for unskilled jobs, and if they migrated, it would be to seek high-paying skilled jobs. Some participants said that they were ready to pay the sacrifices and experience oppression to achieve their dream that the savings they accumulate from their labour in Russia would help their children to study and find a profession. I explore this theme through three sub-themes discussed below. Although many participants talked about the transformative power of education, none of them was able to achieve the ‘educational dream’ at the time I conducted the interviews.

I Wish She Had an Education

This subtheme highlights participants’ delayed realization about the importance of educating women and girls within the general understanding that their education will lead not only to better earning capacity but also to enhance equality in gender relations.

I wish she had an education and could work. It would have been easier for us... and I wouldn’t have to leave...

This is Munir expressing regret that his wife did not have an education. If she did, she would have saved him from going to labour migration in Russia and the subsequent discrimination and suffering there. He had to leave because his income was insufficient to sustain his family. Labour migration was not a choice that many participants made happily. Their decision to migrate was driven primarily by the push and pull factors.
Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers

identified by other studies (Lee, 1966; Parkins, 2010). The common narrative I heard from participants was around the language of ‘no choice’, ‘necessity’, and ‘I have to’. Many migrant workers were pushed to seek labour in Russia because their partners did not participate in the labour force or their income was very low.

Similarly, Zafar felt remorse that his daughters did not have college education. While he was in labour migration in Russia, he was not fully involved in what was going on in the family. He concentrated on earning the money to fulfill his family’s basic needs of housing, food, and access to healthcare, while his wife took on the remaining family responsibilities and made major decisions about the children. As this family had moved to Dushanbe from another region of Tajikistan, they did not have close or extended family in the city and so his wife looked after their children practically alone. As Zafar stated:

First, we were living in obshezhitie [temporary housing/hostel]. The conditions there were not good. Later we moved to small rented apartment. I really wanted to buy an apartment for my family and tried to save money for that. My wife was with children, and I was not there while they were growing. I was too far from them. My wife did not talk about education. It was not our priority at that time... and now I regret that I did not think about it too, as thought about buying an apartment... And even after I bought the apartment, education was not something we paid attention to. And I regret now... My girls would not be in the situation they are now if they had good education and had a profession. Both of them are now divorced, living with me, and I am taking care of them and my grandchildren... But if they had gone to college or university, their life would be better. I wish I saved money for their education when I was working in Russia.

Like Munir’s wife, Zafar’s wife also has no education. Unlike Munir’s economic push, however, Zafar’s push factors have so many intersecting, competing basic needs that college or the professional education of his girls did not count as a basic need. For many participants, their perception of education, especially the importance of educating women and girls, changed during the process of their own mobility. Their new valuing of
women and girls’ education was the result of the inequalities they suffered while in Russia and the gender inequalities they returned to in Tajikistan. This is particularly true for middle-aged male participants like Zafar, who returned from migration and decided not to travel to Russia for work anymore. Zafar realized the absolute importance of his daughters’ education after returning from migration and finding his two daughters divorced because their migrant husbands found second wives in Russia, leaving them destitute like many other migrant families whose husbands remarried in Russia (IOM, 2009).

Like many participants, girls’ education was not in Zafar’s horizon when he went to Russia for work decades ago. Munir too did not think that education was important for women when he was married approximately 20 years ago. It was after migration and facing the difficulties of being a migrant worker in Russia that he realized he could actually live and work in Tajikistan if his wife could work and contribute to the family’s income. Furthermore, participants also bring home lessons from Russia on how the education of women and girls empowers women economically and changes gender relations for the better. Studies have documented how the experience of migration transforms gender relations both in the sending and in the receiving communities (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Levitt, 2001; Mahler & Pessar, 2006). However, such realization is just the beginning, as neither Zafar nor Munir have moved beyond regret over the past to imagine that women and girls can be educated in the present, or at least they did not express that during the interviews. Divorced women with children can still go to school. Being divorced and being a single mother is not the end of a woman’s life. Divorced women can still become professionals and be gainfully employed. They can
still contribute to the family income, and they have the potential to improve gender relations. However, it seems the participants did not imagine this as a possible reality, or at least they did not express this during the interview.

Another participant, Nargis, who talked about her own education, also mentioned the ‘regret’ narrative. Due to a previous civil war in the country and the necessity to look after her younger siblings, she had to drop out of school very early, just after she finished the fifth grade. She did not have a chance to continue schooling and obtain a profession, as she got married early and had to look after her own children. She regretted her ‘missed’ chance to obtain a profession by expressing: “If I studied I did not stay at home now, and I could find a ‘normal’ job.”

Nargis’ understanding of a normal job was not a low-skilled job in the cleaning industry in Russia or Tajikistan, but rather a high-skilled job for which she needed an education. Even though Nargis did not see the possibility of studying for herself, she was looking for a better education for her children. During the interview, she shared: “I did not study myself, but I want my children to study... So, when they get married, they will not suffer.”

Nargis understood that lack of education brings many challenges to people’s lives, especially when they establish families and have children. She expressed these challenges as ‘suffering’ azob. One of her understandings of ‘suffering’ was connected with the necessity to migrate when her husband needs to travel to a foreign country (davlati musofir), leaving her alone with the children, or when both of them had to migrate and leave the children with family in order to earn money in Russia to meet their children’s basic needs. However, like Munir and Zafar, Nargis also did not envision herself
becoming a student who is married and has children. She did not see this as a possible, achievable ‘reality’.

**Boys’ Education**

This subtheme probes the assumption underlying the notion of children’s education to reveal the reality that for some participants, children’s education means boy’s education. Like other studies of migrant workers (Fleury, 2016; UNICEF, 2010), my findings indicate that the desire to give higher education and a better life to their children is one purpose of their migration. Parents are ready to sacrifice for their children’s education. They are ready to travel to other countries for work, obtain the necessary paperwork, face abuse and discrimination, and live under difficult conditions with one hope: that their children will go to school today and achieve a better life with higher education tomorrow. However, scratching the surface of what is meant by children’s education exposes the prevalence of boys’ education.

For example, for Kasym, children’s education is important, because his children are all boys: “I have all boys; they need to have a profession in the future to earn for themselves. I always think about them”. Parents in Tajikistan value boys’ education more than girls’ education, as demonstrated in my research and confirmed by other studies (Janigan, 2012; Yakubova, 2020). However, as a result of migration, parents started to rethink their values toward education. Some participants who had only girls shared their regrets that they had not ensured their daughters’ education, as they had not previously valued education for girls. Transformation in thinking about girls’ education often came from the bitter experience of their daughters’ marriage to migrant workers who left them and established other relationships in Russia. However, for parents who
had only boys, their vision of education formed one of the motivating factors for them to leave for labour migration. These parents knew that their sons were future heads of households and required a good education to enhance their prospects for future employment.

Gender disparity in education is not a new challenge for Tajikistan. UN Gender Inequality Index for 2019 ranks Tajikistan 133 out of 187 countries. Gender disparity in education is a concern for achieving gender equality. UNESCO statistics indicate that gender differences in education start to appear in the fifth grade when 10 per cent of girls are absent from school in comparison to approximately 2 percent of boys. Children, especially girls, tend to drop out of school before completing nine years of compulsory education (Turdieva & Hellborg, 2016). Previously, approximately 37 per cent of high school students were girls (Tajikistan Gender Statistics, 2007), and now this number has increased to 43 to 48 per cent (ADB, 2016). ADB in Tajikistan (2016) reports that only 29 per cent of women constitute tertiary students; this number was reported to be even lower in 2007 constituting 23.7 per cent (Tajikistan Gender Statistics, 2007). The statistical data from the reports demonstrate that gender disparity in education is slowly improving. This gradual improvement is consistent with my findings, which demonstrate transformation in parents’ minds, especially in relation to girls’ education.

However, traditional gender norms in Tajik society continue to be strong and prompt the parents to think more about boys’ education than about girls’ education. Cohn (1993) argues that gender is a symbolic system where society values male over female (p. 229). It seems a similar dynamic is taking place in relation to education in the country.
However, even though migrant workers are still thinking about their sons’ education primarily, this tendency is starting to slowly change. With increased divorce rate in the country due to labour migration, people have started to think about the importance of an education that offers economic independence from parents and partners while ultimately changing gender relations as well. My findings demonstrate the initial steps toward transformation of gender relations specifically in the context of education. However, access to girls’ education is implicated by numerous intersecting factors, which I discuss in the next sub-theme.

**Generational Disparity**

This subtheme probes that not all participants support the education of women and girls. It probes further into the generational disparity between older married men with children who have returned from Russia and younger men who married very recently. For example, Ravshan is a young migrant worker who returned from Russia and got married. He shared that he did not allow his wife to continue her college studies: “She does not need college education. We just had our first child and I want my wife to stay at home and raise our child. I can take care of all the family and our future children.”

Ravshan wanted his new wife to drop out of college where she had studied for a year. However, his father-in-law, an older ex-labour migrant who returned from Russia, insisted that his daughter should continue her studies. He organized childcare for his newborn grandchild while his daughter attended college as a young mother. For the older man, this comes on the heels of a bitter experience where his older daughters were divorced because their labour migrant ex-husbands had left them. One of the daughters was left with a newborn child without any support. The father was afraid the same would
happen to his younger daughter if she fully depended on her husband. Although the younger man did not want his wife to continue attending school, the older man was able to persuade him because they were related and because he was able to cover the financial costs of his daughter’s education and childcare.

This example brings out the complexity of how the young woman’s continuing education was negotiated to change the young couple’s gender relations in the intersections of age, gender, migration experience, kinship structures, and financial support. If any of these elements had not been present, the young mother would likely have quit college. To bring this discussion back to the trampoline metaphor, this negotiation shows changing gender relations through the tension between jumping and falling back, stretching and rebounding. It seems that some older men of the father’s generation are beginning to realize the importance of education both for their wives and their daughters while younger men or the son-in-law’s generation struggle to give up power and control.

This finding also highlights how gender and age intersect. It is older men, particularly those who have divorced daughters, who are beginning to see the value of educating girls. This indicates that younger women are more controlled and dominated within the patriarchal structure. It also emphasizes that hegemonic masculinity is tightly connected with a younger age. However, together with some younger male participants who did not want their partners to study, others, especially those who were thinking of permanently migrating to Russia through *programma pereseleniya* or other means, did want their partners to study. The participants considered education for their wives who could potentially work in Russia. Munir talked about a future possible move to Russia:
...But for this, I need my wife to get an education... My wife has only nine classes of education. I told her father to bring her school Diploma to Dushanbe. I am thinking how she can finish school first and then study in a college. I am thinking maybe she should get into medical college. If we decide to move to Russia, she would need this profession...

Munir shared that it would be beneficial for their family if his wife could get a profession in Tajikistan and be able to work in Russia. He does not have a college or university education himself. He has considered obtaining education but acknowledges his lack of time and resources as he works to sustain his newly established family. Munir’s story emphasizes that even though some male participants are thinking about future education both for themselves and their partners, many of them still cannot afford it, as they have to sustain their families and bear everyday challenges.

Interestingly, and perhaps troublingly, female participants in my research did not talk about education to the extent that male participants did, although number of global studies (Afsar, 2011; Artuc et al., 2013; UNICEF, 2010) indicate that female migrant workers are more concerned about child welfare and education. In my study, female participants talked about their children’s education, but they did not think about their own education. In the midst of everyday challenges of bearing work in Russia and caring for the children, education was something unachievable and even unimaginable. These findings also suggest that education is more achievable for boys and men and less achievable for women and girls. Although education potentially could be achievable for girls and women too, however, it seems that pathway to education could be achieved primarily through men who should realize the importance of education for girls and women.
Becoming Different

Becoming different is the second major theme emerging from my analysis of participants’ narratives. This theme explores gender relations largely at the micro level. Becoming different seeks the questions of becoming different from what, from whom, and in what context? I define this theme as the ways in which participants stand out and distinguish themselves from the dominant gender norms governing their families and communities as a result of their migration experiences. Becoming different is how I see participants pulling away from what Connell (1995) and Schippers (2007) call hegemonic masculinity and hegemonic femininity. This pulling away is how I see participants contributing to the change in gender relations in accordance with what Butler (1993) calls transformation.

Becoming different is that jump participants take to pull away from traditional gender norms, thus transforming gender relations intentionally or unintentionally. However, given the overarching trampoline metaphor of gender relations, participants pay a price when their pulling-away jump is followed by falling back into the tension between the elastic stretching and the rebounding of the trampoline. Transformation of gender relations happens in this struggle between moving forward and coming backward. Therefore, I probe this theme in relation to how it contributes to the transformation of gender relations by discussing three subthemes that emerged from across the participants’ narratives of gender relations as a result of their migration experiences. First, becoming different in household chores depicts how participants take up these chores differently in their private and familial spaces. Second, becoming different in public spaces depicts how communities use shaming, peer pressure, and gossip to police social action in public...
spaces to fit it into the dominant norms of society. Third, *becoming different within the family* discusses the familial tensions and the dire consequences of *becoming different*.

**Becoming Different in Household Chores**

This subtheme probes participants’ experiences of changing who is responsible for household chores both in Russia and in Tajikistan before, during, and after labour migration. It is apparent that gender-segregated family and household roles and responsibilities shift with place and time. Like many patriarchal societies, traditional Tajik society has strictly segregated gender roles and responsibilities for men and women (Harris, 2004). Kitchen duties, childcare, cleaning, and washing clothes are usually seen as female responsibilities within the households. Men are more engaged with other household responsibilities, which require more physical strength, such as making repairs, plumbing, nailing, etc.

Reflecting on their gender role experiences before migration, many male participants said that they never or very infrequently helped their wives or mothers cook at home, do the laundry, or clean the house. For example, Farid shared: “Kitchen was for my mother, I could go to bazaar and bring carrots, or anything, but she would always cook herself.”

However, if they do not cook this does not mean they do not work. Many were fully engaged in agrarian work such as cultivating and growing fruits and vegetables as well as fishing, bringing groceries home, etc. Following labour migration and driven by necessity of survival, many men started to learn new life skills, for example managing household chores, cooking, sewing, cleaning, and doing laundry. Farid continued: “It was very hard in the beginning. I had to learn everything, not only to self help,
but everything... But, I said to myself, I am a man, I should do, and should endure.”

Male participants like Farid who shunned women’s household chores had a difficult time during their migration to Russia. Some of them shared the stories of how they consulted with their mothers or wives about cooking over the phone. Women would teach their sons or husbands how to cook, clean, and sort the laundry. Many of the mothers did not teach that while their sons were in Tajikistan, presumably because these jobs are assigned to women. However, as a result of migration, mothers now have to transcend their own patriarchal conditioning and start teaching their sons the roles which traditionally are assigned to women.

Young men do enjoy learning new skills. Farid laughed at himself as he shared his story of cooking his first dish (sous) beef stew with potatoes: “My mother was telling me how to fry meat first, how it should look like before I put onions... ‘Sous’ turned out good. I did not poison myself (laughs).”

Other male participants were already breaking out of the mould of dominant traditional Tajik gender roles either while they were growing up or as part of their job training. For example, Munir shared:

Previously I was serving in the army, and learned everything there, and it was not hard for me to live in Russia and do things for myself... when I lived in Russia... I saw how our boys are learning everything in Russia. They are learning everything that women do: doing laundry, cooking etc.…

Male participants who were raised by single mothers as boys also broke the traditional Tajik gender moulds as they grew up engaging in household chores. They were charged with responsibilities to help their mothers with chores like cooking and cleaning. They said that in the absence of their fathers, who left for migration, they would
help their mothers with anything because they saw how difficult it was for their mothers
to raise children while also earning a living.

Another female participant, Suman, shared how she broke the mould of traditional
gender roles related to cooking and doing the laundry. Because it was difficult for her to
do all the laundry by hand, after some time, she refused to perform it herself. Her
husband started to occasionally take heavy parts of laundry to his workplace, where they
had a washing machine, and he did laundry there. Suman also shared that while they are
in Russia her husband cooks quite regularly: “Frankly, my husband usually cooks when
we are in Russia.”

Once in Russia, obviously, participants who had prior experience had relatively
less difficulty in breaking the traditional gender mould and taking up household chores,
but all participants, including women, had to modify gender roles and negotiate new
gender relations as the life of labour migrants demanded. Back in Tajikistan, however,
the jump they took in transformation turned into a fallback to traditional transmission for
many participants as the trampoline stretch rebounded. Women participants, particularly
those who went back to extended family systems, suffered, as other studies affirm (Hugo,
2000; Desai & Banerji, 2008).

As the struggle between transformation and transmission of gender relations
continued back in Tajikistan, some participants took every opportunity to break out of the
traditional mould and continue the transformation. For example, Suman shared that when
she and her husband came back to Tajikistan and lived with the extended family, her
husband would wake up early in the morning with her to help sweep the yard in the house
while everybody was asleep. He broke the traditional gender norm but he had to do it secretly. Suman reflected about her husband:

He usually cooks in Russia, but we never told that to his mom... because people would start making jokes and laugh at him... [in Tajikistan], “I am kelin [daughter-in-law] and I have to do it... but frankly, I don’t like cooking... My husband helps me but tries to do it when no one sees how he is helping me...

This example also demonstrates societal and familial policing of domestic gender roles. It also reveals *complicit masculinity* (Connell, 1995), as Suman’s husband enjoyed cooking but still did not reveal his cooking to his relatives to maintain the traditional gender order. Suman’s husband did not want to endure the shame and diminishing of his masculinity in front of extended family members by revealing that he was helping his wife.

Munir, a male participant, shared another approach to transforming gender relations. He did not know how to cook before he left for labour migration. Even though he had many ‘self-help’ skills, which he had learned while serving in the Soviet Army, he practiced his cooking skills primarily in Russia, as he always cooked for himself while he was there. After his return to Tajikistan, he did not have to hide his newly learned skills. He openly challenged traditional gender roles and engaged in cooking, saying: “I don’t feel ashamed to help my wife and cook something myself when I can.” While Munir, a middle-aged man, occasionally cooked to ‘help out’ his wife, he did not do so continuously. In contrast, Suman’s husband, a younger man who started to cook in Russia, did so more on a long-term basis and hence tried to hide that fact from his parents and relatives. While comparing these experiences, I think that age and continuity of performing the cooking tasks are important differences to acknowledge.
While Munir and others like him were continuing the transformation of gender relations, I must also note that the responsibility of cooking is still unevenly placed on the shoulders of the wives and that men are just ‘helping out’ as other studies in gender relations affirm (ILO, 2010; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). Men were proud of learning how to cook as it gave them affirmation and emotional satisfaction, although some of them hid their culinary skills from all others except their wives. However, when it came to cleaning the house, doing laundry, and completing other household chores, the married men did not talk about these jobs as they assumed these jobs were for women. These small shifts in individual, interpersonal, and familial relations indicate how participants push back and contribute to the wear and tear of the trampoline’s rigid patriarchal structures. They suggest that the trampoline will sway and eventually break if enough people practice many jumps.

**Becoming Different in Public Spaces**

This subtheme explores participants’ experiences of how their manners and activities in public spaces are subjected to community policing, social gaze, othering, peer pressure, and gossip to make them fit into dominant moulds of gender relations both in Russia and in Tajikistan. As participants’ narratives indicate, it is not just within private spaces of households and extended family systems that their looking different or even their gestures of becoming different are policed. Community members, peers, friends, and neighbours all work pervasively to ensure that they fit into dominant gender norms. This shows that gender relations are fluid social realities constructed differently in different social, political, and economic contexts (Hill Collin & Sirme, 2016). For example, Nigora, a female participant, shared that her husband was different when they
lived in Russia, but he changed after their return to Tajikistan. He started to pay attention
to what she was wearing, he started to do fewer household chores, and he started to care
for the children less often. As Nigora surmised: “He was different in Russia, and now he
is listening to his [friends].”

For Nigora, the opinion of extended family members and friends served as a
social policing and control to make her husband and herself fit into segregated gender
norms of hegemonic masculinity and femininity (Connell, 1995; Schippers, 2007; Boyd
& Grieco, 2003). Many participants share stories where communities are thirsty with the
desire to control the returnees from Russia, especially the women. Even men who wanted
to become different were not brave enough to break away from traditional segregated
gender roles.

Female participants were particularly targeted for the type of clothing they wore.
Kamilla, a female participant who used to wear black hijab in Tajikistan, decided not to
wear it in Russia because it is a very visible public sign of her being different from the
dominant social norms in Russia. During her previous stay in Russia, she wore her hijab,
and people used it to continuously discriminate against her on the street, in the subway, or
in malls. Police stopped her more frequently and asked her for documents, and people
called her a terrorist or a Chechen terrorist.\footnote{People were associating her with the Dubrovka Theater siege in October 2002 and other events, which took place in Moscow and Russia.} Therefore, when she decided to return to
Russia for work, she decided not to wear her hijab to feel safer and be less visible and
less racially profiled by police on the streets. She wanted to fit in and melt into the public.
She wore casual clothing, including pants and jeans. In contrast, in Tajikistan, due to
cultural and religious norms, she wore long dresses and hijab because, as Kamilla said:
“People will spread rumours about me saying that I became different in Russia”. Other participants shared similar stories of wearing different styles of dresses when in Russia to fit in, melt into the norm, and become invisible while ironically their whole being remains visible like other visible minorities in other migration countries where they experience discrimination (Schenk, 2018). For example, Zamira shared: “My brother told me to dress as everybody else so people are not afraid of you… And no need to cover your head.”

The fear toward covered women comes from global Islamophobia, which is also on the rise in Russia regardless of the fact that approximately 15 million out of 146 million people in Russia are Muslims (Laruelle & Yudina, 2018).

For Zamira, her brother’s opinion was important. She followed his instructions as she went through public spaces so that she would not look very different from others, and so that people were not afraid of her. She felt that she must respect his instructions when she came home as well, this time to fit into the dominant Tajik gender norms by wearing traditional Tajik clothing so that Tajik men were not afraid of her. No one asks where this generalized fear comes from or how the Russian public could be afraid of Zamira, a harmless woman migrant worker, or how the people in Tajik homes could be afraid of a woman wearing non-traditional clothes. This invisible ‘fear’ is the embodied silence that perpetuates oppressive gender relations (Butler, 1993). Traditional Tajik clothing puts Zamira in her place of Tajik hegemonic femininity in relation to her brother’s Tajik hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995). It also places Zamira in a symbolic system of gender, where her values and desires are placed in a lower position than that of her brother (Cohn, 1993). In order to fit into the social norms, she had to perform gender
appearances differently in public and private spaces both in Russia and in Tajikistan. In both cases, Zamira’s transformation of gender relations becomes complicated as her jump to pull away from Tajik tradition in Russian public space is thrown into a fallback within the private space of her Tajik home in Russia.

Like Zamira, many of the female participants I met (both hijab-wearing and non-wearing Muslim women) shared that they dress differently in public or in their workplace in Russia, but when they are in their private homes, they wear traditional dress. They wear strictly traditional clothing when they are in Tajikistan, because otherwise people would start gossiping about them saying that Russia spoiled them. I heard from participants that it is aib (shameful) to wear European clothes that are tight on the body and open at the hands. Community and extended family have sought to control women’s choices of clothing and hairstyles, especially if these women were migrant workers. In contrast, my participants did not encounter these challenges. Community policing was harsher on women’s bodies and lifestyles. As it was during the inception of a Tajik Soviet State, women’s emancipation policies were written on women’s bodies when women were pulled apart by Soviet rules from one side and by the ‘keepers of tradition’ from the other (Northrop, 2004). Today, Tajik women continue to face community policing which controls their bodies and lifestyles. Women push down their choices and desires for change temporarily to avoid shaming, gossip, and other dire consequences. Equally, in Russia they also have to revisit their clothing styles and appearances as a result of racism and Islamophobia. This causes women to conform to the European clothing styles and melt into mainstream society.
**Becoming Different: Familial Tensions**

This subtheme probes the familial tensions resulting from becoming different and pulling away from traditional gender relations. While these tensions are expressed in various ways both in Russia and in Tajikistan, some find negotiated settlements and others flame into serious conflict with dire consequences, particularly for women participants.

To start with the serious ramifications, some male participants shared concerns that when both partners seek migration in Russia, their wives have the possibility to engage with intimate relationships with other men because the Russian society is more open. That fear leads the husbands to seek tighter control over their wives’ bodies. As Nodir reflects:

> Some of my friends’ wives cheated on them. It happened because they were too soft in their relationships with the wives. A man should not lose his role as a man, and women also like strong men’s hand that can beat the table when necessary. If he loses his role as a strong man, the woman will look for other men. And we should not forget this.

Nodir believed that if Tajik men lose control of their wives in Russia that would ultimately lead to dishonour and divorce. He strongly opined that men should express their power through the control of their wives. The unspoken cultural notion of honour and Nodir’s expression of power and control over women’s bodies can both have serious consequences for women in the form of gender-based violence as other studies report (Martin, 2004; Yeoh et al., 2002; Petrozziello, 2013). Mainstream media in the West report stories where many women are murdered for dishonouring their families just because they pulled away from traditional gender norms. One example of honour killing is the story of Morsal, a 16-year-old German-Afghan girl who was killed in May 2008 by
her 24-year-old brother Ahmad. He stabbed her twenty-three times because of her alleged impure moral conduct. In Kingston, Ontario, Canada, there is another example of an Afghan man killing his three daughters and wife because of their Western habits in 2009. Honour killings are usually done by family members. Worldwide, 58 per cent of the victims “were murdered for being ‘too Western’ and/or for resisting or disobeying cultural and religious expectations” (Chesler, 2010).

For women who become different, family tensions also continue in delicate ways and are even hidden in the language of love and care. Women who stick to their traditional roles of femininity and stay home to raise children are praised as loving and caring, while those who pursue employment outside the home to put food on the table for their children are denied the support they need. Specifically, in families where women were able to negotiate formal labour, join the workforce, and contribute to family income, the household chores and childrearing responsibilities were not renegotiated. Women are still responsible for everything, facing the same double jeopardy of working both at home and outside of the home as working women in patriarchal societies (Boyd & Grieco, 2003; Paris, 2005). Even after their experience of migration, some men still believe that women are responsible for all household chores and especially for raising their girls to be obedient wives. As Munir asserts: “Child rearing is in the hands of mothers. Fathers are always at work. Life is difficult... Wives should be patient, and mothers should teach their daughters to be patient with their husbands.”

Despite the familial tension, Munir’s wife kept pulling away from hegemonic femininity and joined the workforce, thus contributing to the family income, although she remained solely responsible for all household chores and raising the children. This
experience is common to most women participants who join the workforce. Although they were able to negotiate joining the labour force after migration, they were not able to renegotiate responsibilities for household chores. This inevitably caused family tensions.

Another cause of family tensions in migrant families with children involves the marriage of their daughters. What is interesting in these stories is that some male migrant workers insist that their wives are responsible not only for raising their children but also for not allowing their daughters to marry other migrant workers. Although these men were migrant workers themselves, they did not want their daughters to marry other migrant workers for fear of divorce, which is widespread in the country. Older male participants were against daughters marrying other migrant workers because they already had negative experiences when their own daughters were left alone and divorced from their migrant-worker husbands. Younger male participants did not want their potential sons-in-law to be migrant workers for fear that their daughters might be left alone while their husbands found other women in Russia. As Munir said:

Frankly, I don’t want my daughters to get married to migrant workers... They can get married and leave to Russia together, if their husbands have good jobs there, or study in Russia. In that case, I will support them, and will be happy for my daughters.

Sometimes familial tensions were resolved by negotiated settlements that benefitted both genders. For example, some fathers missed being with the family while their children were growing up. While these fathers were working in Russia to provide for their families, their wives were raising children alone in Tajikistan. After a while, some wives were able to pull away from their traditional gender roles by joining the Tajik workforce and earning a living and supporting their families financially. Further, they were able to persuade their husbands to stay in Tajikistan to be close to the family while
their children were growing up instead of going back to Russia. Having both husbands and wives earn income in Tajikistan without either having to migrate to Russia worked to the benefit of everyone – children, wives, husbands, and parents.

**The Jump for Power**

The jump for power is the third major theme emerging from my analysis of participants’ narratives. This theme illustrates the complexities of how participants seek to empower themselves both by pulling away from and by falling back into traditional gender norms and gender relations. This complicates the trampoline metaphor by probing more layers of the jump away from tradition as empowerment and showing that falling back to tradition can also be empowering for participants. It shows that the jump and the trampoline stretch does not always mean transformation and that falling back and the trampoline rebound does not always mean transmission of gender relations. This theme highlights how change in gender relations happens in the tension between transformation and transmission, between jumping off and falling back. Under this major theme, I discuss three subthemes through which participants seek to empower themselves and effect change in their gender relations. First, in *migration as escape from societal control*, I explore how some young men and women currently perceive labour migration as an opportunity to unchain themselves from the societal control and traditional gender norms. Second, in *migration as confirmation of masculinity*, I probe how some young men jump for labour migration as a ‘fashionable’ trend and an opportunity to enhance power and control and confirm masculinity. Third, in *children power: promises and perils*, I further probe how some women deploy children both as pathways to power and
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respect and as a confirmation of femininity from which they negotiate respectful gender relations.

**Migration as Escape from Societal Control**

While migration literature talks extensively about economic, political, and environmental factors that push migrants to seek jobs abroad, the stories of participants in my research indicate that the desire to migrate is not only connected with improving economic conditions and gaining wealth, but it is also seen as an escape from traditional gender norms – especially for women.

Brednikova and Tkach (2010), who conducted research in Russia among female migrant workers from Georgia, Moldova, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, indicate that women’s narratives about the decision to migrate are usually constructed around ‘freedom’ from family pressure and violence, financial freedom, and independence. In my study, I heard some similar stories. Some woman participants in Russia and Tajikistan expressed how tired they were of their gender roles in Tajikistan. In Russia, they felt more freedom. Largely female participants said that one of their reasons to move to Russia and work there was to escape from traditional gender norms and the social control Tajiks imposed through shaming, gossip, and rumours. As Samira shared:

> What I don’t like in Tajikistan is the gossip... People are always talking about everybody. There are no gossips here [in Russia]. No one cares how you look like and what you wear...

> Sometimes, I feel such a pain, internal pain [even here in Russia]. I feel so sick inside that I want to crash everything. I am so mad, and want to leave everything here and run away back home [to Tajikistan]. One day this sickness and anger inside of me will explode. But then... then... I am sitting here and thinking, what am I going to do there? Who cares about me? All are living their lives. At least I can live and work here, and when needed I also send money to my family members and help them. Why should I go then?...
Like many migrants in other studies (Ahmed, 2000), Samira is caught in the in-between spaces of escape and return, of home and estrangement. She is torn apart by the duality of feelings of wanting to escape from Tajikistan and return to Tajikistan. Then, she gets the reassurance that she needs to stay in Russia when she realized on her recent visit to Tajikistan that everyone wants to go to Russia:

Also, when I travel back, everybody is asking me about Russia. How is life there, how is work? I have such a feeling that all, really all people would like to come here and work. And they come. And frankly I don’t understand that, especially, women who have children and husbands there [in Tajikistan] and leave them behind in order to come and work here. It makes me think, is the life so bad in Tajikistan?

Migration to Russia is also seen as an escape for Nazira, another female participant. For her, an escape from the husband she divorced and the intimidating rumours and gossip followed. Getting married ‘late’ (mid-thirties), Nazira talked about the ‘dream husband’ she loved who after marriage acted out violence and abuse toward her. After being beaten on multiple occasions and having miscarriages, she decided to divorce her husband. Even though her parents supported her, Nazira hid her divorce from the community because they would always make her feel guilty by telling her that it was her fault that he beat her. She said that people usually tell women to endure abusive husbands, especially women like her who had no children yet in her mid-thirties. For Nazira, migration was an escape from gossip and rumours about her divorce, and she desired to start with a clean slate in Russia.

Migration is also an escape from rumours and gossip for Zamira, another divorced female participant. She shares that she constantly heard rumours about herself:

In our society if you are divorced woman, you will hear lots of rumours about yourself. People like to spread rumours, and if you are a woman who left for migration, it is even worse... But I don’t care what people are saying about me, I am clean in front of Allah as he sees everybody and everything.
However, before she took the jump to migrate, Zamira had to surrender to the constant disturbing rumours about being childless at her age. Although she did not have enough money to raise a child, she became a second wife and gave birth to a child. That still did not stop the gossip and rumours. Zamira then decided to migrate to escape the non-stop gossip. She was fortunate to take her little daughter with her to Russia where she lived with her brothers and worked while her sister-in-law looked after her daughter with her own children.

For Suman, a younger female participant who works in Russia with her husband, migration was a great escape from the domineering rules of extended families. Younger women decided to migrate in pursuit of liberalization and escape from traditional settings. While some younger women and men talked about the escape and search for freedom in Russia as one of their motivations to migrate, older women whose sons are currently in migration wanted their daughters-in-law to stay in Tajikistan while their sons earned a living in Russia. As a result of mobility, the younger generation started to seek more freedom from the control of their parents and community members. From some participants’ narratives, it was clear that they wanted to escape from traditional gender norms and the pervasive gossip systems of control they were facing in their communities. They wanted to escape this and establish new families in Russia.

Suman mentioned that initially her husband wanted to leave her with his extended family in Tajikistan while he worked in Russia. However, she did not like that everyone expected her to behave a certain way as a new kelin (daughter-in-law). As studies show, Tajik extended families are patrilocal where older women are the decision-makers over the lives of their daughters-in-law and on remittances sent by their sons (Grogan, 2013;
Harris, 2004). Also, Suman believed that partners should live together, and that is why they got married (as hers was not an arranged marriage). In addition, Suman was getting upset because the extended family would always question her about her ability to get pregnant. Fertility was a painful theme for her, and being asked by family members made her suffer more. All these fuelled the jump she took to migrate and live with her husband where nobody cared how they lived and what they did. As Suman said, she wanted to live as far away as possible from the extended family where they could not: “interfere their noses into my life… And I did not want to live in their house without him [in the house with the extended family].”

Affirming Suman’s struggles, male participants stated that their own mothers did not want their wives to join them while in migration. Mothers even expected and ensured that wives lived with extended families while their sons worked in Russia. Many mothers talked about the difficulties of living in Russia with family, but they also emphasized the necessity that wives stay in Tajikistan with extended families because kelins (daughters-in-law) are supposed to do ‘hizmat’ and serve the parents of their husbands. Therefore, although some women migrate to escape societal control, patriarchal control is reinforced when gender intersects with religion and culture.

Farid, a male participant, did not specifically mention escape to liberalization, but he shared that he felt more freedom while living in Russia than he felt while living in Tajikistan. He talked at length about the restrictions he faces in Tajikistan not only in making his own decisions in life, but also in publicly displaying his affection and love for his wife. He remembered:

Once when we returned back home [to Tajikistan] and stayed there for some time... we used to go for a walk in the evenings. We always did it when we were
in Russia. We always went to the parks when we had a day off, or in the evenings. At home [in Tajikistan], we were doing the same. One day we went for a walk with my wife holding hands. But later people and my family members started to make jokes of me and told me not to hold hands with my wife, not to show my love in public.

Although Farid did not migrate to escape hegemonic gender norms, he did not like the discomfort he experienced by the fact that his family and community wanted to control his relationship and dictate what to demonstrate and not demonstrate in public. The example of Farid demonstrates that men are taught to hide their feelings and emotions, including affection and love for their wives. Ibanez-Tirado (2018) argues that “touch is a significant realm of the emotional, performative and sensuous aspects of family relations” in Tajikistan (p. 3). However, Farid was policed not to demonstrate ‘touch’ in public. Farid certainly did not appreciate the fallback into such rigid gender norms after enjoying the transformed gender relations he and his wife had experienced along with their sense of freedom in Russia where they would express their feelings in public without anyone bothering them.

**Migration as Confirmation of Masculinity**

In this subtheme, I discuss how some young male participants took the jump to migrate to Russia not because of economic motivations or to escape hegemonic gender norms but to actually pursue the confirmation of their hegemonic masculinity and to try out new pathways that others have started. Many migration studies and studies carried out among migrant workers underline economic gain as the most prominent push factor for many migrant workers (Winter-Ebmer, 1994; Sorhun, 2011). Indeed, in my own research, it was clear that for some participants, labour migration was more connected to survival and opportunity to earn a living and support their families. However, this is not
necessarily the case for everyone. Some young male participants shared the story that they started to think about migration because their peers had left. They wanted to try it as well, regardless of whether or not they faced economic hardship. Some participants shared that the Tajik community has the attitude to copycat actions and experiences from each other. As Samira observed: “Yes, everybody is leaving [Tajikistan]... And we have such an attitude in the country that, if somebody did something or bought something, you need to do the same.”

Participants shared that labour migration became so fashionable that many young men were keen to try it because everybody who is cool was doing it. Although economic factors were important for many migrants who decided to travel to Russia for work, they were not the only factors. If many young or middle-aged female participants said their migration was an escape and a search for freedom, young male participants said their migration was a confirmation of their masculinity. This confirmation was especially clear for younger men rather than for male participants in their late-forties who have families and children in Tajikistan. For middle-aged men with families, migration was a chance to earn a living because they were the main breadwinners in their families. Their wives were staying home with their young children. In Tajikistan they were not able to earn enough money to support their family (and in some cases their extended family as well, including their parents); thus, they decided to migrate and earn a living in Russia. In many ways, this is also a confirmation of hegemonic masculinity, although driven by economic necessity. However, the situation was different with younger unmarried men who wanted to try out migration as an unknown experience, an adventure, and an opportunity to
confirm their masculinity by demonstrating that they can go anywhere and overcome ‘hard life’.

There is another layer to this hegemonic masculinity that younger male participants pursued. They talked about the guilt of asking parents for money, and their desire to earn ‘good’ money themselves. However, unlike the hegemonic masculinity of the older male participants, the money earned in Russia is not for the sustenance of their families. One of the participants understood the ‘good money’ they earned as a demonstration of their ‘manhood’. As Munir stated:

Real men will not go to mom and ask, I need something. This is ‘aib’ [shame]. That is why I started to think about finding a job in Russia. My sister was living there with her husband and family, so I thought to go there as well.

However, even within this jump for power to confirm their hegemonic masculinity, and even within this transmission of normative gender relations, there is an ironic transformation of gender relations. Specifically, some of the young men said that migration helped them to establish relationships with the young women they liked. If before migration they were not confident and felt shy to establish relationships with girls, after migration they felt more confident in themselves because experiencing the ‘hard life’ had changed their attitudes. Some young men confirmed that they were able to establish relationships with their future wives when they returned to Tajikistan after labour migration. Farid asserts: “[Migration] helped me to improve my communication skills, increased my self-confidence, and reduced my shyness.”

Another participant talked about increased self-confidence because of migration, which in the long run could help him to establish relationships with his future partner.
Nodir: But these difficulties make you stronger. In the long run, when you come home you know you are stronger, your communication skills are stronger, and that helps you in your life.

Through experiencing what they named the ‘hard life’ and the life skills and communication strategies they learned as a result, I argue that these young participants have transformed the hegemonic masculinity to which they set out to confirm (Reeves, 2013a). The young men who felt ashamed to ask for money from their parents are now the young men who can be more actively engaged in negotiating marital relationships directly with their marital partners and not wait passively for their parents to arrange marriages. Some of these young men do not live behind their mothers who take care of them; they live independently with other strangers in Russia and overcome the challenges they face. Labour migration confirmed the sense of masculinity they were proud of when they returned to Tajikistan. These young men can establish nuclear families instead of patrilocal families where women usually live with extended family and mothers-in-law and could potentially experience more discrimination (Grogan, 2013; Hegland, 2010). If nuclear families are more democratic, as other studies assert, these young men can potentially form their independent families and not subject their new wives to patrilocal extended family systems (Harris, 2004; Behzadi & Direnberger, 2020). The transformation of hegemonic masculinity and the creation of new gender relations is clear. However, the question remains of whether nuclear families are more democratic. Are the new gender relations the young men negotiate with their female partners more equitable and respectful?
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Children Power: Promises and Perils

In this sub-theme, I further probe the jump for power by some female labour migrants as they deploy children to command the respect of motherhood as the ultimate hegemonic femininity. I discuss both the promises and perils of deploying children in negotiating respectful femininity and gender relations. The jump to power here signifies not the jump to migrate and stretch the trampoline to transform traditional gender norms; rather, it is the jump to power by women migrants as they use children to empower themselves and transform gender relations within the hegemonic femininity of motherhood (Schippers, 2007). This jump depicts a transformation of gender relations within the transmission of traditional gender norms as mothers consolidate their motherhood positions.

Together with all the joy and happiness, which could be generated by the experience of motherhood for many women, motherhood itself is the ultimate signature of hegemonic femininity in patriarchal societies. This holds true both for Tajikistan and for Russia. In many countries, motherhood is perceived to be the heart of feminine identity (Gillespie, 2003), and motherhood plays a critical role in women’s subordination (Roberts, 1993). Even though motherhood is argued to be disempowering as it diminishes many opportunities for women, it could be equally empowering (Lihach, 2015). Through the stories of female participants, it is clear that they saw motherhood as empowering. Some female labour migrants with children felt they were more respected and supported in the Russian society because of their motherhood status. This was not always the case with women who have older children, as motherhood is more visible with women who have younger children and the community can connect with younger children more than
with older children. Women participants said that it was easier for them to obtain various documents from government institutions, for example, when they visit FMS (Federal Migration Service), when their young child/children accompany them. When they brought their young children along to FMS or other government services, women usually did not have to wait in line for many hours. The FMS workers and people in line were supportive and respectful toward the women with younger children. People waiting in line (mostly men) would show more respect to mothers with children and allow them to access services before them.

Women participants who did not have young children shared stories of ‘borrowing’ kids from their Tajik friends or colleagues in order to go through the waiting lines faster while pretending that these were their kids. Some female labour migrants tried to use children in this way to obtain support and required documents. ‘Borrowing’ children helped them to access what they needed in FMS faster. From these stories, it is clear that motherhood served as a respectful and protective support mechanism for many female labour migrants.

Outside formal institutions, women participants also used children-power within the informal institution of the family to negotiate power and new gender relations with their husbands. Some women who had to monitor their fertility trends to avoid pregnancy while working in Russia wanted to have more children after their return to Tajikistan. They talked about the challenges of getting pregnant and their need to increase or stimulate fertility cycles in order to get pregnant during their husbands’ visits to Tajikistan. For example, Nargis, with the help of medication, was trying to stimulate her menstrual cycle and ovulation period as her husband visited for a short time in Tajikistan.
Even though she already had children, she still wanted to have more. For some women who saw their primary roles as mothers and wives, children served as a confirmation of their femininity and womanhood. Besides, the dream of pregnancy was connected to a sense of power and respect for having more children and an internal sense of security that the husband will not leave his wife with many children to find a new wife in Russia (Olimova & Bosk, 2003). As women lack power in patriarchal societies (Sultana, 2012), they have to use whatever instruments available to access power and renegotiate their position and access to services. In this case, the instruments happened to be children.

However, not all women who desire children in order to access the power of femininity and motherhood can produce children, and therefore they fall short of accessing the power that motherhood affords others. Some women fall short because of social ills, and others fall short because of physical illness. Looking at one of the social ills reveals that divorced women are barred from having children.

For example, Fatima, a female participant, was a divorcee who was in an intimate relationship with a Tajik man in Russia. She was pregnant with his child, but the man did not want to have children with her. She really wanted to keep the child, as she did not have children. However, while working in Russia in precarious conditions she was barely able to support herself and therefore unable to keep her child. She could not return to Tajikistan for fear of being shamed and ostracized by the family and community that usually demonstrate intolerance toward women who have children outside of marriage. Not knowing anyone and not having any support system in Russia, Fatima had no choice but to seek abortion. Nevertheless, even the abortion had to be done in secrecy because she felt shame. She was afraid her co-workers would start gossiping about her sexual life,
and she feared losing their respect and her job. She was afraid of rumours in the small community of other ethnic Tajiks and Uzbeks she was living and working with. She was living through the hell of shame and despair while her partner did not want to bear any responsibility for the child she was bearing under her heart – because he had a wife and a family in Tajikistan.

Interestingly, there is another layer to this story in that not all divorced women are ostracized for wanting to have children. Society usually imposes a difference between a divorced woman who gets pregnant and a divorced woman who wants to adopt a child because she cannot get pregnant. For example, Samira was unable to have her own biological children due to health issues. She talked about having a child openly without any shame and shared that she was dreaming about adoption. She only worried about her inability to raise the child because she was living in a precarious situation in a foreign country with no family around. Adopting a child could diminish her opportunities and access to work, and she wondered: “I am thinking... if I take the child... but what is next? I am working from morning to night. But I really want to have children. But how?”

These complexities in the experiences of women participants demonstrate that the jump to power through children-power is not distributed evenly among variously positioned women. Children-power favours women in marriage, affirming their hegemonic femininity and enabling them to negotiate new gender power relations with their husbands. For divorcees like Fatima, however, it generates shame and ostracization and diminishes opportunities.
Morphing Gender Relations of Power

This is the fourth and final major theme emerging from my analysis of participants’ narratives. I define morphing gender relations of power as the multifaceted overall adjustments of gender power relations originated by the experiences of labour migration. I explore how the jump people make for labour migration destabilizes the complex trampoline structural frame of gender norms and how it shakes the settled gender relations in the families and communities of Tajik migrant workers both in Tajikistan and in Russia. I discuss the overall morphing stretches and rebounds of the trampoline as well as the jumps and fallbacks of migrant gender relations as catalyzed by their experiences of labour migration. As Reeves (2013a) points out, gender relations are characterized by binary relations between men and women determined by socio-cultural and economic factors where women are often the victims. Recent theoretical developments assert the fluidity of gender and gender relations (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995; Cohn, 1993; Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2006; Paechter, 2018). For the context of my research, however, my analysis stays within the dominant Tajik construction of dualistic male/female gender categories, extending the fluidity of gender relations only to the various combinations of the two categories. Thus, I extend this discussion by probing three subthemes: male-male, male-female, and female-female gender relations.

Male-Male Gender Relations

In this subtheme, I discuss how labour migration destabilized traditional Tajik male-male relations, focusing particularly on father-son relations. In their traditional gender norms, Tajik men are constructed as the breadwinners, and they were the first to take the jump into labour migration. That jump pushed more men than women out of the
country to earn a living. While some men sent back remittances to their families faithfully, others abandoned them (IOM, 2009). Studies show that many families collapse due to labour migration, especially when men leave their wives and children behind and start new families in Russia (IOM, 2009; Al-Jazeera, 2013, Qodir, 2011). However, studies also show evidence that although some men do start new families or establish relationships with a ‘guest wife’ in Russia, they also continue to financially support the families in Tajikistan (Kalandarov, 2012).

My own findings affirm that sending or not sending remittances has a tremendous impact on gender relations within families. However, the most painful and devastating experiences result from the absence of the migrant men from the families because wives and children live without the emotional presence of fathers and husbands for many years. International migration literature discusses the effects on children of fathers who migrate (Nobles, 2013). Research suggests that the impact of a father’s migration include increased illness, reduced vaccination, reduced breastfeeding, lower educational aspirations, lower probability of attending high school, fewer years of schooling, and a higher probability of behavioural problems (Nobles, 2013). In addition, available research on migration and impact on children has typically found that parental absence is associated with increased risks of mental health problems among children such as loneliness, low life satisfaction and low self-esteem, depression, and behavioural problems. International literature agrees that lengthy separation disrupts parent-child attachment and bond (Fellmeth et al., 2018; Smith et al., 2004). In my study, I also observed that the absence of a father had a particularly painful impact on father-son relations and male-male gender relations in general.
Even though the means of technology and communication are well developed today and families have better opportunities to connect from a long distance, the second-generation migrants in my research did not have access to such luxury of communication. Their fathers migrated in the 90s when they were in their mothers’ wombs or when they were babies after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the outbreak of the Tajik civil war. In the 90s, the civil war made international calls much harder in the immediate post-Soviet period, and this challenge continued throughout the post-Soviet space. Access to calls was expensive and not possible for many migrant families. As a result, children and fathers lost emotional connection. The father-son relationship is particularly important in traditional Tajik gender relations, but this thread of transmission was broken by labour migration. Even for fathers who sent remittances regularly, financial support was not enough for the sons who also needed their fathers’ emotional support, nurturing, love, and care.

For example, Matin, a second-generation male migrant, dreamed that his father would live with them and raise him and his siblings. Equally, Matin appreciated his father for the sacrifices he made by living in a ‘foreign country’ (davlati musofir) for all these years to support the family financially (Roche, 2017). Indeed, his father motivated Matin to go to Russia to work and save for his marriage ceremony. While living with his father, however, Matin realized that they shared no emotional connection and he did not know how to relate with him. As he remembers:

I did not even know what to talk with my father. When we were in one room, he would be silent and I would be silent as well... If I have any problems, I share with my mother, but not with father, or even now with my wife. When I was not married, and lived in Russia, I would tell about my problems to my mother who was in Tajikistan, but not to my father with whom I lived in the same apartment in Russia.
For Matin, this loss of emotional connection and trust is difficult, although his father never failed to provide financial support. However, the situation is much harder for participants whose fathers had abandoned them. For example, Firdavs’ father abandoned his family in Tajikistan and remarried in Russia. He did not support the family financially or participate in any family affairs. Firdavs’ experience was one filled with internal deprivation and an acute sense of loss and grief, as he remembers:

You know, I did not know who a father is. I did not see him when I was a child, he left when we were very young. I saw him on photos... I was dreaming about father. Do you understand me??? I wanted to hold his hand, to walk on the streets with him. I wanted to have a father...

While Firdavs talked, his eyes sought empathy and understanding from me. Parents and primary caregivers are the most important figures in a child’s life as they provide the blueprints of their primary human relations, including gender relations. Researchers have found that boys are more affected than girls when raised by single mothers, as they face not only financial but also emotional, social, and psychological challenges (Holden, 2014). Even in traditional families, the father is expected to demonstrate a level of affection and care to his children through physical and emotional exchange, for example how Firdavs desired to hold his father’s hand. Ibanez-Tirado (2018), in her article, quotes Geissler and Prince (2010) who argued that ‘touch’ is the ‘the primary modality of making relations’ and a practice of relatedness. As Firdavs reflects, however, his father’s absence is much more than an emotional experience of loss and grief; it also has a social dimension of identity, public pride, and honour:

Having a father is also gaining a respect in the community. If you don’t have a father at all, they don’t... [stops and sighs heavily]. When people see you with your father, they respect you. For example, when you are holding his hand and asking him to buy you something... I never had that in my life...
As Firdavs’ tone of voice became very low and he stopped talking, I felt the depth of his palpable loss and deep grief. Tears welled in his eyes as he struggled to hold them back. It was a moment of silence; it was a moment of grief coming from a society that teaches boys to hide emotions and not to cry. However, he was sitting in front of me, a woman, and the drops of tears were falling from his eyes, tears flowing from his thirst for love, his endless wait for attachment and care. I felt his grief deeply and I could not hide my own emotions, as tears were rolling down my cheeks as well.

Reflecting on Firdavs’ experience, I see his sense of loss and grief as deeply embodied by social norms (Jacoby, 2012). He was living out the social norms that to have a father is to have a provider and protector through whom he gains peer and community respect. Nevertheless, there is a difference between a father who supports his family and one who abandons his family. When a labour migrant abandons his family, peer respect and community support dissolve as well. There are emotional, economic, social, and political layers to Firdavs’ grief which remind me of Foucault’s notion of power (1998). Respect comes with power: the ability to make things work, have a voice and be heard, and demand and receive what he needs. Respect is power and power is with the father in patriarchal family institutions. Firdavs aspires to that power and male identity from which he constructs his own masculinity (Connell, 1995). This includes material connections to a father who can purchase or send gifts for a son, like other migrant workers, and Firdavs can command power and community respect through such symbolic demonstration of gifts (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017). Indeed, out of many years of painful waiting, Firdavs wore a big smile when he remembered the gift his father once sent:

But then one day, when I was in a second grade, my father sent me and my brother two bicycles. OOOoh, it was the happiest day in my life, it was my first
bicycle I was dreaming of..., I was riding it in our *kishlok* [village]. I was showing it to my friends saying that my father sent it to me. I was so proud... Oh... This bicycle was a reminder that dad did not forget about us. I dreamed that he will come back one day and stay with us forever... But I fooled myself...

When the first generation of males took that jump into labour migration, they destabilized traditional Tajik gender relations. However, it is also important to note that the mass labour migration also coincided with the civil war which took place in the country from 1992 to 1997 with more than 50,000 deaths, 25,000 widows, and 55,000 orphans. More than 250,000 persons fled the country entirely, and 700,000 were internally displaced (Kuvatova, 2016). Labour migration has persistently taken place for the last 30 years and it continues to shake traditional gender order.

The trampoline stretched and new possibilities opened, transforming the established Tajik male-male, male-female, and female-female gender relations. However, when the emotional hole – the absence of fathers – took charge, it brought a fallback on tradition and a rebound of the trampoline. Like Matin and Firdavs, second-generation male migrants longed for their fathers despite their emotional disconnection. Maybe even because of that emotional hole, sons constructed their hegemonic masculinity through the long-distance role modelling of their fathers. This emotional hole between male-male or father-son relationships and its tension with gender relations requires more understanding and research.

**Male-Female Gender Relations**

In this subtheme, I focus on the traditional notion of Tajik male-female gender relations as it is unsettled and resettled, produced and reproduced through the jump men and women have taken into labour migration. The tension set off by this jump, in turn setting off the tension in male-male relations, continues here into the tension in male-
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female relations as well. Here, I probe the tensions in gender relations in the context of mother-son and husband-wife relations. Starting with mother-son relations, several male migrant workers shared the experiences of their mothers when their own fathers were in migration. They remembered how difficult it was for their mothers to raise them alone, playing the double roles of both the mother and the father. Here are two examples of reflections:

Firdavs: It was very difficult for my mom to raise us. My father gave nothing to us, except a small piece of land where we were living. My mother was working in a bazaar selling sunflower seeds. My brother had a disability. It was even harder for her... I started to work very early at around seven maybe.... I was going to the river where I was fishing. I was selling the fish in bazaar and was giving money to my mother... I have seen the difficulties of my mother and how she was raising us... It was very hard for her... I have seen her crying many times... And my heart was aching with her... I don’t want her to cry anymore... I am doing my best to prevent it... My mother is my world. Our Prophet was saying: “The Paradise is under the feet of your mother”... yes, my mother is my world.

Matin: My mother was instead of mother and father for me. She raised us all. All the time, my mother was dar tori sarmon byd [under our heads]. We got all manners and education from our mother... I was very sick when I was young, my mom looked after me, and took good care. She took me to the doctors and was running [davodav] a lot due to my conditions. I am very thankful to my mother. Today I am healthy because of her and all her efforts. I don’t want anyone to upset and harm my mother’s heart.

In the narratives of both Firdavs and Matin, I see the tension between transformation and transmission of gender relations. Their gratitude to their mothers for suffering and raising them alone translates into tremendous love and respect and reverence for their mothers. That reverence and love also grants the ultimate power to mothers. Mother-son relations are characterized by mother-power that enables mothers to make important decisions for their families, including finding wives for their sons and arranging marriages. There is a tremendous power vested in mothers in Tajik society in general. Harris (2004), Grogan (2013), and Roche (2017) also highlight mother-power in
Tajik society and in Central Asia in general. In my research, this mother-power also stood up clearly especially among younger male second-generation migrant workers. Through my study, it was revealed that participants’ mothers are put on a pedestal for being ultimate symbols of reproducing hegemonic femininity, or hyperfemininity as Paechter (2008) indicates, despite living their lives as long-suffering single mothers who played both male and female roles in their families. Through the experiences of migration, gender relations were transformed and produced new forms of femininity (Schippers, 2007; Paechter, 2006), and this empowered femininity. Although mother-power still aspires to maintain traditional gender order, this limits the capacity to transform the overall gender relations of power.

This limitation is reinforced in husband-wife relations because mother-power and mother-son relations rarely translate into the husband-wife relations of these sons. Although sons deeply respect their mothers and transmit their male power to them, it seems that they push their wives and future wives to fully obey and respect their mothers-in-law without offering them similar respect or reverence as women or mothers. Mother-power could be both dangerous and rewarding, depending on the relationships that develop between mothers and daughters-in-law. Right off the bat, however, the male participants seem to impose the subordination of their wives and future wives to the mother-power of their mothers, as the following examples demonstrate:

Matin: I said to her [his wife] that my father was in migration for so many years. I love my mother the most. Father is father..., but you need to respect my mother, and these two people in my life. If my father and mother are pleased by you, I will be pleased as well. Don’t even respect me if you don’t want to but respect my parents in the first place. Always respect and listen to my mother, and I will treat you always well. If we have any misunderstandings in the future, but if my parents are on your side, I will understand you too. If you want to live with me, you need to treat and respect my mother.
Nodir: Mother is one of the main persons in my life, I am who I am due to the circle where I was raised in. Mother is the centre of my circle. My future wife needs to respect me and the circle of people who developed me as a human being. And I am also expecting it from myself towards her.

Firdavs: I will marry the wife my mother will choose. I owe my mother a lot. She suffered a lot. How can I disobey or betray her now? My father already betrayed her. I cannot allow myself to do the same. I want her to be happy. If she is happy, and I will be happy as well. My expectation from my future wife is to respect and treat my mother well, always.

For these participants, mother-power was absolute. Their reverence, respect, obedience, and love toward their mothers are unconditional. They submit their own powers to their mothers as they subordinate themselves to mother-power (Roche, 2017). Reinforcing traditional gender norms where young wives are treated as objects with no choice or decision-making power of their own even after they become mothers in their own right leaves women vulnerable to gender-based violence, as studies show (Martin, 2004; Petrozziello, 2013). Yet mothers have the ultimate decision-making power, including selecting and grooming wives for their sons. These participants said they knew their mothers would not bless any relationship with ethnic Russian girls or other girls, and so they did not enter into any relationships. When I asked Firdavs if he liked anyone while working in Russia, he laughed and said that he could not even imagine that. He said he did not see that as an option at all because he followed his mother’s sacred advice. Responding to the same question, Matin said that his mother did not want him to bring any wife/bride to Tajikistan from Russia and his obedience was unconditional, as he said:

My mom used to tell me to "study well, finish school, and I will find a good wife for you by myself. I have hopes, expectations and dreams on you."... I fully rely on and trust my mother.
These participants did not only submit their own male power to their mothers or expect their wives to obey their mothers unconditionally, but they also insisted that their wives copy their mothers even in how they dressed themselves. For example, Firdavs described his future wife’s clothing, saying that it “should cover her hands and head as my mother does.” Similarly, Matin told his wife:

At home, you can choose how to wear clothing, you can choose not to wear the rumol [head covering] but when you step out from home, you need to dress the same way as my mother [in terms of head covering and dress].

Although mother-power is practiced in such absolute form in families where young men were raised by de-jure or de-factor single mothers because of the heavy sacrifices the long-suffering women made, mother-power is widespread in patrilocal families where men readily followed their mothers’ wills and the marriages these mothers arranged for them (Thibault, 2018). The participants did not question an arranged marriage because it was the norm for them. In the dominant Tajik culture, marriage is not a matter between just the marital partners; rather, it is a collective familial and societal matter. This makes arranged marriage widespread in Tajikistan (Harris, 2004; Thibault, 2018).

In the process of migration, the practice of arranged marriage is not only reproduced, but also reinforced when families ensure that their children marry the partners chosen and ‘approved’ by kin. Arranged marriage is a cultural tradition, although it is often mistakenly constructed as a Muslim practice. Many families insist on arranged marriage as a manifestation of religious practice. Religion plays a significant role in Tajikistan in the construction of gender roles, and Muslim identity for Tajiks has equal importance to traditions and customs (Acar & Gunes-Ayata, 2000). Stephan (2010)
argues that labour migration also serves as one of the factors that increased Islamic religiosity in Tajikistan. There are numerous reasons for this. Historically in Tajik society, the father played an important role in raising and informally educating the children. For example, children, especially boys are taught different life skills by their fathers both in urban and rural households. Because of male labour migration, this fatherly role of teaching life skills has been abandoned. The resultant vacuum has been filled either by wives at home, or by the increasingly popular trend of religious homeschooling. Religious homeschooling could fill the gap of missing fathers who are not present to raise their children and transfer their own ‘generational’ knowledge, values, or morality (Stephan, 2010, p. 474). Imbedded in the global context of Islamophobia and the local post-war political context in Tajikistan, the government controls religious schooling. For example, it allows teaching of religious beliefs to children inside their homes, and it prohibits doing so outside of the family (USDS, 2014).

Along with religious education taking place inside the homes, there are other factors affecting the increase of religiosity in the context of migration. In Russia, Islamization has increased together with the population practicing Islam. It is predicted that in fifteen years, Muslims will constitute one-third of Russia’s population (Avilov, 2019). However, the Russian government still constructs Islam and Muslim people as the Other and does not support expansion of Islam. Yet this does not stop people from practicing their religion. On the contrary, it makes them more interested in and determined to follow their faith in opposition to governmental policies. Tajik labour migrants are not the exceptions in these processes; they are in fact becoming more religious while working in Russia. Islam also helps some migrants to establish certain
frameworks and norms of social life, hygiene, and morals, especially with multiple people living together in one small apartment or a room (Roche, 2014) where certain rules are necessary in order to sustain everyday life. Islam is followed to preserve ‘normality’ and shared values of life among the workers. As a result, increased religiosity travels back to Tajikistan too, which ultimately contributes to arranged marriages. In this sense, we see that traditional gender relations are generally reinforced and not transformed. The notable point here is that the elastic trampoline stretched and expanded mother-power, thereby transforming the male-female gender relations. However, even if mother-power is transformed, it can negatively affect younger wives and potentially the sons. Nevertheless, in the next section I discuss how female-female gender relations are changing and illustrate that mother-power can have lesser power on daughters than on sons. I also discuss how mother-power is not evenly distributed.

**Female-Female Gender Relations**

In this final subtheme of morphing gender relations of power, I discuss female-female gender relations and how changes happen in the constant tension between production and reproduction of gender norms of hegemonic femininities (Schippers, 2007) and between the transmission and transformation of traditional gender relations (Butler, 1993). While some studies construct gender relations in binary terms where males are breadwinning patriarchs and women are dependent victims, other studies have critiqued this binary construction and revealed the complexities of gender relations not only between the opposite genders but also among women (Reeves, 2013a; Thieme, 2008). Paechter (2018) argued that femininity should not be conceptualized in relation to masculinity but rather in relation to femininity itself. I draw on these studies to probe the
morphing of female-female gender relations as it plays out in mother-daughter relations and in the relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law as well as between sisters-in-law.

While mother-power seems to be pervasive as discussed in the last two subthemes, it is not evenly distributed among all mothers. Not all mothers wield mother-power, as motherhood intersects differently with gender, age, generation, marital status, access to remittances, relations with husbands and sons-in-law, and social positions within families and communities. In mother-daughter relations, daughters, particularly young girls, seem to be the most marginalized by traditional gender norms. It seems some mothers value sons more than daughters because daughters are married away to work for their husbands’ mothers elsewhere in other communities while sons bring home *kelin* [daughters-in-law] who work for them with expected obedience and respect.

For example, Matin, a participant who is an older son with four younger sisters, remembers how his mother encouraged and supported him to get an education and how she had big expectations and dreams for him. His sisters were not encouraged to get an education, and they got married at the age of 18 – which is the legal marriageable age in the country. Other participants also shared similar stories about how they, their daughters, or their sisters were married right after or before completing high school. Many mothers hope that their daughter will be a good *kelin* and fulfill the dreams of her husband and his family (Harris, 2004), a vision many participants in this study also shared.

Although girls are marginalized in this way in general, from my analysis I find that mothers have less power and influence over their daughters than over their sons. Findings from my study suggest that daughters tend to be freer from the mother-power. For
example, Samira is a divorcee who decided to leave for Russia in labour migration. However, her mother did not want her to leave, as she was afraid of gossip and rumours. Samira said:

My mother was telling me not to go. “What will neighbours say? What will people say? You are alone... you are a divorced woman. They are going to spread rumours about you that you are dating different men there. Find a job here as a nanny or in the store.”

Against her mother’s wishes, Samira went to Russia for work. Even then, her mother was urging her to return because of gossip and continuous rumours among the neighbours as people suspected that Samira was having intimate relationships with other men in Russia. Her mother’s pressure was strong enough to return Samira temporarily but not strong enough to keep her there, as she returned to Russia after a while. Another participant, Kamilla, is a widow with several children. Kamilla left for Russia to earn a living for her children. Her mother supported her migration decision in the beginning because a male relative helped her to find a job and ‘look after her’, but later, she was against Kamilla’s migration, urging Kamilla to stay by telling her: “your children need ocha [a mother], not me bibi [a grandmother].” Kamilla’s mother did not want her daughter to migrate again, but Kamilla still decided to leave even when there was no male relative ‘looking after her’ during migration.

These examples show that mothers of female participants do not hold as much power over their migrating daughters as they do over migrating sons, especially sons whose fathers were also migrants. Mothers were supportive toward their daughters’ migration when a relative-male figure helped with the migration journey and stayed with them or worked in the same city. When these connections were not present, mothers were reluctant to agree with their daughters’ decision to migrate. Either way, it seems mother-
power is more effective on sons than on daughters. Connecting this back to my theoretical framework, participants’ stories underscore the crucial necessity of examining the complexities within familial relations as other researchers assert (Harris, 2004; Paechter, 2006; Roche, 2017). Mother-power demonstrates how older women wield power and become gatekeepers of hegemonic femininity, thus perpetuating traditional patriarchal gender relations of power. Furthermore, these studies also affirm my analysis of female-female gender relations of power in the stories of participants in my study.

Mother-power may not be effective on daughters’ migration, but it is still a strong power that older women wield over younger women within familial relations (Harris, 2004; Paechter, 2006; Roche, 2017). For example, female-female gender relations between a kelin [daughter-in-law] and her mother-in-law and sister-in-law are rife with tensions where the kelin is marginalized. As discussed earlier, mothers expect their sons to marry a woman of whom they approve, because traditionally, a wife is not just a partner for their son but also a kelin who is expected to respect and serve everyone in the house. Often, the mother-in-law picks her future kelin. For example, Hairi is a female participant who returned from labour migration in Russia due to health issues. She told me that she was looking for a wife for her son who was working in Russia. She was very clear about what she expects from her future kelin: “Khushtomana hurmat kadan darkor” [It is necessary to respect the mother-in-law]. In addition, because Hairi had health challenges, she was looking for a kelin who would look after her and her younger children while her son works in Russia and sends remittances. Her son is the only breadwinner for the family, replacing the father who left the family for labour.
Young *kelins* are positioned on the lowest rungs in the hierarchy of female-female gender relations and they suffer abuse and exploitation by the hands of their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law (Hegland, 2010). As studies show (Grogan, 2013), while access to remittances is a big factor in empowering women, in patrilocal families, it is older women with remitting sons who have access to remittances and the decision-making authority associated with that access. *Kelins* are marginalized, as they do not have access to the empowering remittances of their husbands. But changes in these gender relations happen when the *kelins* grow older and raise sons of their own who will bring home *kelins* of their own and they too become mothers-in-law with mother-power and full authority to control younger *kelins*. And the cycle continues not only by reproducing old gender relations but also by producing new ones (Butler, 1993).

Nafisa, a female participant who was in labour migration in Russia with her husband and had to return to Tajikistan due to health issues, shared her sadness. Upon her return, she had to live with her husband’s extended family. She never saw the remittances her husband sent home, as the money was transferred to her mother-in-law and sister-in-law. Nafisa could not even purchase clothing and school uniforms for her children because her sister-in-law was doing that for her. Nafisa remembers her sister-in-law saying:

*Bazaar is not a good place for a woman whose husband is in migration... and she [Nafisa] needs to stay home and look after the children; bo sari luch munkin gashtan nest* [not to show off herself to the public with an ‘exposed head’, with no headcover, meaning to be without a husband].

*Bo sari luch munkin gashtan nest*, the expression that was told to Nafisa by her female relatives, means that she should not leave the house alone while her husband is in migration. As Nafisa shared, her mother-in-law and sister-in-law felt they were Nafisa’s
guardians while her husband was in migration; thus, they restricted her freedom of movement and choices. Nafisa’s story demonstrates another layer in the complexity of women’s power within familial gender relations as other studies argue (Harris, 2004; Paechter, 2006; Roche, 2017). Here it is not only older women, but also younger women who wield power over a *kelin* as gender intersects with Nafisa’s *kelin* status, age, and whether her husband was around. This limits her ability to mother the children, her access to remittance, and her ability to choose how to spend it, thus marginalizing her within the female-female relations within her family.

However, Nafisa’s marginalization changed when her older son left for migration and was able to earn money for his wedding. At that point of his own empowerment, he also empowered his mother by insisting that his new wife, mother, and sisters should live separately from the larger extended family. Her son was able to transform the housing situation for the whole family. With this change, Nafisa now has access to the authority, full respect, and reverence that mother-power affords her. However, how she will treat her new *kelin* is still unknown. Now, possible marginalization of *kelin* is in the hands of Nafisa, who as *kelin* has previously experienced marginalization herself. Now, Nafisa’s daughters are also sisters-in-law, and how they will treat *kelin* is unknown too. For individual women, their gender relations are transformed as they move through the circles of age, bearing sons, finding *kelins*, and leaving patrilocal family arrangements. In these complicated systemic and deeply cultural ways, however, female-female gender relations change while simultaneously remaining the same.

In summary, as demonstrated by all the four major themes and their subthemes, the overarching finding of gender relations as trampoline is highlighted as the stretching
and contracting of gender norms and the transmission and transformation of gender
relations. In general, these findings validate Butler’s (1993) analysis of the transmission
and transformation of gender norms and Connell’s (1995), Schippers’s (2007), and
Paechter’s (2018) articulation of changes in hegemonic femininities and masculinities.
While my research focuses on the changes in gender relations instigated by labour
migration, my findings reflect the general morphing in gender relations of power as the
Tajik society perpetuates itself through the years by changing and adjusting to new
transformations but also by remaining the same and transmitting old relations. I visualize
this process as one-step forward and two steps back where gender relations remain in the
constant back and forth process of jumping and coming back. Therefore, through the
participants’ stories, I visualize this process as jumping on a trampoline with a constant
process of transmission and transformation of gender relations of power. With every
jump the participants perform, they push back on the springs and the rigid patriarchal
structures of the trampoline. These performances of jumping create small transformations
in gender relations of power. Patriarchal structures come with backlash in the form of
culture, religion, gossip, rumours, and mother-power and try to re-enact the
performativity of rigid patriarchal gender relations. This shows the constant tension
between changes and continuities, transformation and transmission. However, with many
repeated jumps and with many people jumping, I contend that the springs give way and
the trampoline sways and eventually breaks.

This is my desire as a feminist striving for sustainable change and complete
emancipation from patriarchal gender relations. However, my analysis of participants’
narratives shows that small transformations are already taking place with every
performance of jumps and every pushback. My contention is that we all need to jump for
the transformation of gender relations. The swaying and eventual ripping of the
trampoline depends on the people who are on the trampoline performing the
transformative jumps, on outside forces including migration, and on feminist researchers
who provide new insights.

In this chapter, I present an overview of some of the major themes emerging from
my thematic analysis of participants’ narratives. I delve deeper into narrative analysis
(Polkinghorne, 1995) and develop composite stories, which I present in the next chapter.
The two methods of analysis complement and reinforce each other. While this chapter
pulls out the broad themes, the next chapter delves deeper into the complexity of
participants’ experience of gender relations in the holistic context and everydayness of
their lives.
Chapter Four: Composite Stories

Participants sit together in an imaginative, borderless transnational space and share their premigration stories, stories of working in Russia, and stories of return. They seem to say: “The ‘journalist’ wants our experiences of migration and changing gender relations. Hmmm.... But our stories are much deeper and more complex, and this is how we want to tell them. Hear us in our own wholeness, in our mundane struggles and triumphs, in repeating details of our everyday lives, in our tears and our laughter, in our joys and sadness. Hear the stories that tear us apart, empty our souls, and put us back together. We learn gender relations through all the minute struggles of our everyday lives.”

Women and men share stories separately. It seems that there is lack of trust to bare themselves to the opposite gender within their cultural context. “This is our story, hear us,” they seem to say.

Act 1: Men Share Stories

Four men are sitting together around one dastarhan (tablecloth/traditional space where the food is eaten). They are all migrant workers coming together from different transnational spaces to share stories of their migration journey.

Abdullo is a single young man who currently lives and works in Russia
Sattor is a young married young man who returned from Russia and currently lives in Tajikistan
Fariddun is a middle-aged married man who currently lives and works in Russia
Dowud is an older man who returned from Russia and currently lives in Tajikistan

In Scene 1, they recall their lives before migration and how they made their decision to migrate.

Scene 1: Premigration Stories

Abdullo:

I grew up in a small village many kilometers from Dushanbe. We are three siblings in the family. When I was a child, I did not know my father. Sometimes I looked at photos to remind myself what he looked like. He left when my brother and I were very young. During all those years, he did not support us, or he did so very, very rarely.

Sometimes he would send presents to us. I knew that his presents were not enough for us to survive. Still, receiving a present from my father made me so happy. However, my
father did not leave us completely without anything. We had a place to live. He left us the land where our house was built, and where we could grow some food in our yard.

My mother did not have professional or higher education. She worked in a bazaar selling some small things. She also did some embroidering for pillows and other traditional things. It was very painful to observe how it was difficult for my mother to raise us and how she was suffering for us. Things were even harder during the war. Many families did not have any bread on their tables. Thankfully, we had bread, but we did not have other types of food. For example, our neighbors had a cow and could make \textit{jurgot} (homemade natural yogurt). We did not have a cow and I never tried \textit{jurgot} when I was little. I really wanted to try it. So, one day, I took the bread we had at home and went to our neighbors to exchange it for \textit{jurgot}. I think my life skills started with this exchange. Growing up, I realized that I needed to support my mother, as my father left us and did not send payments. Suddenly, my mother became the one who had to work and make ends meet. But it was very hard for her. As I am the oldest son in the family, I had to learn how to earn money at a very young age. I was maybe around six or seven when I started fishing and selling the fish in the bazaar. Later, with this money I bought small goats and raised them at home. I fed them until they grew, and I sold them in the bazaar. I started with one goat and ended up with three goats. I was earning not bad money from the goats and I gave it to my mom.

Growing up, I always helped my mother, as it was difficult for her to raise us alone. I was doing everything I could. That is why I learned many skills from a very young age. I had a younger sister, but she died when she was a few years old. It was very painful for my mother to lose her only daughter. That is why I learned to do all...
‘woman’s’ work myself. I learned how to milk a cow, prepare dough for non (traditional bread), bake non in tandur, cook, and sweep the floor. I can do everything. I am better than a daughter is. I did not want my mother to feel that she needs a daughter who can help her at home. I was helping her with what a daughter would do.

Once, when I was in the second grade maybe, my father came. I do not remember my exact age; I was a child. However, I remember very vividly how happy I was at that time. My father stayed with us for a short time and then left again. The next time I saw him, I was already in 11th grade. He lived for a couple of months with us and left again for work in Russia. My mother was pregnant when he left. My father never returned after that. When I knew my mother was pregnant, I prayed to Allah to give me a brother. I wanted to have ‘shoulders’, I wanted to have a person who I can rely on. I was so happy to know that I got a baby brother. Even though there is an eighteen years age difference, he is my ‘shoulders’ now.

From early childhood, I knew that I was the older son in the family, and I had to support my mother, and my brother, who has a disability. I do not know exactly what this disease is called, but my brother cannot be engaged in physical work; he has problems with his spine. When I finished school, I tried to save some money for university, as I always wanted to have an education. I dreamed of becoming a doctor but it remains a dream for me, as it was very expensive to become a doctor. The bribes were very high, even to enroll in the university. The tuition was high as well. I did not have the money. I enrolled in a profession, which was a lot cheaper. It was not my ‘dream’ profession, but at least I would have a diploma. Maybe I would never use the diploma and might end up working in a completely different field. However, I still needed to earn money to get the
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diploma, as nowadays, you cannot find any ‘normal’ job in Tajikistan without a university education. So, I tried to save some money, and when I finished school, I started university. During the days, I was studying and during the nights, I was working. Sometimes, I would fall asleep during the lessons, the professor would reprimand me, and my classmates would laugh at me. But I still worked as much as I could in order to continue my studies and contribute to the family income. I was trying to pass exams myself, without bribes, but one of the professors did not want to let me pass the exam without a bribe. I was so furious; I wanted to pass it myself, with my own knowledge. I did not have extra money to pay for the bribes, as I needed it for my family, and to pay tuition. It was one of the moments when I decided I needed to change something in my life, as this life was very hard.

I also could not bear to see my mother and the pain she was going through. My mother is a foundation, and I am a wall, which stays strong only if the foundation is stable. But it was not easy for her, and consequently for me. I could not see her suffering, and our ongoing financial problems. My brother was in school, and my other brother was very little. I could not finish university because of the bribes and I had to take a leave of absence.

I was also thinking about my brother who is living with a physical disability. He was already in high school. I understood that it was more important for my brother to study and get a profession than for me. With a profession, he can earn his living even with a disability that bars him from physical work. No, no, I am not complaining about life, but it all made me think about migration. I could not bear my mother’s suffering; I could not continue my university; my middle brother will need money for college soon;
and my youngest brother was growing and would need to go to school soon. I decided to migrate.

Before I told my mother about my decision, I called my uncle who worked in Russia. I told him I could not watch how my mother is suffering. She was not sleeping, working days and nights. She had a small child. My brothers needed food, they needed clothes. Soon, my youngest brother needs to go to school, and my middle brother needs to study in a college or University. But we cannot afford it. I told my uncle that my mother will not allow me to leave, and I did not have money to buy the ticket. So, I asked my uncle to lend me money to purchase a ticket. And he supported my decision and lent me money for the ticket.

Three days before my departure, I told my mother that I was leaving to seek work in Russia. My mother was crying and telling me: “Please don’t leave; let’s return the ticket before it is too late.” But I told her that I had decided. I decided to leave for them. My grandmother was telling my mother: “Don’t let your son go to Russia, he will find a girl there, establish a family there and will abandon you like his father did”. And my mother asked me before I left: “Son, you will never do that to me, right?” And I told her, “Ochajon (mother), I will never leave you alone!”

Sattor

Like you, Abdullo, I am also the oldest child in the family and like your father, my father also migrated when I was very young. But we lived with my grandparents, my aunts, and my aunts-in-law while my father and his brothers and brothers-in-law were working in Russia. My father is still a migrant worker in Russia. I am not a child anymore and I’m married, but my father has been working in Russia for many years. He
does not want to return to Tajikistan and wishes to save money to build a house in Russia so later, we can all move there.

Growing up, because I am also an older son like you, I tried to help my mother. But we had many other cousins and my siblings living in one house. When my sisters were younger, I would help my mother more, but later, when my sisters grew older and could help her, my mother wanted me not to waste my time for household things, but to focus on school and study well. She had many hopes for me.

While my mother was fully in charge of raising us, my father would earn money, so we were fed and clothed. He would come once in a few years. It was expensive to travel, as we did not have direct flights from the city where he worked. Occasionally, we would go to the post-office and talk to my father on the phone. Communication was difficult before; it is not like now when we have cell phones with installed Viber which allows us to talk everyday, if needed. But once, he came and stayed with us for several months. He was very sick. He took the necessary medications, and my mother took good care of him. It took a few months before he felt better and then he left for Russia again.

When I finished school, I had to travel to Russia for work too as my father wanted me there. He told me I would earn money for my future wedding, and he sent money for a ticket. My mother loved me very much as the only son in the family and she was not eager to send me to Russia for work, but my father wanted that, so she listened to him. Besides, my father and my uncles were also in Russia, so she felt that I would be in good hands. My father and my uncles all lived in one apartment. So, I had all the conditions needed to come and work. I was only seventeen at the time. I had to travel as soon as I got my high school certificate, but I was not so eager to go because I liked a girl in school
who I wanted to marry in the future. But I had to leave with the hope that when I returned, we would get married. She promised to wait for me. But, when I returned for the first time, I found out that her parents had arranged a marriage for her to another guy.

Fariddun

Frankly, I did not previously think about working in Russia. I knew everybody was leaving, maybe half of our population was in Russia (laughing), many of my relatives were in Russia, but I never thought of coming here myself. I loved our country, I loved our people, and I had a relatively good job in Tajikistan for all those years. I had a university diploma, but I never worked in the area of my professional training because I finished university during the war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union doctors, teachers, engineers were instead selling in bazaars because their salaries had turned to nothing. As a new university graduate, my salary was too little. Like both of you, I am also the older son in the family. All my other siblings are sisters. As a man in the family, I had to earn money, I had to get married, and I needed money to help my sisters who later had to get married as well. Previously, I was getting my wage in American dollars, but later it became in Tajik Somoni. And with global crises and inflation, the exchange rate fluctuated all the time. We got wages in Somoni, but when the prices went up in Tajikistan everybody said it was because the ‘dollar’ went up. But many people in Tajikistan were getting their wages in Somoni, how should we live then? Our wages did not increase. How should we feed our families?

So, for the last few years my income was not enough. I would get my wage at the end of the month, and I would divide this money for our monthly needs: for bozori (groceries), a bag of flour (50 kilo), a bag of rice, cotton oil, money for utilities, for
clothing, for school. I would divide my wage, and nothing would be left at the end. What if somebody got sick in the family, what if we needed extra money for something else? I was not able to have a ‘buffer’ amount for such unexpected costs. And, I was not even talking about other needs for the *havli* (house) or buying a new TV, or something. I could not save money. And my sons were big already; they needed to start university very soon. I had no choice but to come here to Russia for work. But, I think I live in much better conditions than many Tajiks. I speak Russian fluently; I have a higher education, and my cousin has lived and worked here for many years and he supports me.

I was talking to my cousin on the phone and complaining about life in Tajikistan, how the prices are high, and how my income was not enough for my family’s needs. My kids were growing, and their needs were growing as well. He suggested I come to Russia and promised to help me find a job. I talked to my wife and we decided that I temporarily travel and work in Russia and hopefully make some savings for our sons’ education. I resigned from my job and decided to come. My cousin helped me to buy a ticket, as I had to leave some money at home with my wife because she did not work. I promised my brother I would return as soon as I could. It was not an easy decision to come here leaving my children there, especially now, when they are older. At this age, they start acting out and can find bad company. There are lots of young boys who get addicted to drugs. I am afraid of all of that. I think the father should always be near the family and look after the kids, but what can I do? I had to take the risk and come to Russia. But my children are good children, thanks to Allah. Now I need to think about their education. That is the primary reason why I decided to leave, to start saving for their university education.
Dowud

I come from a family with 11 siblings. Unlike you three, I am one of the youngest in the family. I was around six-seven years old when my father passed away. After I finished school, I was drafted to serve in the Soviet Army, and was sent to other Soviet republics. When I returned, I found out that my mother and older brother had passed away. Later, because I had already reached the marriageable age at around 21-22 years, the wife of my deceased older brother found a wife for me. After marriage we lived in our parent’s house.

In the mid-nineties I decided to move to the capital, Dushanbe, while my wife and one child stayed in kishloks (village). I worked in the capital for a few years, where I rented an apartment with other men. I did not have a chance to travel back to my village very frequently, because it was during the war, the travel was expensive, and I could not just go for a visit. I had to go and bring money with me, but I had to earn it first. After working for a couple of years in the capital, I decided to bring my wife here as well. We did not have close family members living in the capital. We did not have a place to live, and we could not afford to rent a whole apartment ourselves. So, we rented a room in obshezhitie (shared hostel) first. This was what I could afford. My older child was young, and what I was earning in Dushanbe during the war was not enough for us to rent a whole apartment. I could see how my family was suffering, and I felt helpless because I could not organize better conditions for them. So, I decided to migrate. You know at that time many people were migrating for work to Russia. Some of the people I knew had already left and worked there.
My friend and I decided to travel, as we knew one person who was working in one of the farms in a Russian village. We travelled seasonally, worked for 6-8 months in Russia and then came back home for the winter months. During my first trip to Russia, I sent my wife and my child to live with her mother, so she would not be alone in the city. Before my departure, I left some money with my wife, so they could live before my return. It was not so easy to send money at that time, so I had to come with earned money myself. Usually people were sending money through other people or used expensive money transfer systems. But I decided to save money and bring it with me to Tajikistan.

**Narrator**

Here Abdullo, Sattor, Fariddun, and Dowud share rich stories of dense relationships. They come together from different ages, educational levels, marital statuses, regions, and countries (Tajikistan and Russia). Their shared stories of labour migration bring them together with all these differences. From their stories, it is clear that the decision to migrate is not easy and ‘clear cut.’ It is, rather, a very nuanced process that is pushed and pulled by numerous factors which are tightly connected with assigned gender roles. How do I understand their rich stories through the lens of the theoretical framework I discussed in the previous chapters? We see changes in gender relations in the intersection of gender relations theories, the local Tajik context, and the international context of labour migration.

In order to fully understand how male labour migrants acquire and embody a sense of gender relations, and in order to understand how they interrupt or continue gender-assigned roles, it is necessary to understand the complex economic, political, social, cultural, and religious factors in their lives (Razack, 1995). In order to understand how gender relations are enacted and changed, it is necessary to analyze the dense relationships within which migrant workers negotiate the everydayness of their lives (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995; Tanenberg & Kemp, 2002). The context of labour migration opens possibilities for both change and continuity and reproduction of gender-assigned norms (Butler, 2003) for men. In addition to the intense economic factors that push and pull these men into labour migration, we see powerful factors of gender relations.

In Tajik society, men are required to perform as breadwinners, as family supporters, as protectors, and as future husbands. They have to migrate because there are multiple needs and obligations for them as men, such as getting married and being a ‘good’ husband and son who is able to economically sustain the family. If there is no opportunity to affirm the economic side of masculinity, then men have to migrate to Russia in order to confirm their roles of husbands and sons. They need to migrate to assert their manhood. They are ‘doing masculinity’ based on how they learned it, how
they absorbed it, how they observed it, and how they embodied it. Men have to 'do masculinity' to maintain gender order (Paechter, 2018).

‘Doing masculinity’ is not only associated with the need to earn and sustain a family. For some younger men like Abdullo and Sattor, it is also associated with the desire to discontinue the type of masculinity performed by their fathers who left their mothers and families in destitution (whether permanently or temporarily). Furthermore, gender performative scripts intersect (Crenshaw, 1989; Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016) with other multiple identities such as age, marital status, education, ability, kinship structure, and parenthood. These interlocking systems should be understood for each migrant worker, as their experiences are embedded and implicated in this relational web of identities when they make the decision to migrate to Russia.

However, the requirement to perform and confirm masculinity is ripping men apart because it also brings with it the intense dilemma of leaving or staying in the country. ‘Doing masculinity’ requires men to migrate because of the need to support their families, but equally, they need to stay to be able to protect their families and their loved ones.

All four men in this scene have already been drawn into international labour migration. In the next scene, you see them sharing their stories of working in Russia.

Scene 2: Working in Russia

Abdullo

Oh, well... the first day of my arrival in Russia was a very interesting experience. Initially, I decided to seek labour not in the big central cities, but in the smaller ones. My uncle was telling me to join him, but I did not want to become a burden for my uncle, as he already helped and lent me money. I also had the phone number of my father, but I did not want to call him and ask for help. I decided to find my own path and try to find a job through others – like migrant workers of my age. Through social media, I connected with an acquaintance from my school and asked if there was a job there for me, and if he could help me. This person promised to help me in the beginning by meeting me at the airport and allowing me to stay with him for a short period of time before I could find a job and a place for myself.

Before this trip, I had never travelled anywhere outside of Tajikistan. I did not speak Russian, but I understood some of the words. My mother used to translate the
movies in Russian and I was trying to learn some words from her. In university I also had a Russian language class. When I arrived at the airport, the security guy was asking me: “Zel’ visita?” “Purpose of travel?” and I could not understand him. Then he asked “Rabota?” (work?) and I said, “Yes.” I knew this word (laughs). In the airport, the guy who promised to meet me never showed up. I did not know how to find him, as I did not have any means of communication. I did not even have his phone number. There were several other non-Russian men in the airport, offering me services to take me to places to live, to help me find work, etc. But I did not trust them. I had heard many stories that they deceive people, take you somewhere, beat you, take everything from you and throw you away somewhere on the road. I was lost and decided to stay in the airport. I spent a night there.

The next day, I met a Russian man, who was around 60 or older. He had kind eyes and I felt that I could trust him. Sometimes you see the people and realize that they have a good soul, and this is how I felt towards him. I felt I could trust him. So, I decided to ask, but I was trying to remember the words in Russian and how to talk to him. I said: “Hello, I am looking for a job”. He asked me: “What is your nationality?” I did not understand him first. I did not know the word ‘nationality’. Then he asked: “Who are you? Tajik? Uzbek? German? American? Or somebody else?” I said: “I am Tajik”. He asked: “So, you came to earn money here?” I said “Yes”. Then, he told me: “Where are your parents? With whom did you come?” I explained that I came by myself and someone who was supposed to meet me did not come. I said to him, that I didn’t know where to go and I was looking for a job. I sought help from him and asked if he knew where to find work.
He said to me that he knew one person and that people from ‘your homeland’ work there as well. “This is the only way I can help you,” he told me.

He took me to this place and asked: “Who is a senior person here?” and then he said: “Give this guy a job, his father is my best friend.” This old man was very kind to me. He literally said: “His father is my best friend,” even though he met me for the first time just a couple of hours ago. He said to them: “Please give him a job, and please I urge you, no fraud. Pay him the earned wage.” And they gave me a job. I worked and lived close to other Tajiks. This old man would come every month to check if they paid me for my work. He is absolutely no one to me, but he was so kind to me. On New Year’s Eve he came to me and invited me to his house to celebrate. He picked me up and we went to his house, where I met his family. Now even though I left this region, and work in a different place, I still have his phone number and call him occasionally.

When I lost my job in this company, as they were laying off people, I had to leave and go to Moscow where my uncle is working. He helped me find my first job in construction, but in Moscow you get stopped by the police all the time. They continuously want money from you. I was working and earning little money which was taken by the police all the time. That was why I decided to find a job further away, not in Moscow and further from the police. Here it is better, but still there are nationalists on the street. I got beaten several times. I stopped going anywhere because I am afraid that I would get beaten or killed one day. I just come to work very early and leave. I try not to be on the streets when it is dark. I like going to Chaihana (traditional tea house) and watching football there. This place is like a piece of ‘homeland’ for me. But I cannot go there now, because I work every day till evening, and at night I am afraid to walk.
Recently, coming back from Chaihana at around 9:30-10 pm, several young men approached me. They asked if I had a cigarette and I said: “Sorry, I do not smoke,” and they started to beat me. They are all nationalists, they told me: “You black shit, go home”. They were all bold, with black heavy boots. They wanted to show me their muscles, their strength by beating me alone. But the strength is not in your muscles, the strength is in your heart. After this accident, I understood this even more. The strength is in your heart which you demonstrate by your kindness.

I don’t want to stay here permanently, no, never. I don’t like living here. Yes, I earn some money, but I cannot live the life they are living. They don’t know who your parents are. They don’t respect them. And my family is there, in Tajikistan, how could I even think of staying here permanently? When I call, my younger brother calls me father. I can hear how he is asking me: Ota, ota (father), will you teach me Russian? (laughs). And I promised my mother, I would never leave her. I focus on what I need to do. I came here for work. This is what I am doing, working, not establishing any relationships, and trying to stay away from trouble. Every morning, I come to work, work as good as I can, and leave in the evening, before it gets dark. I come home, pray, eat and go to bed. All my days are almost the same.

Sattor

Oh, you are lucky that you met such a kind person. My story is different; my father, who is a migrant himself, wanted me to come to Russia. On the day of my arrival, he sent one of my uncles to the airport, as he could not meet me himself. My uncle took me to the apartment where he lived with other Tajiks. Conditions were good there. We had everything. I stayed there for some time and then I had to go and apply for different
documents. I liked Russia in general, but what I did not really like is getting different documents. You have to run around a lot. You need to wake up very early in the morning, and to get in line by 5am. And there is an order if the line is managed by Russians; if it is managed by Tajiks or Uzbeks, it becomes a mess. I did not like this first experience. The line is long, there are people who come right with the work uniform from construction, all dirty.

I did not start working the first days. I had to wait for the documents, and my father promised to find work in construction where he works. While my father and uncles were at work, I did all the household things: cooked, cleaned, washed. When I started to work, we took turns with house chores, but if somebody did not do the work, I did it. My father and uncles are older than me, I have to respect them. So, I did not say anything, but I did all the household chores. When I felt irritated or nervous, I would just go outside and walk.

I worked for the first time in the same place where my father worked. Tajiks, Uzbeks and other people worked at the same construction site. In the beginning, I was curious, as everything was new to me. I met new people. I saw the city. Everything was very different than in Tajikistan. There is an order here, I liked it. But also, I missed home, I missed my mother dearly. That is why after working for around a year, I told my dad that I would like to go home and spend some time there. Later, I returned to Russia, but I lost my previous job, because I decided to travel home, so I had to find another one. I worked at different places, usually they would pay me a salary, but in one of the jobs where I worked for two months, they deceived me and paid me nothing.
Fariddun

Like you, I was not very much interested in travelling to “davlati musofir” [a foreign country]. I have my family in Tajikistan. But I had to travel, because as a man I have to earn money for my family. In Russia, I live in an apartment with my cousin. But during the summer, he and his wife live in a dacha (summer cottage), so I live in the apartment by myself. Besides the ticket, my cousin lent me money to get a patent and work permit. He told me that I need to have all the necessary documents to stay and work in Russia legally, even though they are very expensive. He always insisted that I need to have all legal documents, not fake ones. He told me not to trust the different intermediators who will do documents for me, but go to all places myself. He drove me to the institution where I could obtain documents. I was surprised, everything is so organized there. While I did not have to stay in very long lines, I heard from others how difficult it is to obtain these documents.

My cousin told me that I can pay him back gradually, because he understands that I need to remit to my family as well. So, I am returning it to him very slowly. I paid lots of money for the patent, and had little left to pay my debt and also remit to my family. Frankly, in the first months, I was not able to send money at all. My wife had to borrow some money from her relative so she could buy school uniforms for our children. But because I am living with my cousin, I do not spend a lot of money on rent and food. Also, his wife usually cooks, if she is at home. If not, I am still learning how to cook myself. But I call my wife every day, we have Viber now. She would tell me how to make some basic food. Sometimes she would tell me: “Talk to your son, he is not listening to me,” and then I start talking to him, and do ‘nasihat’ [to have disciplinary educational
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My wife says that it is very hard without me. Even getting groceries is hard. Before, I was doing all bozori [groceries] myself. But we know it is temporary. We need to endure. I just need to earn and save some money. This is my goal for now.

Dowud

As for me, I travelled to Russia with my friend. The trip was very long. We took a train first, and everybody knew that during the trip, the trains are stopped by different gang/mafia groups demanding money. It could be on the way from Tajikistan or on the way back. Our train was stopped by one such group. All the people on the train knew what the purpose was and started to prepare a certain amount of money to give to this gang. Thankfully, the person with whom I was travelling knew the head of the group. When they were collecting money from one section to another, suddenly one of them said hello to my friend. They talked to each other, and we did not have to pay any money. I felt lucky at that time because I was travelling with my friend.

My friend’s brother-in-law was already working in Russia. He worked as a driver at a farm and told us that there was a seasonal job we apply for. He explained to us how to reach this village where he worked. The trip was very long and required several stops, trains and busses. The farm was quite far from the center, but we found it. The conditions at the farm were good. Both of us had one room, with places to sleep. We cooked and did everything that was needed, such as washing, cleaning, etc. We earned money there, but when we returned, we realized that our trip was not so successful. It was 1998, and the Russian ruble was devalued in response to a financial crisis, so the amount we brought home became just coins. Unfortunately, all my hard work did not pay off. Initially, I hoped to use this money to buy an apartment or at least improve our housing situation.
The prices for apartments were very low after the war, but I could not buy one, as the money I earned was so little... After all my migration difficulties which did not pay off at the end, I thought of trying to earn money in Dushanbe. I brought my wife back to Dushanbe and started to seek a job in the city. I worked in the capital for a couple of years. Business went very well, so in several years I was able to purchase a one-bedroom apartment for my family. At that time, I already had four children. My wife stayed at home with them. Later, business went bad, and I started to think about finding work elsewhere, again. My friend had already left for Moscow, and I decided to follow in his footsteps. He promised to help me. This time, I was leaving my wife and four children in Dushanbe. My mother-in-law was living in a village alone, so we brought her to Dushanbe, so they all could live in one place: six people in one bedroom.

So, when I left, my friend met me at the airport, and helped me to find a job in construction, the same place where he was himself working. I worked there for around two weeks, but this type of work was very heavy for me. So, I decided to search for other job opportunities. After some time, I found a job in one of the governmental institutions as a general worker, to help with cleaning, moving and other things. They even gave me a room where I had a place to sleep, wash etc. Then, I helped my friend who worked in construction, to get a job at the same place. This job was better than working in construction. I worked there for several years but would come home every year to stay with my family for a month. As it was a governmental institution, I could have a one-month vacation like everybody else.

While I was working in Russia, my wife decided to start working as well. Her friend worked in one of the canteens and told her about a job at the same place. My wife
called me and asked if she could work there. She made arrangements with her mother to look after the kids while she was working. It was half day work, starting early morning, so she would leave while the kids were still sleeping. I agreed, the conditions were fine, and all her colleagues were women. I said to her that she could work if she wanted to.

When I returned home for vacation, I realized that our one-bedroom was not enough for all seven of us. So, I started to search for other places, and thought about selling our apartment. Later, I was able to sell my apartment and buy a new two-bedroom apartment for my family. Thankfully, during these five years I was able to save money. But later, this institution hired another company who had to hire contract workers like us. At the end, the conditions there got worse, and we were getting significantly less money, because the company was charging fees for themselves as well. I had to leave this job and return home permanently. But the money I was able to earn in Tajikistan was not enough. Even though it was not my preference at all, I started to think about returning to Russia again. One of my friends planned to travel for work in one of the Northern cities in Russia, as his relative was working there. So, we decided to travel together. The first job we found there was again in construction. I worked there for two weeks and decided to resign. Like last time, I realized that construction work was not for me, especially in the far North. I found another job in a grocery store. The owner was a Muslim and hired me as gruzchik (loading/unloading person). After some months, the owner opened a new store, and because they already trusted me, they offered me work as a cashier in this store, and as a gruzchik at the same time.

However, at that time it was already a regulation that all cashiers needed to have Russian citizenship. But the owners knew many people in the Federal Migration Agency...
(FMS) and that is why I was offered this job. They told me they can solve any problems with FMS should they emerge. I worked as two people: as a cashier and as gruzhik at the same time. It was better for me, because I was getting more money, and it was better for the owners, because they paid me less than they would by hiring two people for two different positions. But while working in this region, I could not travel home to Tajikistan frequently. But still, I tried to travel when I could. I traveled to this city a couple of times, and the last time I returned home, I decided not to go back but stay home in Tajikistan permanently.

I found another job in Dushanbe, and worked there for a month. One day the store owner in Russia called me and said to come back, saying they opened another new store. Frankly, I did not want to go. I told him that I could not come and would like to stay home with my family, and I found a decent job here. But they insisted, and even sent me money to purchase the tickets. It was hard for them to find a good Muslim man they could trust with their business. I was thinking about this offer and decided to travel again and stay there for a year. I thought I could use these savings for our family. The children were growing; the time to get them married was coming too. I was earning good money and sending some them home to my wife. This money was enough for living and even for saving. If my wife wanted to buy something, she would consult with me, for example, if she wanted to buy a washing machine or TV. And I would agree to buy them. But she asked me first.

Narrator

Now we have the stories of these four men working in Russia. How do I understand these stories by looking through the lens of my theoretical framework? How do gender relations interact with the Russian context of international migration and the cultural context of Tajik labour migrants within Russia?
Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers

The pre-migration stories of the last scene highlight the difficult economic situation that pushes men into labour migration (Chiovenda, 2013; Scarborough, 2016). Equally, the necessity to perform gender scripts makes them ‘do’ their masculinity (Butler, 1993; Paechter, 2018) and migrate to Russia. Men continue to demonstrate their ‘hegemonic masculinity’ (Connell, 1995) by earning money and by enduring difficulties while working in Russia. They are confirming their ‘hegemonic masculinity’ to their families, to their neighbours, to their kin, and to themselves.

However, together with the confirmation of ‘hegemonic masculinity’ in Tajikistan, they are equally becoming a ‘marginalized masculinity’ (Connell, 1995) in Russia. As soon as they leave Tajikistan, they could be deceived, oppressed, and exploited, whether in transnational space or within the nation-state in Russia. Their visible markers of skin colour, nationality, age, and ability to speak Russian intersect with their legal status and ‘clean’ fake documents (Reeves, 2013), thereby creating unique experiences of oppression (hooks, 1992; Ahmed, 2017; Hill Collins & Sirme, 2016). Through this experience, the men are bearing multiple masculinities as simultaneously hegemonic and marginalized.

Interestingly, when men migrate alone and confirm their ‘hegemonic masculinity’, they equally transform it by enacting new roles (Butler, 1993). Because of migration, men start to learn in Russia many domestic roles that are constructed as feminine (Hassan, 2018; ILO, 2010). The same hegemonic masculinity that requires men to leave and endure the difficulties in Russia also transforms them and makes them embody some aspects of femininity by becoming different in household chores and in public spaces.

As we see in the next scene, these men usually bring their newly transformed roles to Tajikistan where they could be confronted with rejection from the keepers of traditional gender order. This process highlights the tension between the transformation and transmission, production, and reproduction of gender roles. However, the process of ‘becoming different’ and ‘coming back’ to traditional gender norms does not bring all men back to hegemonic masculinity. Rather, they are brought to a complicit masculinity which does not defend and ensure patriarchy but accepts it in public (Connell, 1995). As a result, migration processes highlight the enactment of various forms of masculinities as described by Connell (1995).

This illustrates that the experience of masculinity is highly connected with multiple factors in migration processes. These masculinities are inseparable from each other. It also emphasizes the fluidity of the gender system which is constructed through the binary walls of masculinity and femininity. However, gender is fluid and contains both femininity and masculinity, not separately but together. When this ‘togetherness’ is brought into life, it usually meets opposition from the gatekeepers of the gender order who could be family, neighbours, or the larger society.

Additionally, from the experiences of men, it seems that their gender-specific constructed templates for understanding themselves and others (Cohn, 1993) are incompatible with the family templates and relations they observe in Russia. Some of these men resist the new social and gender norms and cannot imagine themselves living in Russia permanently due to differences in values, gender norms, and everyday oppression. However, for some men, as Abdullo’s and Sattor’s stories attest, there is also resistance not to continue and reproduce the same gender roles their fathers performed as migrant workers resulting in abandoned wives and children. In their stories of
‘working in Russia,’ the young men who were left by their fathers as children are refusing to reproduce the same gender relations as those of their fathers. This refusal also reinforces the absolute power of mothers over young male migrant workers who could either transform or transmit gender roles and expectations to their future or current wives.

In the next scene we see these men sharing stories of their return or thoughts of return from Russia.

**Scene 3: Stories of Return**

*Abdullo*

I have been working here for several years already, and I do not think about returning yet. I dream about going back, but for now I cannot. I have to earn money. I have a mother in Tajikistan, a brother living with a disability and a very young brother who has not started school yet. I need to think about my education as well. My mother is dreaming that I get a higher education, and that I get a diploma. I need to make her dream come true. I also need to get married. But I need money for all of that. That is why I am still here and working, but I don’t imagine myself living here permanently.

My mother and my brothers are there, and I am helping them. Now my mother is telling me: “I am proud of you”. My mother and her opinion are very important to me. Hence, I will marry there in Tajikistan to a girl my mother will find and approve. I am not looking for any girls here in Russia. I want to marry in Tajikistan, so I can tell my wife what my mother means to me and she will understand. Here, they don’t understand. Who is the mother? Who is the father? They don’t know their parents. They don’t respect their parents. They don’t care. When they reach the age of eighteen, they start to live their own life. I don’t want that. I don’t want my mother to suffer and go through pain again. When she gets old, I don’t want her to think that everything she has done for me is for nothing.
So, I see my life in Tajikistan. My life is them. I am living for my family which is in Tajikistan.

Sattor

When I first travelled to Russia, I did not even look at girls, I focused on work, and my mother would never accept a Russian girl or a girl she does not approve of. So, I wanted her to find me a wife. Of course, the last word was mine. I have to talk to the girl and understand her character. She introduced me to several, and I liked only one of them. She seemed more understandable and respectful.

I am not thinking about going back to Russia again, at least not in the near future. I have a job here, and it is enough for now. My father sends money to us as well. My mother, my other siblings and my wife all live in one household. I am the only son; I will always live with my mother, and my parents. And this is what I told my wife too. Now, in our household, I am the only man. I try to bring happiness to the women I live with. I learned from Islam that every Friday you need to spend with your family, and that it should be a day of happiness. On this day, especially family members should respect and listen to each other. So, for example, I try to cook on Fridays when I can. While my father is away, I help my mother to cook sometimes, and I learned from her. Also, when I was away, because I was the youngest, usually I had to cook for my father and uncles, so now I can cook very well.

My father is thinking about building a house in Russia, and moving there permanently, but I don’t want to, for now. Maybe in the future. But for this, I need my wife to get an education. My wife has only nine classes of education. I told her father to bring her school diploma to Dushanbe. I am thinking about how she could finish school
first and then study at a college. I am thinking that maybe she should go to medical college. If we decide to move to Russia, she would need this profession as well. I am thinking of studying too, but I have not decided what to study. For, now I am focused on my work.

Fariddun

I’ve been here for around one year. I don’t know how long I will stay and work. And I do not plan to travel home just for a visit. It is very costly. I would rather spend more time here and earn money. I still did not pay back all the money I borrowed from my cousin. But I am returning it to him, slowly. I am also paying for patent and other documents. The rest of my income, I send to my wife, keeping very little for myself.

I am not thinking about staying in Russia permanently. I don’t even think that my children will be able to come and study here. First, it is very hard to get into Russian institutions. I would prefer them staying close to us and studying in Tajikistan. But, if they are accepted to a university in Russia, I will be happy as well. There are good Russian universities in Tajikistan too but everything costs money. My dream is that my boys will get a higher education and will be self-sufficient in the future. That is why I am here.

Dowud

You know, working in Russia gave me several opportunities. I was able to earn money for my family. I am thankful that I met good people there. Knowledge of Russian helped me too. The Soviet Army was a good experience where I practiced the Russian language. Because of my work in Russia, my kids were always fed and had everything they needed. They were able to buy books and finish high school. I was able to improve
my housing conditions. But it was very difficult as well. I am not complaining, but every gain comes with sacrifice, or with a cost.

I spent a lot of time far away from my family. But I tried to be consistent in my travels back home. I either worked seasonally, or tried to come back at least once a year, if I could. But I see that the younger generation is different. I see that young men who migrate are not so loyal to their families. I am talking from my experience as two of my daughters got married to migrant workers and both got divorced. They were left because their husbands found other women in Russia. Both travelled to Russia and stayed there with their husbands for a short period of time, but they returned because the conditions were not good, or rent was expensive for two people. That is why, even though I am a former migrant worker myself, I don’t wish my daughters to get married to a migrant worker. And, I am not returning to Russia myself. If I decide to go one day, it would be with the family. I know there are ‘resettlement’ programs now (programma pereseleniya), but I still do not know if I want to try and resettle through this program...

Perhaps, why should I? This is the land where I was born, and perhaps it should be a land where I am going to die.

**Narrator**

These men’s ‘stories of return’ have several layers: return to migration, return to Tajikistan, and return to Russia. Looking through the lens of my theoretical framework, I see how gender relations interact with the local and international context of migration so that these men are positioned in the struggle between the dilemma of staying and returning. The love for their homeland and for their families is on one hand (Roche, 2017), and the lure of economic opportunities in Russia is on the other. These men vacillate between spaces of choices: one moment they have firmly decided, and the next moment they are thinking again (Ahmed, 2000). This dilemma follows them from the first steps of their migration journey. In Russia, they dream of going back and reuniting with their families, or they hope to bring their families and loved ones to Russia.

Back in Tajikistan, Sattor is still thinking of returning to Russia, but this time with his family, if possible. However, as it is difficult to economically sustain the family in
Russia, some younger men are thinking about getting education both for themselves and for their wives before they move to Russia permanently. This situation can potentially contribute to improved gender relations, specifically in relation to equitable access to education. The prospect of migrating with their families pushes some men to revisit their traditional stance in relation to women’s education.

Experiences of ‘marginalized masculinity’ (Connell, 1995) have caused some men to realize that their partners, daughters, children, and themselves need education and a profession in order to economically sustain themselves and be on a higher level in the economic hierarchy both in Russia and in Tajikistan. Their experiences have led them to rethink the hierarchy of boys’ over girls’ education. This hierarchy started to gradually change when girls’ education started to become more important. Other studies have also demonstrated similar findings and connected labour migration to improved education levels for girls (Mansuri, 2006; Antman, 2012).

Abdullo and Sattor, like some young male migrant workers, want to obtain or learn specific skills for themselves and/or their partners to help them earn decent wages in Russia. They began to realize that confirmation of masculinity and performance of the role of a breadwinner in a family could be done within Tajikistan there is a well-paid job, skills, and adequate education. In addition, some young male migrant workers have started to think about permanent migration to Russia through the program of ‘pereselenie’ (resettlement), which can presumably offer equitable access to work and prevent them from facing ongoing police oppression and multiple barriers in relation to their legal status in the country. They believe that the resettlement program, coupled with education in skills-based professions, will give them more economic opportunities and better lives in Russia.

However, thoughts about education do not necessarily translate into actions. Many migrant workers spoke about their own or their female family members’ educational aspirations, but many have not implemented these aspirations. My framework highlights that the ability to negotiate education for women with the male partner has the potential to transform gender relations of power. Nevertheless, this depends on many factors intersecting with gender, age, kin relationships, finances, and other support mechanisms. And so, the jump on the trampoline continues until enough people jump and push and dismantle patriarchal structures. I conclude the men’s stories here.

In Act 2, we meet female migrant workers who share their own stories in their own space.
Act 2: Women Share Stories

Narrator

Like the men in Act 1, here, four women are also sitting together around one dastarhan (tablecloth/traditional space where the food is eaten). They are all migrant workers coming together virtually from different transnational spaces to share stories of their migration journey.

Saodat is a middle-aged, widowed woman in Russia, whose children live with close relatives in Tajikistan
Malohat is a young married woman with no children, living and working in Russia with her husband
Yasmin is a divorced, middle-aged woman with no children, who currently lives and works in Tajikistan
Mijgona is a married, middle-aged woman living in Tajikistan with her kids, while her husband works in Russia

In Scene 1, they recall their lives before migration and how they made the decision to migrate.

Scene 4: Premigration stories

Saodat

Life can bring us unexpected events. As a child, I was raised in a very good family. During the Soviet time my father had a good job, and my mother stayed home and raised the children. We had everything at home, until the war started. During the war my father lost his job, and my mother was not working. It was both dangerous and expensive to live in the capital, so my parents decided to move to the village where their relatives lived. We stayed there for some time, because it was safer, and we had food to survive. When we returned, school was temporarily closed due to the war, but I didn’t continue my education when it reopened. I think I was in grade eight at that time. My good childhood life ended when the war started, and I had to quit school.

I left school, my father was not working at that time, and we did not have money in our family. I sold fruits, vegetables and sweet corn on the streets. We had fruit trees in
our yard and I sold those fruits. I would also buy raw corn, cook it at home and sell it on the streets. With this income I helped my parents a lot. Later, I worked for one woman in a small store and sold some groceries there too. At the age of 15, I was working and making a living for our family. My peers were spending their time differently. When it was Eid, they visited each other and gathered in the street, but I never joined them because I was working. My heart was burning (dilam mesuht) for my father. I saw how difficult it was for him to not be able to work. I remembered how hard he worked during all the previous years. He was a good father and did everything for us. That is why I felt it was my turn to support him. My older brothers were working too, but their incomes were small. I worked every day till my mid-twenties to make a living for our family. Then I got married. I met my husband at work, and we fell in love.

I loved my husband but living with his parents was so difficult. My mother-in-law did not treat me well. I cried every single day. I could not get pregnant for several years. Every day his mother reproached me that I am not able to deliver children, and that my husband should kick me out. But my husband loved me, and I stayed with them. I endured everything because my husband treated me well. Even when I could not get pregnant, because of health complications, he did not mistreat me. I endured everything, thinking that this was my destiny. However, I was crying and questioning myself about why I had this destiny? For what sins?

After living with my husband and his family for several years, I got pregnant and I delivered a baby, but the baby died. After some time, I got pregnant again and delivered a healthy child and in couple of years, another child. At that time, I thought that I was the
happiest woman on earth. I was feeling very hopeful. I had two children, and my husband loved me. I felt I had everything a woman needed to be happy.

But my happiness did not last long. When my second child was a few months old, my husband developed a serious disease, and the treatment he received did not help him. Before he passed away, we were all at the hospital and the doctors said that he would die very soon. I stayed with him, crying and asking what we should do if he passed away. He had already realized that he was dying, and told me, “If you can, please endure and live with my family for one more year, and later find another husband. You are still very young. You need a man who will take care of you.” My husband was there lying on the bed, hugging the children, and he passed away just in few hours...

For one year, I stayed with his parents and delivered all maraca (traditional religious ceremonies). I could leave the house when my husband passed away, if I had wanted to. I was enduring even though they did not treat me well, because it was my husband’s last request. I was patiently enduring because I understood this as my woman’s destiny. Women should be patient ‘sabr’. I felt if I did not endure and left the house, Allah would not forgive me, and I would not find happiness and barakat in life. Thus, I decided to endure and live with my deceased husband’s family.

But shortly, after one year has passed, I was told by my father-in-law that I, with the children, should leave their home. They kicked me out without giving us anything. For so many years I had lived with them, tried very hard to be a good kelin, and they gave us nothing. I left this house, crying. In one hand I carried a bag with my kids’ clothes, and in the other, I was holding my child. The older child could already walk. When I entered my parents’ house, my father asked me: “What happened?” and I said to him that my in-
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laws told us to leave the house, permanently. at that very moment my father had his first heart attack and was urgently transported to the hospital.

when i returned to my parents, i started to work in the bazaar again, but the money i earned was not enough. a relative found me a job in russia to take care of an elderly russian woman. i decided to go. in the beginning, my mother supported my decision to migrate. she even asked her brother, my uncle to find me a job.

malohat

oh, my heart reaches out to you (dilam mesyzad). like you, i was raised in a good family. but i didn’t go to russia because i had to feed my children. i left because i followed my husband, who was working there.

like yours, my childhood was happy. i felt that i had everything. i had loving parents who got married early because they fell in love. later, life became harder, as there were no jobs in the country. my father spent a few years as a migrant worker. he worked in russia to make sure we had everything we needed. even when i finished school and entered professional college (ptu), my father paid my tuition. he wanted me to get a profession. later, when i grew up, i also married a guy who was already a migrant worker when we decided to marry. we met during a big gathering, when he returned to tajikistan to visit his parents, as he was on vacation. after he left, he approached me through social media, and we started talking. after some time, he proposed, and we decided to get married. he told me that after getting married, i had to stay with his parents until he took me to russia. but i did not want that. first, even though his family are nice people, they were still strangers to me, at that time. i did not want to be kelin in a house without my husband. also, i did not want my husband to
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leave me right after marriage. We frequently heard stories of migrant workers who had left their wives. They say it is temporary, but then it takes years and years. The wives are in Tajikistan and the men are in Russia. I did not want to become one of these women. So, after we got married, in around one month we went to Russia together. My husband helped me to find a job.

Yasmin

I feel for your pain, Saodat (*dardi tyro his mekunam*). And I appreciate your pursuit of freedom, Malohat. But, my own migration to Russia did not stem from the necessity to feed my family. I was already working and self-sustaining. But, I followed the footsteps of my brothers who were migrant workers.

I was raised in a family that was neither poor nor rich. Both my parents were workers all their lives. I had brothers and sisters, but I am the only one in the family who had a higher education. All my brothers finished school, but did not have higher or professional education, as they migrated to Russia right after finishing high school. My sister has professional education. When it was a time for me to start university, it was a difficult time, as it was right after the war. It was not the best time to seek education when girls were kidnapped and even raped. Some parents were afraid for their daughters and kept them at home to protect them.

In our whole extended family, I was the only woman with a higher education. My family was religious. We did *namoz* and we were told that girls did not need to have higher education. They just needed to finish school and get married. But my father has a different opinion, even though he is devout Muslim. When I was in high school, he told me: “If you get all 5s (equivalent of As) in your certificate, I will help you to enroll in a
higher institution of your choice.” And I studies very hard and had all 5s in my certificate.

My dream was to enroll in a medical university, as I wanted to become a doctor. But I could not enroll, as the fees were very high. My father wanted me to become a doctor, but the tuition was unbearable. And I did not want to study in any other institutions. But, my friend’s mother, who was our neighbour, submitted mine and her daughter’s documents to a professional college (ychilishe) and we were enrolled. Although I did not want to study there, I still completed it. My father insisted that I continue my education and enroll in a university; otherwise, he or my grandfather would find me a husband. I was young; I did not want to get married. I submitted my documents to several universities (non-medical). I passed all the tests, was accepted by all the universities I applied to, and was admitted without paying any money. I studied in the university I liked the most.

My educational years were very difficult because I was the only girl in my family that was studying. All my family, especially, my grandfathers, uncles, and aunts were against my education. My grandfather, who lived in a different town, would come to Dushanbe and observe me. He would wait near the entrance of the university just to see what I was wearing, how I was behaving, and with whom I was leaving the university. He would hide behind the trees and follow me home. I did not know about this until he told me, recently. He saw me wearing long skirts, rymolcha (traditional head covering) and saw how I left the university with other girls. He followed me home and saw that I went home right after I finished classes. All my uncles were telling my parents that I should leave the university, that no one would marry me, that somebody would kidnap me,
deceive me or do something bad to me. They told my mother: “Dyhtar tyhmi shaition ast, Duhtar aklash kutoh, yagon kas fred ina mekynad” [A girl is the devil’s seed, a girl is short-minded, somebody will deceive her].

One day, my mother came to my dad in tears, telling him: “Let’s take her out of university. She should not study. Look, everybody is talking about her. Until when should we listen to that?!” My father told my mother: “She is my daughter, she will continue studying, and they will continue talking. But as they talk, my daughter will continue studying.” So, I was able to finish university because of my father. My father wanted all of us kids to study. He encouraged us all from when we were younger, but the others were not interested in education. My brothers started working very early and after finishing school they moved to work in Russia. My sister decided to quit school after reading the Quran and learning about Islam, when other people started to tell her that women should not have education. My father is very religious man, he follows Islam, and he always wanted us to study. Because, my father insisted, my sister finished high school. I was different; I always wanted to study. I did not need this push and my father always supported me in my pursuit of education.

My father is religious, but he had a very strong position on education and also on the way girls should dress. The time was when everybody started wearing the satr (hijab). It was fashionable, but my father did not allow female members of the family to wear satr. When my brothers got married, they told their wives to wear satr, but my father told them, “satr is not our traditional way of covering the head. Women should cover the head traditionally, in our own Tajik way.” He told my brother: “When you live separately with your wife, you will be the hujain [chief, master] to your wife, but while you live here
with us, don’t make your wife wear satr. You are all young. Just let your wife cover her head with rumolcha, as it is traditionally done by Tajik people”. But my brothers were not the only ones who wanted their wives to start wearing specifically satr. Many men made their wives wear satr because, people in the community, neighbors and others believed that if a wife did not, her husband was a scoundrel. If a girl wore pants or short skirts, her father was a scoundrel. But I did not wear satr; I covered my head traditionally with rumolcha.

Going to Russia for work was an ‘out of the blue’ decision for me, although my brothers, uncles and cousins were all migrant workers in Russia. Perhaps half of the population of our community were migrant workers. As I said, I was already working, so I did not think about migration. One day, my brother called home when my parents and I were having lunch. He told us that their cook got sick and could not work anymore, that she had left for Tajikistan and that they needed a new cook, urgently. He offered me a job to come and work there as a cook. I asked my father, and he said, “if you want to, you can go”. I had not thought that he would give me permission, so I asked again: “Will you allow me to go?” My father said if I wanted to go, I could go. He did not worry about me, because my brother was there, and he could look after me while I am in Russia. My brother worked in a farm where they had pigs, cows and other animals. At this farm, the workers had lunch on the premises. The company would deduct money for their lunch, but it paid a salary to the cook. Other workers, who were not Tajiks, primarily Russians and Ukrainians, would eat different food, including pork. The farm had many Tajik workers, and all of them were looking for a Muslim cook, who knew what haram was, and would cook halal food for them. I thought I could cook there. My father was not
against it, and I decided to go. My brother sent money for my ticket. I organized things at my workplace, and I left in just a few days.

Mijgona

Thank you for sharing your stories. Mine is similar to yours but it is also different. I was born in a family of eight siblings. I was the oldest. My father passed away when my youngest brother was six months old. My mother had to look after the whole family. Because I was the oldest, I had to quit school in grade four or five to look after my siblings while my mother worked at the bazaar. When my sister grew up, she also studied until grade four or five. Frankly, I don’t even remember. Both of us were helping with the household and raising our youngest siblings, while our mother worked.

Later, I was married to a distant relative who was a migrant worker. He worked in Russia from the age of 17 or 18, following the footsteps of his father, who was a migrant worker. My husband did not have a professional or higher education. He stopped school at grade nine and did not continue, as he had to work. His mother and their family needed money, as his father re-married another woman in Russia and did not support his first family in Tajikistan. So, my husband had to earn money quite early when he was around 14 or 15. Later, he joined his father in Russia and started sending money to his mother. Working in Russia from an early age, he developed good Russian-speaking skills. His father was fluent in Russian too because he got his education and lived during Soviet time. My husband worked in Russia and traveled back to Tajikistan once every two or three years for around two months.

For the last few years, he worked as a general worker and gardener in a private household. The owners were a rich Russian family living in a house with their older
children. My husband was a hard worker and they liked him. He looked after their house very well. He did many things. He cleaned the yard, did all the gardening and landscaping, drove their younger child to and from school, did the shopping and ran other errands when the owners asked. He lived on the same property where the house was located. The owners had a separate building where the workers lived. Usually, it was just my husband, because he did all the outdoor things there. The building had a room, kitchen and shower. The first time I traveled to Russia was when he asked me to visit, as he could not come himself. The owners of the house wanted him to stay, but suggested to bring me, his wife. He asked me to bring the kids as well, because he missed them dearly. He asked the owners if I could visit with the children and they agreed.

At that time, I had two very young children, and I travelled to Russia with them. It was the first time I ever travelled outside of my country. I was scared but also very interested in seeing another world. My husband met me at the airport and brought me to the place where he lived and worked. It was a beautiful house. There was hot running water and everything that was needed to live comfortably. I stayed with my kids for a month and then asked my husband if there was any work for me, too. I was eager to work. So many people from Tajikistan move to Russia for work, and I was right there, so I also wanted to work and help my husband. He asked the owners of the house and they offered me a job. I had to clean the house, cook some things, wash, iron, etc. My husband and I took turns looking after the kids. Sometimes, they stayed together in their room, watching TV. They were very well-behaved. I got pregnant while I was in Russia, and my husband told me to stay and deliver the child there. The pregnancy went well. Because we did not have free, governmental health care, my husband took me to the
private clinic for tests and to monitor the pregnancy. But the delivery was in the hospital and it was free of charge. When the child was born, I could not work anymore. I had to return home. The owners did not mind if I stayed until the baby grew a little older. When my youngest child was two months old, I returned to Tajikistan with three kids.

When my younger son was less than two years old, my husband called and said that his employers were looking for a woman who could care for an elderly woman, one of their parents. She needed support with moving, eating, going to the bathroom, etc. My husband asked me if I could come, as we also needed money to build a house in Tajikistan. While working in Russia for many years, my husband had bought a piece of land in our village. At that time, we just built a foundation there, and the construction moved very slowly, as we needed money for that. We thought that if I went, we could build this house more quickly, and later we could live there with our children. But this time, unfortunately, I could not bring the children with me to Russia. I had to leave them.

At that time, I was living with my mother-in-law and my husband’s younger siblings. As they could not look after our children while I was in Russia, I asked my sister if I could leave my kids with her. My sister had her own children who were the same age as mine. She asked her husband, who was a migrant worker in Russia too, and he agreed. So, I left my three, young children with my sister and left for Russia again.

**Narrator**

*Saodat, Malohat, Yasmin, and Mijgona share their stories of how they decided to become migrant workers. Their stories are diverse as are their backgrounds. These stories highlight that the experiences of women are not homogeneous (Mohanty, 2003; Moosa-Mitha & Ross-Sheriff, 2010). How do I understand their stories through the lens of my theoretical framework?*

*These women shared their struggles and achievements, happiness and grief. In order to understand their main reasons for migration, it is necessary to understand the wholeness of their stories. Like the men’s stories, these women’s stories also illustrate*
that the decision to migrate is not always pushed by economic factors but also by other important intersecting factors and social identities.

Traditional gender scripts usually require women either to follow their husbands or male relatives who are labour migrants or to stay in the country to look after parents, children, and the elderly (Reeves, 2011). These gender scripts lack fluidity and provide very limited options for women to flourish. They require women to comply with the decisions produced by the community. This supports hegemonic masculinity and femininity and guarantees the dominant position of men and compliant women (Schippers, 2004).

However, even as these scripts encourage women to comply, the stories show that women have agency to decide whether to migrate or not. Some women want to migrate with their husbands even at the cost of leaving the children in Tajikistan with extended family members. While on the surface this could illustrate that women obediently follow their husbands to Russia, and that men are portrayed as decision makers, under the surface women are active agents in these processes. They facilitate the bulk of negotiations and pre-arrangements with extended family to make the migration happen. These negotiations are usually invisible and masterfully hidden to ensure the performance of traditional gender scripts.

What we also see here is that some of the behind-the-scene negotiations take place in family arrangements, especially in relation to childcare. Even though these processes are not always acknowledged and visible, the women have the ability to persuade their husband and extended family on the need to migrate to Russia. Migration shifts childcare patterns too, when children are left with extended family members or siblings whose partners are also migrant workers. The decision to migrate with husbands offers women a window to explore new experiences. Some would like to migrate to feel self-sufficient, to gain the ability to earn, and to contribute to the family budget. They exercise their agency by deciding to join the labour force in Russia. These could be understood as stories of empowerment (Ross-Sheriff, 2011). Other women demonstrate their agency and power by deciding to migrate with their husbands against their husband’s will.

However, women’s agency also intersects with level of education, kinship structure, age, absence or number of children, and many other factors. Contextual factors like the Tajik Civil War created a massive loss of lives and loss of jobs. This made survival impossible for many people and created a push factor for some women to join labour migration. For some, the consequences of the civil war reinforced gender-based violence and pushed them into labour migration.

Furthermore, even when women follow traditional gender relations of femininity and allow the continuity of patriarchy, they also transform it and produce new gender relations where women have more voice and decision-making power. This illustrates that femininity is not always a place of marginality (Paechter, 2018). These stories dispute the binary gender system that constructs femininity as weak and powerless and masculinity as strong and powerful. These are mythical, symbolic constructs. These stories highlight that continuity and transformation of gender relations can take place simultaneously.

Single and married women also exercise power when deciding to migrate to Russia to seek freedom and escape from traditional gender order. This is not to deny that the economic situation also exerts pressures to push and pull women into migration.
While women’s stories reveal intense pain and sacrifice due to economic marginalization, they also demonstrate women’s enormous courage and determination to lift their families out of dire economic situations.

International migration research emphasizes economic factors as facilitating labour migration processes, but they are definitely not the only reasons (Cohen & Sirkeci, 2011). My theoretical framework also disputes this and highlights that economic factors are not always the ‘deal-breakers’ for female labour migration. Women are also looking for opportunities to unchain themselves from highly rigid patriarchal gender norms. Some take labour migration as an opportunity to escape from gender-based violence, others to escape from general societal control. Still others simply want to try new opportunities. A good example of this is Yasmin. She is a highly educated woman who works as a professional, but at the first opportunity, she left for Russia to work as a cook. This reveals the gendered layers of migration in the theoretical framework. One layer is the gendered context of international migration. Even when some women see migration as an escape from societal control and traditional gender norms which pushes them to leave Tajikistan, international migration still pulls them to gendered occupations in Russia to work as housekeepers, cleaners, cooks, nannies, and care providers. Another layer is the local context of Tajik migration where women who migrate to Russia must get permission or support from male relatives. They must work under the control and protection or support of a male figure, usually a close relative.

Besides the multiplicity of social barriers, women go through traumatic separation when leaving their children behind. When society blames women for leaving children, women embody the blame and feel the guilt. This furthers the vulnerability of women and their marginalization in society. But vulnerability comes with its own power for women. The stories they shared highlight women’s internal strength, resilience, and dedication to sustain their children and families. This does not mean that women do not feel grief and sorrow. They definitely do. The tears and emotions they shared around this conversational table demonstrate their internal strength to collect themselves and move forward with courage and hope.

Like the men in Act 1, all four women in this scene have also been lured into international labour migration, crossing the context of their Tajik national border. In the next scene, you see them sharing their stories of working in Russia.

**Scene 5: Working in Russia**

**Saodat**

For my first work in Russia, my relative found me a job in a good household, with good, intelligent people. They even gave me money for the ticket. Initially, my male relative helped me with everything. He met me at the airport and brought me to the workplace where I was to live with an elderly woman. The daughter of this woman lived separately and came by frequently. They were very nice people and they treated me very
well. I told them about my destiny, and the reasons why I had to migrate for work. I took
good care of the elderly woman and did everything at home. But I missed my children
terribly. I was losing weight, as I could not eat anything. One day the woman’s daughter
asked me: “What is happening to you? How do you feel, is everything all right? I noticed
you lost so much weight during this time.” And I said to her, with my very bad Russian at
that time: “No, everything is good, and I appreciate everything you are doing for me. I am
losing weight because I miss my children.” I told her this with tears in my eyes. And she
said: “Okay, let’s bring your kids here. You all can live in this apartment.” I was so
happy, and so thankful to her, but I said: “I don’t want to overuse your kindness, but
maybe I could bring my older child here.” My daughter was still young and did not go to
school, but I think she understood more and missed me very much. I brought her to
Russia.

And you know, perhaps this is my destiny. The elderly woman passed away few
months after I brought my daughter to Russia. The daughter of this elderly woman was
grieving and was afraid to enter the room and wash her mother before the burial. I did
this job. I washed the body and prepared everything. We had all the Orthodox Christian
ceremonies. And when we had the ninth day ceremony, the lady told me that I could live
there with my daughter for as long as I needed to, and she promised me to find work. She
really was trying to help me find a job. But this village was small, and she could not. I
lived in this apartment with my daughter for two more months. The woman would come
and visit us, bring groceries. I did not even buy any food. But I was not working and was
not getting any wage. And I needed money because I had another child and my parents to
support in Tajikistan. After two months, I told the woman that I had to leave. I was very
thankful for everything they had done for me, but I needed a job, and unfortunately, I
could not find a job in this village. So, I went to a different city with my daughter. But, I
had to send my daughter back to Tajikistan because the living conditions were not good
and I couldn’t care for her because I had to work. That was another heartbreaking
experience for me and my daughter. Separating at the airport was a difficult, emotionally
draining experience for both of us. I always remember it with tears in my eyes.

Then I had to send back my daughter to Tajikistan, one of my relatives found me
a job as a cook at a construction site, where the majority of workers were Tajiks. They
were seeking a good cook who could make our own traditional halal dishes. The workers
lived and worked at this construction site. Frankly, even though I did not like this job, I
had to accept it, as I had no choice. The conditions were not good there, and the people
were different. Before, when I worked with a Russian family, they were nice to me. But
this time, the Tajiks were not. It was a time when I was so disappointed with our Tajik
people. I expected more understanding and support from them, but on the contrary, they
did not treat me well. Later, I accidently injured myself at the workplace and had to
return home to Tajikistan.

But you know, my first experience in Russia was interesting. I met different
people, and some of them were supportive and treated me like a sister. They did not try to
use me; they understood and helped me by finding me a good job, giving good advice,
etc. Even good advice was so important in a foreign country where I knew nobody. But I
tried not to connect with any other people I met in Russia. When your head is bowed and
you don’t interfere in the lives of others, nobody will interfere in your life, either. So, you
need to know your own straight way. This is my principle that I use while I am in Russia.
And frankly, I suffered a lot in Tajikistan, and when I was younger I thought that it was my only destiny. But when I went to Russia, I met so many different women, and I realized that many people are going through hardship, but regardless they still worked and supported their families the way they could. Before I went to Russia, I had hatred in my heart. I hated my husband’s family because they kicked me out. I was carrying this hatred inside. I could not share this with people other than my mother. But when I went to Russia, eventually, I started to talk to people, to other women who were complete strangers to me. I shared my story and they were very understanding, empathetic and supportive. I realized that, yes, I was kicked out from home, but that was not the end of my life. Life goes on, and there were other people too, better people, kinder, compassionate and empathetic people. I realized that I should go on. I started to thank Allah for giving me the opportunity to travel, to see other world, and other people. My language skills improved while I was in Russia. Before that, even though I was raised in the capital, my Russian was very bad.

So, after I injured myself and returned to Tajikistan, I found other jobs and worked for a few years. I took care of elderly women, worked as a nanny and did other jobs here and there. Then, someone from the family where I worked offered me a job as a nanny in Russia. They were moving to Russia, and promised to cover my transportation and living. I agreed because they were good people and I needed money to raise my children.

I went to Russia few months after their departure. This family met me at the airport, and brought me to their apartment where they greeted me very nicely and had prepared a good dinner. They rented a room in one of their neighbour’s apartments. I had
to live with an elderly woman there. But I was just sleeping and showering there because most of my time was spent looking after the kids. This woman did not like that, as I was coming home late, and did not bring any treats for her. She asked me why I did not buy her any candies. I tried to explain to her that I did not come here to Russia to eat candies. I left my children back home and came here to work. How can I eat candies here, knowing that my kids are there and I don’t know if they are eating at all? And if I buy candies for her, what will I send to them? I could not live with this woman for a long time, and the family who invited me found another place for me.

During my second migration, the conditions were very good. During my first migration, I was scared to go out, as it was the first time I ever left my country. Sometimes, people looked at me when I was wearing satr (hijab). Maybe because of that and because I knew nobody, I was afraid of people, and I believed they were afraid of me, too. I knew only one grocery store. I would go outside, buy groceries and come back. The second time was different. The family was very good. They took good care of me and I looked after their children very well, like they were my own kids. I ate bread out of their parents’ hands. My kids were eating bread from these hands too. And in return, I tried my best to do everything for them. The children were very nice too. I really liked them. I took them to kindergarten, school, and classes. I cooked, cleaned and fed them. But during my second migration, I decided not wearing hijab. I feel that because of ISIS, people were afraid of head-coverings even more. I did not want the people to pay attention to me. People were afraid of me when I wore a hijab during my first migration. And now, working with children, I spend a lot of time in public places, as I am taking kids to school and different lessons. I don’t want to be targeted on the street when I am
with the kids. So, I had to leave my head scarf when I am outside in Russia, but I can wear it inside if I want to. However, I always wear *hijab* when I travel back to Tajikistan.

**Malohat**

My story is a little different, as I travelled to Russia to accompany my husband who is a migrant worker. When my husband and I came to Russia, we did not live in one room together. We lived in a two-bedroom apartment where I was sharing a room with another young woman from Tajikistan and he was sharing a room with another young guy from Tajikistan. My husband and I would try to schedule working days together and have days off on same days, so we could spend time together.

When I came to Russia, I didn’t have any work experience. I started to work after three days of practice. I was fluent in Russian from the beginning, so I did not have any problems finding a job. If you know Russian it is a lot easier to find a job. I worked maybe for a year, maybe more, until the owner started to decrease costs and lay off people. I was one of them. I was trying to find another job, but for several months, I could not. It was difficult because we could not save any money. We wanted to save money to purchase our own apartment in the future. When I stopped working for a few months, my husband got nervous. He complained that we spent a lot of money, and we could not save any. The money he was getting was barely enough for the two of us. He started to tell me to go back temporarily to Tajikistan, because it was costly for him to sustain both of us, and he wanted to save money for our future home. Life is expensive in Russia. We needed documents, we needed to pay rent, we needed to pay for food, clothing, hence he could not save. But I did not listen to him. I did not want to go back. I was actively searching for another job. In several months I found a job. But after that, I
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Yasmin

started to manage my finances differently. Before, when I was working, we were spending my money primarily for rent and some other bills, while his earning was to go for savings. After I lost the job, did not work for several months and became dependant on my husband, I rethought how to manage my own finances. Now, I am trying to save my own money and do not give my entire wages for rent or other needs. We share the costs. When I have my own money, I can decide when to come back to Tajikistan without asking him to purchase my ticket. I try to go once a year, while he travels infrequently, as he tries to save as much as possible for our dream apartment.

As for all of you, travel to Russia was also my first trip outside of my country. It was my first experience sitting on a plane and feeling like a bird. I was excited and scared at the same time. My brother met me at the airport and brought me to the farm. I started to work a couple of days after my arrival. They had done the registration and all legal paperwork for me.

Conditions were very good on this farm. Every week, each worker was entitled to two liters of milk and two kilograms of meat. My brother, my uncle and my cousin worked on this farm as well. As my cousins, brother and my uncle did not need milk, I collected all liters for all family members and made jurgot (natural homemade yogurt) from that milk. I made jurgot and non (traditional Tajik bread) at night. My brother took that to the nearby store in the morning, and owners sold it during the day. My brother brought me money at the end of the day. That was additional income for me.

Besides the cooking job in a canteen, I worked as a dairymaid. Every day, I woke up at 4am and milked the cows till 8 am. Then, I went home, took a shower, changed my
clothes and went to the kitchen and cooked lunch from 9:30-10 am to 12 pm. We had lunch at 12pm. After lunch I did the dishes, prepared some food for the next day, and left the kitchen usually at 3 pm. I milked the cows again from 5 pm to 9 pm and went home. Occasionally, I baked non and made sambusa and jurhot. Then I was free to sleep until the next day. That was my typical day.

Still, life on this farm was very difficult, and not just because of work. The work was good, the conditions were good. But it was difficult to be far away from my parents. I was not married at that time. And every evening, I would talk over the phone with my mother. My mother cried from one end, and I cried from the other. My telephone bills were very high. The other difficulty was because of the people and what they were telling me. For example, I had other cousins working in Russia, but in a different city. When they found out that I came to Russia for work, they called me and my brother asking why I had come. They told me that I should go back to Tajikistan, saying that Tajik women should not come to Russia for work. They said that my place was in Tajikistan and, if needed, they would send me money to purchase a ticket to return home. They believed that I had lost respect (oby reh reht) because I came. They said: “You are non-married, never married. Who will marry you in Tajikistan when they find out you worked in Russia?” After that, I tried not to pick up the phone when they called.

Nevertheless, I also understood their concerns. I heard different stories about Tajik women. For example, I heard about one bad situation which happened on the farm before I came. A young couple from Tajikistan were working on the same farm. One day, the husband had to leave the farm for couple of days to fix his legal documents. On the day of his departure, the husband’s friend came to their apartment and raped this young
woman. When her husband returned and found out that his wife was raped, he immediately said *taloq* [divorce] to her and kicked her out. She got pregnant, delivered a child and gave this child to somebody else for adoption. She is still working on the farm, but lives in a different place now. When her ex-husband sees her, sometimes he beats her. Other people ask him: “Why are you beating her? It was not her fault that she was raped.” But he says if she did not want it, it wouldn’t have happened. So, even though she was raped, the blame is on her. I heard more tragic stories while I was there. Maybe my cousins also heard similar things and were afraid that I would dishonour their family.

Bad news was coming to me but not just from my cousins. I was getting it from other Tajik women working on this farm. One of them told me: “If you wear a headscarf, it does not mean that you will be the same. You will still go the wrong way. I also was like you. But I had to become a lover of one person. And if I did not, they would not let me work. They all want something from you. If I did not become a lover, they could beat me. They would not give me my wage and would fire me from work. One day you will become a lover to someone as well. You have to.” I was very scared when she told me this, but I told myself that my situation was different. Thankfully, I had male protection, which she did not have. I had my uncle, my brother and my cousins. Maybe that is why no one approached me. They were afraid of my male relatives.

It was a very big farm consisting of several farms. At one, there were only sheep, in other big pigs, in another small pigs, and in another, just cows. It was very interesting to see this farm. I was raised in a village, and grew up with cows, but in Russia, the way they look after the cows is very different from what we did in Tajikistan. They give them water with sugar, they give them *suhari* (dried bread). They look after the cows very
well. There was a radio on the farm and the cows eat while listening to music. That was such a big surprise for me and I shared this with my parents back in Tajikistan, and to the people who also had farm animals in their homes.

I started to send money to my parents the moment I started receiving my earnings. I was afraid to keep the money with me in the apartment. Six of us were living in one apartment, and our door was insecure. When you are in a foreign country, you cannot trust anyone. We were not at home all day long and somebody could break in. And that was why I sent my parents money as soon as I got my salary. Largely, we were sending money to my father, but because I did not want my mother to be upset, I sent some to her as well. Maybe she wanted to buy something for herself without asking for money from my father. Later, we decided with my brother, that he would send money to our father and I to our mother. We thought it will be equal, and it will not upset any of our parents.

I understood the value of money while in Russia. I learned how to save and keep money. I learned the hard way that it is not easy to earn money and I was really saving everything I could. With my savings, I was able to get a piece of land in our village. In just one year, I was able to purchase land and later, I can start building a house there.

Mijgoda

When I had to return to Russia again for work, I was thinking, “how I am going to live here without my children?” While I was looking forward to work, I was very worried for my kids. I worried about my kids every single day. But we all had to endure, as we needed the money.

Like last time, the owners asked me to wear non-traditional clothing and take off my head covering while at work. My husband was not against it when we were in Russia.
But when in Tajikistan, he was very strict about my clothing style. My dresses were to be long sleeved, and I must wear satr. Even when I travelled back to Tajikistan, I wore traditional dresses and satr to the airport. But while in this house, at my place of work, I could wear short sleeved dresses and did not have to cover my head.

The first time I travelled, my husband did the registration for me, and all the required documents for my stay, because I took children outside and could meet the police at any moment. I was also pregnant, and it was important to have registration documents. This time when I travelled, I stayed home all the time. I did not go outside, except on rare occasions with my husband, who was driving me. The owner of the house told my husband that I didn’t need any documents, largely because I was staying home and was less likely to meet the police. The owner told me that if I had any problems with the police, they would resolve them. But my husband had to do his paperwork, always. Having all the legal documents was very important for him as he also worked as a driver.

This time, I looked after an elderly woman and did household chores. I was cleaning, washing, ironing, and making food for the owner’s son, who was in high school. He went to school several times a week and the other days his lessons were at home. My husband brought the teachers to him and then returned the teachers back. I made tea and coffee for them. The owners did not eat at home. They worked from morning until evening. In the evening, they cooked themselves, or brought food home with them. The wage they paid me was good. They gave my monthly wage to my husband.

Even though the work conditions were good, I missed my children terribly. I was calling my sister and talking to my kids. The children missed me as well, and they cried
and asked for me, especially my older child. This time I worked in Russia for one year and decided to return to my kids. The owners told me that I could come back if I wanted, they got used to me and they liked how I looked for their house and family.

Narrator

When Tajik migrant women share their stories of working in Russia, their stories are different from those of male migrant workers. How do I understand their experiences looking through the lens of my theoretical framework? How do gender relations of power interact with the interlocking contexts of international labour migration and Tajik labour migration? How are these intersections different for male and female Tajik migrant workers?

Like Tajik men, Tajik women also come to Russia to support their families. They enjoy the same empowerment and economic benefits. They also experience the same systemic discrimination of the Russian state and society. They experience the same Russian face of racism and Islamophobia. However, as Tajik women, they experience additional layers of gender-based suffering. They experience abuse both in the larger Russian society and within their smaller communities of Tajik migrant workers.

The experiences of women demonstrate that separation from family and children could be very difficult for them. Even though men also shared that they missed their families and children, the stories of women are filled with feelings of loneliness, fear, mistrust, separation, and anger. These feelings are more intense and devastating for women than for men because patriarchal culture embodies in women the responsibility of nurturing and keeping the family together as part of hegemonic femininity (Paechter, 2018; Schippers, 2007). Patriarchal culture blames and shames them for leaving the family, and women suffer more because they embody this shame and guilt. Men are also embedded in patriarchal structures which tear them between leaving to earn money and staying to protect family as a requirement for ‘doing masculinity.’ However, they do not feel the embodied blame and shame felt by women. Even rape becomes the woman’s fault, and she is beaten while the man perpetrating the rape is cleared.

Traditional gender roles follow women even in their jobs in Russia (Rocheva & Varshever, 2017; Tyuryukanova, 2011; Tomei & Belser, 2011). Many women are pulled to care-type professions and invest themselves into caring for others while their own families and children stay in Tajikistan and are cared for by other people such as family members. This feeling of guilt tears many women apart, especially those who must leave their own children in the care of extended family members.

Furthermore, the stories of women in migration illustrate the clear line they draw between ‘living’ and ‘working’. They cannot allow themselves to ‘live the good life’ while in Russia. They cannot allow themselves to experience feelings of happiness knowing that their children are far away from them. It seems that women are bearing a half-empty life while working in Russia. For women, Russia is work, where they come to earn a living, but they cannot enjoy life while staying and working there without their children.

The context of international migration that intersects with gender relations further illustrates the control over women’s bodies both by the Russian and Tajik versions of
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patriarchy. This makes staying and working in a foreign country more complex for women than for men (Fleury, 2016; Herrera, 2013). Bodies of female labour migrants are more sexually targeted with the desire to capture, use, and deceive. They are more prone to gender-based violence (Ross-Sheriff, 2011). Because female labour migrants from Tajikistan could be vulnerable to sexual violence, some male relatives oppose their migration to Russia. This is especially highlighted through the stories of non-married and never-married women. Male relatives think that their single female relatives should never travel to Russia for work because other men could sexually deceive them and hence fracture the honour of the family. This view largely comes from traditional gender order when men in the family believe they must protect their female relatives from other men who can sexually 'seduce' them.

Furthermore, women experience the control of their bodies in the larger Russian society where they face combined racism and Islamophobia. Women try to melt into Russian society by changing their hairstyles, by highlighting their hair, and by changing their dress styles. Women try to erase some of the identifying markers that can indicate their identity as Central Asians, Tajiks, and Muslims. Like Yasmin, some female labour migrants decide to take off their hijabs. Some female labour migrants were told to do so by their employers or male family members. Those who decided to take off their veil while in Russia had to do so to protect themselves from the ostracization and discrimination that exists in Moscow and other Russian cities toward Muslim labour migrants and migrants from Central Asia who are predominantly Muslim (Schenk, 2018).

In addition, some women whose work is related to caring for other people are afraid to be targeted by neo-Nazi groups while they are in public. Hence, by taking off the veil, they are trying to protect the people they care for who may be targeted as well by being in public with them. However, these women are not erasing their faith; on the contrary, from the stories it seems their faith becomes even stronger while they are in Russia. In the face of adversity they seek strength and resilience through faith.

Furthermore, despite their ostracization, the women also demonstrate how international migration has empowered them to negotiate more equitable gender relations of power. Women have obtained more self-confidence while working in Russia. This is observed through their ability to earn money, purchase property back in Tajikistan, contribute to family income, financially support others in Tajikistan, and learn the Russian language. Women are starting to wield self-power through self-realization. Staying and working in Russia has given them new experiences and opportunities to meet other people, to meet other women, and to hear their stories of struggles, achievements, grief, and happiness. Through listening to these stories and expanding their worldviews, women start to move from self-pity to self-confidence.

In the next scene, we see if these women’s stories of return will bring the tension between transmission and transformation of gender relations (Butler, 1993; Connell, 1995) to a more equitable relation of power.
Scene 6: Stories of Return

Saodat

I am thinking about returning to Tajikistan. My body is here but my soul is there with my children. I cannot even eat. I don’t know what they are eating now. During the last Ramadan I could not eat normally. We usually eat something delicious when we break our fasts. But I could not, and I was eating pasta with eggs during the whole month. I could not eat something delicious; it stuck in my throat. I was thinking that Allah could never forgive me if I ate something good, when my kids may be hungry. My thoughts are always with them.

Last time when I returned to visit my kids, my daughter said to me: “Ochajon [mummy] please don’t leave us again. Don’t go again. We don’t need money. Please stay with us.” My heart ached, as I wanted to be with them. I dream to be with them. But what can I do? I need to work. The income I earn in Tajikistan is very small. And I see the result of my work in Russia. I inherited a piece of land from my dad at the edge of the city. With the savings, I started to build a house there. I recently sent money for windows. Maybe I will work for one more year and won’t come again. I don’t know. My daughter will become a teenager; I need to be with her. I need to teach her what a woman should do. When kids are very young it is still possible to migrate, but when they become older, migration becomes difficult because I need to teach my kids. They need a mother. For my son, I need to be in Tajikistan right now, because he is at the age when he acts out a lot. As for my daughter, she needs to learn how to cook and do things at home. I was doing everything when I was twelve. I even cooked and baked non in tandur. Now, when I come back or talk to my kids over the phone, I realize that they don’t listen to me. I worry
about them. If they are not listening to me now, what will their future be? I know these
days that girls at the age of twelve and thirteen already have phones and they talk to boys.
I am afraid that some guy will deceive my daughter when she grows up. She does not
have a father’s protection; anyone can deceive her.

I always worry about my children, and I miss them so much. Even when I have
happy moments here, I cannot be fully happy because my kids are there. When my
mother was alive, she used to look after my kids very well. I worried about my kids a lot
and my mother worried about me. She cared for my children very well to make sure that I
felt calm and worried less about them. When my mother passed away, I had to leave my
children with my relatives. They are good and take good care of my kids, but still, they
are not parents, or a mother or a grandmother to them. Sometimes, I call and talk to my
daughter and she says: “Ochajon, I am hungry.” And my heart aches. I am in tears. She is
hungry because everybody is at work, and when kids return from school, no one is at
home to cook and feed them. Sometimes she tells me, “Ochajon, give me some money, at
least I can go and buy hotdog or something”. So, when I work in Russia, I don’t suffer
from physical pain; I suffer internally. My conscience suffers, because I am here, and I
cannot be with them, with my children...

In Russia, no one cares how you are dressed and where you go. There is freedom
here. But most importantly, what I like in Russia is the decent wages. The wage you get
at the end of the month for your hard work is enough for you to live until next month. If
you get a wage of 20-25 thousand rubles, you can live well. In Tajikistan, with a salary of
800 somoni that you get after the hard working month is not enough. What could I buy
with this money? Should I buy oil, clothes for my kids, or something for myself? I had lots of needs that I could not meet.

What I don’t like in Russia is nationalism. Regardless of how you are dressed, your facial features already tell others who you are. When I am with kids on the playgrounds, and a child accidentally hits another kid or something, other moms say: “Oh these Tajiks...” Here, in this land, you are always a stranger. I don’t even know how my kids would be treated if I bring them here. I love my country; it is my homeland. Even if it is easier to live in Russia financially, I love Tajikistan. I love the people, I love the weather, I love everything. But if I had a chance to take my children, I could move to Russia permanently, or at least spend more years here with my kids.

My relatives tell me to get married and become a second wife. I am still young, but I don’t want to. My own happiness was burned; why should I burn it for another woman and let her husband be with me? When my husband was dying, he told me to find another man who will take care of me and the kids. He told me that he did not want them to be orphans. They needed a father. I understand that, especially for my son. He needs a father who will be an example for him. I don’t mind getting married again to a nice, kind person or a widower whose wife passed away like my husband. He can understand me and become a good father to my children. But I don’t want to be a second or third wife; it is better to continue living as I am now.

There are many Tajik men working in Russia who have families and wives in Tajikistan. Some of them are rich, have Russian citizenship, and are looking for a second wife while they are in Russia. They will look after you, find a house or apartment for you. And sometimes their first wives in Tajikistan do not even know about the existence of the
second wife. I could become a second wife, but I don’t want to. Most men want to use you and don’t want to have your kids. They are not saying: “Let me marry this woman because she has half-orphaned children and to care for them is savob in Islam.” Many Tajik men here are religious and they talk about Islam a lot. They teach others what to do, but they don’t practice it themselves. They say: “Islam teaches us that it is necessary to care for orphaned children” but they don’t do it themselves, if the kids are not of their blood.

Maybe I would even agree to become a second wife to a good man, who will take care of the children and become like a father to them. But most men are looking just for you, for a woman, and not your kids. In Islam you need to do hayr (almsgiving) and support orphaned children with an open heart and never look back for a return. I know a woman in Tajikistan who gave money to my children every Eid. When I ran after her to say thank you, she did not even look back because this is how it should be. This is what Islam teaches us. To give but not tell others, to give and forget, and do not seek gratitude for what you have done. This is true Islam. We had another neighbor who brought presents to my children every New Year. They are no one to us, just neighbors who lived in the nearby mahalla (neighborhood). Every New Year, my son tells me: “Ochajon, our Ded Moroz (Santa Claus) will come soon!” – And they came every year and brought presents to my kids. And kids were so happy for a small present. The small present costs almost nothing but the care costs a lot. To see happiness in my kids’ eyes is priceless. I am hoping to meet such a good man who can become a good father to my kids, and if not, I would rather live as I am living now. I don’t need a man if he will not love my kids as a father.
Malohat

I am not looking forward to returning to Tajikistan. We don’t have kids yet. For several years we were trying to get pregnant, but we could not. I was receiving treatment both in Russia and Tajikistan, but still, it did not help. If I get pregnant, I will deliver the baby in Tajikistan and live there, because we do not have a place to live and raise a baby in Russia. When I go to Tajikistan, I always hear gossip that I cannot get pregnant, maybe I am infertile, maybe I should go to the doctor. I have an endless supply of advice from relatives. I go to the doctor all the time, but it does not help. I take tons of medications, but it does not help. I hear reproaches towards me, not my husband. He usually does not come with me to Tajikistan but even when he comes, I am still the one who is blamed for infertility.

Because of all that, I don’t even want to go to Tajikistan or spend a lot of time there. However, my husband wants to save money, and purchase an apartment in Dushanbe. But I don’t want it. I want him to get Russian citizenship and purchase an apartment in Russia. He does not have a higher education; I don’t have a higher education. We are young and both of us would like to study in the future, but I don’t know if we can. It costs money, and it is hard to balance both work and education. If we have kids, it will be even harder. For now, I do want a child; we will see what awaits us in the future. If I return to Tajikistan it will be because of my parents, but I would like to live permanently in Russia. There are more opportunities and more freedom here. I am little bit tired of our traditions in Tajikistan. Too many rules we must comply with.

Yasmin
I am thinking about returning to Russia. Malohat, I hear you when you talk about freedom. Yes, I too felt that freedom in Russia. It is like living in a very different world.

I worked in Russia for over a year. I returned to Tajikistan because it was hard for me to stay without my parents for a long time. When I returned, I was able to continue working in the same place. At home, when we had a big family gathering, some relatives of our neighbour started to laugh at me and tease me, saying: “Oh okay, tell us what you did in Russia!” They were laughing, saying: “Oh, what can a woman do in Russia?” I was telling them, what I was doing - I was working there. Man kori halol kardam (I was doing ‘clean’ work). I milked the cows, cooked, baked bread, made jurgot. I earned money with my own hard work. They were saying: “Oh, we know what women do there. We have heard so many stories. Our Tajik women are engaged in prostitution there or become lovers to somebody.” I was very upset. These relatives of my neighbour had very bad thoughts about me because, sometimes I wore half-sleeve dresses, let my hair down, did my makeup, and did my nails when I went to work. They taunted me by calling me: “Duhtari shahri” (a city girl), “Duhtari Rossiya” (a girl from Russia).

After a year, I met a man who offered to marry me. He was divorced. I was also in my mid-thirties and should have married a long time ago. In Tajikistan, getting married for the first time in mid-thirties is very late. He came to my parents to ask for their permission to marry me, and they agreed. After marriage, I stayed home for a week. During this first week, and the first month after marriage, I was the happiest woman. I was the happiest wife. We lived alone in his relative’s house. During the first month, he was doing namoz (praying). He was very kind and nice to me. In a week, my supervisor called me to return to work, and I asked my husband and he agreed.
After one month, one day I came home after work when he was drunk. I never saw him in this condition before. I entered the house and he threw a teapot at me, which broke into pieces. He came to me and started to beat me; he pulled my hair, and he beat me so hard. After some time, I could not cry, I could not scream, I could not do anything. I did not feel anything other than pain. This continued for several months. He was drinking every single day, and he beat me every single day. I was hiding it from everybody. I did not even tell my parents. I told no one that he was beating me. He was smart, beating my body, not my face. He forced me to wear satr. Before that, I covered my head in the Tajik traditional way. Because of his beating, I lost several pregnancies.

I lost interest in life. It was very hard for me. I tried to stay at my workplace longer and come home later because I did not want to come back home. I went to the Botanical garden and cried there. I could not share my pain with anybody. The trees and the wind listened to my pain. I was afraid to tell people because I got married late and they would tell me that this was my fault, that I was a bad wife who could not be patient with my husband, and that it is my fault I could not take good care of my husband. I was smiling in public, but I was all in pain inside.

Once he had a problem with the law and was arrested. When I got to the police station, he urged me to bail him out. He showed remorse and said he would go to detox. I hoped that he would improve. He begged me on his knees. He swore to Allah. He promised to do namoz again. I believed him. But in order to bail him out, I needed money. I called his relatives, I called his brothers who were migrant workers, but no one wanted to pay for him. I took a loan with an interest rate from a private lender and bailed him out.
But the detox treatment did not help. He got very sick. I was taking care of him at home, as he could not even walk independently. One day, one of his relatives called; my husband started to swear and talk very impolitely to this person who was older than him. When my husband put the phone back, I told him that he should not talk to an older person in that way. My husband became mad but he did not have strength to beat me as he was sick, and out of anger, he said three times *taloq* [divorce] to me. It meant the end – divorce. I left the house and moved to another place where I decided to stay for some time. I did not tell my parents about what happened, not about the beating, not about the prison, not about the detox hospital. I did not want them to worry about me. So, one day he came to my parents all drunk, and started to ask for forgiveness. My parents were shocked, as they did not know anything. But my father said: “if he said *taloq* three times, nothing could be changed.” It was the end.

Now, I am divorced, and the loan I took for my ex-husband is on my neck. I signed all the documents. I asked his relatives, but no one wanted to contribute. He does not want to contribute. Now, I must pay this money. Lots of money. So, I started to think about migration again, as I need to pay this debt. Also, I am so tired of everything. I am so tired of gossip. I don’t even want to tell my relatives that I am divorced. I asked my mother and father not to tell anyone. When we visited the relatives, we did two *dastarhons*, one from my mother and one from me. When they asked about my husband, I told them he is in Russia, working. I didn’t even leave the apartment I was renting because of them. If any relatives wanted to visit, there was my own place where they could come and see where I lived. So, I want to go to Russia because of all these rumors. Also, there are so many rules around the country. You are not supposed to do this and
that. How can I live in this world that is full of rules? People in Russia do not care where you go, what you wear, with whom you are on the street. No one cares.

In Russia, I saw a different life, different opportunities, a different world. I was able to earn good money. I never had a chance to earn the same amount of money here. I worked two jobs there, in addition to baking non and making jurgot. I had the opportunity to earn with my own hard work, without asking anybody, my brothers or anyone. In Russia, if you know the language, if you are hardworking, and if you are doing chizi halol [right/clean things] no one will do anything bad to you. Yes, we hear lots of things about Tajiks, that they are discriminated against, and treated badly. I was also very worried before I left for Russia the first time. I am dark skinned, and thought that I would not fit in there, and people would look badly at me. But I realized that it very much depends on the person, how you behave, how you treat other people. But, yes, our Tajik people still have many problems there. They are disregarded; people look down on them and do not recognize them as equals. Most problems start from the lack of language skills. They think if people do not speak Russian well, they are stupid. If Tajiks would speak Russian fluently, they will have fewer problems.

So, I am thinking about traveling to Russia again, but, this time, I want to go through the pereselenie (resettlement program). My brothers cannot participate in pereslenie because they require a trydovaya knizhka [workbook] and education but they don’t have it, unfortunately. I am the only one of our family who has a chance at the pereselenie program. When you go to Russia through pereseleniie - the legal, government route, you have all the rights. The government supports you when you move there. Institutions will offer you jobs, because you come through pereselenie. I am
preparing my documents now with the hope that I can work there to save money and pay off the loan. Maybe later, I will open my own business there. I cook very well; I bake very well. I can open a small company myself.

When I was in Russia, I used to bake bread and make sambusas, and people really liked them. They told me: “please bake more.” They really liked my sour dough. I was making non from sour dough. We say, “Az guli kady zani Tojik yagon chiz mekynad” [From pumpkin’s flower the Tajik woman can make something]. I am reassured that my skills are needed there. People liked my cooking; I could organize my life there. And if I could go, I would bring my parents there. I could send them money to buy tickets and visit me in Russia. I am dreaming about it. Also, I am thinking that maybe I could establish a family in Russia. Frankly, if I had a child, I would not think about re-marrying at all. After my ex-husband, I do not trust men and don’t want to have any relationships, but I do want to have children. And I can have a child when I will get married.

Miigona

For me, everyday problems begin when I come back from Russia. Here, I don’t have running water in my apartment and have to go down to bring the water up. There are also problems with electricity and I often build a fire and cook outside. During the winter, it is very cold as well. I also like that people in Russia do not talk about you, do not gossip; but here, your neighbors keep talking about you, finding all kinds of problems about you. I think this is their full-time job just to find something bad about you and gossip with others.

Comparing the conditions in Russia to how people live here in Tajikistan, I ask my husband if we can all move and live permanently there. If you are a hard worker in
Russia, you have money in your hands. I tell my husband that we could live in Russia as a whole family with kids but he is not listening to me. He does not want to live there. My husband could obtain Russian citizenship through his father who has had it for many years. But my husband is very stubborn; he does not want to do it. He does not want to live in Russia permanently. He says he does not need Russian citizenship. Once he agreed to start working on his Russian citizenship through his father, but his mother said “No.” She did not want her son to obtain citizenship from his father and move to Russia permanently. She cried, saying that he would abandon her, as his father did. And my husband decided not to think about Russian citizenship and permanent residency anymore. He told me that we will live in Tajikistan. He continues to work there in Russia, supports us, and we are slowly building a home where we can live, as I live with my mother now.

My husband does not like Russia much. He says: “I did not see life, I just see work, work, work. I did not see how my kids are growing, how they said their first words, did their first footsteps. I missed all the ‘sweet ages’.” He thinks Russia took his ‘good age’. But at least now, it is easy to talk to each other. With Vaiber he can talk to the kids more often, and my kids do not miss him as much as before, as they could see each other on the video.

The owners of the house have offered for me to come again. But my kids are bigger now and go to school. I have gone when they were younger and did not attend school. Now, I must be close to them to make sure they are learning, as our children’s education is important to us. My husband tells me: “I would like my children to study. I would like them all to get a profession. I am travelling to Russia, facing difficulties,
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living far from my family, but I don’t want that for my children. I don’t want them to travel and work in Russia. I don’t want them to be janitors and gardeners. I want them to study and get good jobs in Tajikistan, so they don’t suffer as I did.” He hopes to return, when we finish the construction of our house. He is also saving money to buy a car and be a taxi driver in Tajikistan when he comes back.

Narrator

These women’s stories are full of complexities and contradictions. They illustrate that the women’s experiences of pain and suffering are implicated in their joy and happiness. The freedom they say they achieved through labour migration is at the same time connected with control and oppression. Looking through the lens of my theoretical framework, I see these struggles as the tension between transmission and transformation in gender relations of power (Butler, 1993; Connolly, 1995). The contradictions and complexities they experience are embedded both in the contexts of Tajik and international labour migration.

These women share their stories from diverse social positions. Some are married; others are single or divorced. Some have children; others do not; some are dealing with issues of possible infertility. Some are in Russia and others are in Tajikistan, but all are thinking of return. Their stories are embedded in broader intersecting narratives of patriotism, nationalism, patriarchy, religion, and Islamophobia. It is through these intersecting narratives that the women facilitate or avert changes in gender relations of power.

Their dilemma between returning and staying demonstrates all these intersecting narratives. Women who have children feel responsible for staying with their children and for keeping their family together, even under the very difficult conditions that exist in Tajikistan. Some are tormented by guilt and shame. For example, Saodat cannot enjoy life in Russia because, as she says, her body is in Russia but her soul is in Tajikistan with her children. She feels guilty to even eat good food because she believes Allah will not forgive her for eating well while her children may not have enough food in Tajikistan. The guilt of leaving her children in Tajikistan is devouring her inside. Equally, she is pulled apart by various narratives such as those related to Russian nationalism and religion.

Those women who have no children feel that this is their fault. For example, Malohat has failed to conceive a child despite numerous attempts. She feels guilty due to her infertility. She takes this guilt upon herself even though the infertility may belong to her husband. She does not want to return to the gossip of Tajikistan even though she loves her country and family. Women like Malohat feel more freedom in Russia and are dreaming about staying or returning to Russia permanently. Some of them are escaping from societal control, while others want to run away from gender-based discrimination (Petrozziello, 2013) and the structure of gossiping and control which is very prevalent in some communities in Tajikistan. They see Russia as a freer place (Hassan, 2018;
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Kasymova, 2012) where they are more respected, where they are valued, and where they have access to decently-paying jobs. They are seeking freedom and unchaining themselves from the traditional gender order to be able to reimagine who they can be (Paechter, 2006).

Furthermore, the stories of return illustrate the choices women have in terms of when to return to Tajikistan or to Russia. For women with children, the stories show that the age of their children is a significant factor that either allows women to migrate or requires them to stay in Tajikistan. The ability of women to negotiate return depends on the changes in gender relations of power they are able to negotiate. In addition, women who are married and whose husbands work in Russia seek to join them with their children. However, due to multiple barriers, they cannot join their husbands. These barriers are not only economic and legal but are also based on the problematic conditions in Russia. Women usually have irregular working hours, precarious living conditions, and precarious employment (Rocheva & Varshaver, 2017).

However, narratives that hinder changes in gender relations of power come not only from Russia, and they are not only connected to economic factors. They also come from Tajik patriarchal narratives embedded in Tajik culture. They come from parents-in-law, who do not always support their daughters-in-law living in Russia permanently. Some mothers have bitter experiences with their own husbands who left them while being in migration. This makes them keep their sons’ families in Tajikistan, even though the sons could be labour migrants for many years. Therefore, mother-power also plays a significant role in stories of return.

All these stories of return demonstrate the importance of intersecting multiple broad narratives within Tajik culture, religion, experiences of racism and Islamophobia, Tajik patriarchy, Russian patriarchy, Russian nationalism, Tajik nationalism, patriotism, etc., and of how they all transmit and transform gender relations of power. These stories are full of complexities that both hinder and improve gender relations of power.
Chapter Five: Stepping Back

Reflections

Winding up the tortuous path of this research journey, I have come to the point of completing my dissertation. Before I discuss the implications of this study for social work, I would like to step back in critical self-reflection and engage some of the most outstanding ethical concerns in the conceptual and methodological aspects of the research process. Here in this chapter, I turn to face the difficult issues of power relations between researchers and research participants. There are myriad issues tugging at my heart and burning me inside – issues ranging from my position as ‘insider-outsider’ and ethical issues of trust, emotions, practical help, advice-giving, enabling, and supporting participants even while disputing their views. Here I highlight only a few.

Power and Privilege

The issue that hit me hard during my interaction with participants was that of my power and privilege relating to education. Going in, I did know that despite being ‘native’ Tajik and exposed to migration, I was not familiar with the experience of labour migration. I was very mindful of my privileges as I was born into the kinship of highly educated influential people in Tajikistan. University education was provided as a basic need we never questioned. I grew up knowing that I would go to university after high school. My parents did not have to decide which child they should send to university. However, many of the research participants I met did not have this privilege. In many families, parents had to decide who should go to school: boys or girls, older children or younger children? Though I was aware of my privilege, the rawness of these stories threw me off balance.
I did not expect that many women participants would not have had the opportunity to attend secondary school. I was deeply saddened to meet women with just four, five, or seven years of school. I was reminded of the unjust system where girls had to drop out of school so early. Nonetheless, I found that these women were very strong. They were wise and hard-working and did everything they could to make ends meet and support their families. Although I am deeply saddened by the adversities they face, I admire them greatly.

Why am I writing about women only? Of course, as a woman I identify with them, but more importantly none of the male participants I met failed to complete school. They all had high school diplomas and diplomas from vocational colleges, and a few had university education. This highlights male privilege and the choices families usually make for their children’s education where girls’ education is valued less than that of boys. This was clear even in the small number of participants I interviewed.

During the interviews, some of the women felt ashamed that they had just a few years of school. When possible, I tried to shift the conversation to their strengths and not see their lack of education as a weakness which they expressed through their words, their body language, or their tone of voice. During the conversations, I tried to validate their experiences of having to leave school to take care of younger siblings while their parents had to work and feed the family. I tried to establish compassionate and empathetic relationships through my body language and facial expressions. My body language and small comments were my attempt to send an implicit message of heartfelt understanding of their experiences of schooling. However, I was also mindful about personal privileges, and I realized that I may not be able to understand the depth of their pain or the
complexity of their experience. I take consolation in recognizing that full understanding may not be possible.

**Fear and Self-Worth**

I realized early on that some participants were fearful of me. Initially, some of the participants saw me as a journalist and not a researcher. Fear was especially poignant in Russia, where people were afraid of sharing their stories. Although their fear slowly melted, I don’t think it was fully gone. Many Tajik migrant workers in Russia try to remain invisible and do not want to engage in conversations with strangers. They were hurt so many times and as a result have lost a sense of trust. I think fear is their protection mechanism creating invisible boundaries between them and others.

I observed a different layer of fear among the Tajik women I interviewed both in Russia and in Tajikistan. Many women did not believe they could offer something for research. They feared that they were ‘not smart enough’. Their narratives were: “oh, I don’t have education”, “I don’t have knowledge”, “it is better to talk to men”, “better to talk to my husband”, “he knows it better”, and “he is smarter”. However, I also want to stress that not all the women I met shared this fear. Still, these conversations reminded me of how women are embedded in narratives of female inferiority in patriarchal systems that value men more than women while constructing men as smarter and more knowledgeable and women as not knowledgeable and ignorant.

**Emotions in Feminist Social Work Research**

One of the ethical goals in research is not to harm participants or their feelings, emotions, and experiences. However, some participants did have negative emotions during the interviews as they shared some difficult experiences triggering distressing
emotions. One participant said: “When I talk about it, my wound opens up again”.

Although I offered to stop the interview, she said, in tears, that she wanted to continue her story. I cried and sobbed with her. But these mutual tears and grief made me think about emotions in feminist social work research even more, not just in relation to participants but to myself as a researcher as well. Am I allowed to cry and share emotions with participants? Am I allowed to share their grief? But am I not a human when I am a researcher? Why am I even asking these questions? I realized how embedded I am in the discourse of the disinterested, objective, neutral researcher who is free from emotions.

Blakely (2007) argues that “researchers’ emotions are a natural part of inquiries” (p. 3) and when “feminist scholars investigate difficult and sensitive topics, they are confounded with emotion-laden material” (p. 2). This was definitely the case for me as I was immersed in deep and sometimes troubling emotions during my research process. Perhaps I was experiencing vicarious trauma myself. Through this study, I recognize that I was emotionally engaged in my research. As a woman raised in a patriarchal society that assigned emotion and caring to women as something devalued and inferior, this is how I embodied and practiced emotion and caring. Now I embrace them as constituting the ethics of caring reclaimed and revalued by feminists (Campbell, 2001). I sincerely care about the issue I was researching and the people who I was fortunate to meet during this research process.

Through this study, I realized that feminist social work is emotionally engaged research that can be full of care, empathy, compassion, and support. In this type of research, it is impossible to be free from emotions and nearly impossible to be objective. I realize that emotional connection with participants is not only ethical but also sincere,
and I see this emotional connection as one of the values of qualitative research. It has the potential to establish trusting relationships with participants and enables circles of understanding, care, and mutual support. Through this research, I also realized that the principles of care, compassion, and empathy are central to me – a feminist qualitative researcher.

At the same time, I also realized how emotionally draining feminist social work research can be. I experienced varying types and intensities of emotions throughout the entire research process. At times, I felt heartbroken, shocked, angry, and hurt. Sometimes I would go home and release my emotions; other times, I would just hide in silence. Sometimes the rage and heartbreak followed me even into my dreams and I would hear the voices of participants. Researchers do not often share emotions. However, for me, as a novice feminist researcher, I realized that there is no emotion-free feminist social work research. I also realized that feminist research can be an emotionally difficult experience. Blackely (2007) argues that feminist researchers should not only express care toward the participants but toward self too through balancing work and research, counselling, and other self-care methods. Perhaps this is one of the lessons that feminist researchers learn to be mindful of while carrying out research.

**Boundaries in Social Work Research**

In this research, I did not establish rigid boundaries between the research participants and myself as a researcher. Instead of conducting a structured interview where the interviewer is the expert, I tried to minimize the power differential and engage in a fair conversation with participants. I followed my own worldviews guided by emotionally engaged research and inspired by the ethics of caring (Campbell, 2001). The
ethics of narrative inquiry demand that I try to engage with the whole person’s story to establish trustful relationships with participants by practicing compassion, respect, and empathy. However, some participants sought my advice on some issues they were struggling with. This caused me to reflect on my role, asking myself: Am I a social worker? Am I a researcher? Or am I just a compassionate human being eager to help? Are there rigid boundaries between these aspects of who I am? I realized that my advice was important, especially for participants who told me how good advice was imperative for them while they lived and worked in Russia. I understood that advice-giving can potentially improve someone’s life.

For example, a participant in Russia asked me if I knew a doctor who could perform an abortion for her. Ashamed, she had not asked other migrant women because she did not trust them and she was afraid they might spread gossip. However, she did not know where to seek medical help. I felt her struggles deeply, but her question also raised several ethical issues for me. First, it underlined the need for trustful and confidential counselling and reproductive services for women migrant workers. Am I the person to give her that advice? Second, it blurred the boundary between my identity as a researcher and as a social work practitioner. Where is my boundary? Third, it triggered a deep ethical dilemma in me. Let me elaborate on this dilemma.

My ethical obligation was to support the participant who graciously shared her story, although such help is not always expected from a researcher. I really wanted to support this participant, and all I needed to do was give her specific information on confidential reproductive health and services. However, I felt deeply unsettled as I encountered a clash between my commitment to feminism and my personal values
loathing abortion. I firmly believe that this woman should have control over her body and have an abortion if she chooses to. Nevertheless, I felt unprepared to participate in ending the life of this fetus by finding a doctor who would perform an abortion for her. This encounter exposed a hidden unexplored value in me that I had not noticed until this participant asked me this question. This stays with me as one of the deeply unsettling ethical dilemmas I faced in my research.

A second example involves an interview with a young married migrant worker who was against his wife’s education. As he told me that his wife did not need education or a job because he was the breadwinner, I was burning inside because his view against women’s and girls’ education was sharply conflicting with mine. However, I tried to continue the conversation in order to understand where he was coming from. As I struggled to stay calm and be mindful of my body language, he asked me what I thought about his views. Normally I would share my views as my commitment to reciprocity. If I ask participants questions, I must also welcome their questions for me. But this was tough. What advice could I give him regarding his wife’s education? Frankly, I was not prepared for this question.

I thought about the social work principle of self-determination which I usually hear in the context of social work in the Global North. However, in this situation, I also realized that his decision is impairing the self-determination of another person – his wife. So, I decided to answer him by telling him a story. I shared my personal family story about my grandfather who had worked for a medical university all his life. My grandfather encouraged girls to study in medical school by travelling to remote areas across Tajikistan and talking to parents of girls. I shared with him the story of my mother
who raised her children independently because she had a high level of education and was trained as a medical doctor. However, this encounter made me think about giving advice during a research interview. Can I give advice to research participants if they seek it? Am I prepared for it? Who am I in this situation: a researcher or a social worker? What is the boundary between the two?

However, the important lesson I learned through this research is that international social work research, in particular, is a reciprocal process. It is not only about taking something from the participants in the form of interview data and experiences; it is also about giving something back. We, as international social work researchers, should be prepared to give back in the form of support, advice, suggestions, and referrals to specific resources. The important lesson I learned for myself is that as an international social work feminist researcher, I should be prepared to give back and be mindful that research is a reciprocal process.

**Listening to Self and Participants: Whose Voice Is It?**

Several participants in this research were raised by single mothers. They shared the difficulties connected to single motherhood. As I was also raised primarily by a single mother, in listening to the stories of research participants sharing their experiences, I thought I was listening to myself. I felt they were speaking out of my own mouth. Although our stories are very different, they are also alike in many ways. When I wrote my analysis, I questioned myself: is it me talking, or is it the participant? I read and reread the transcript. I listened and listened again to try to understand the experience as separate from mine. This experience brought to life the concept of co-constructing stories in the third space and the third voice in narrative analysis. These stories are neither
participants’ nor mine alone. They are our stories merging in the third space of co-construction. This also helped me reaffirm my researcher’s active role in the research process as opposed to the neutral objective researcher who does not influence the stories.

**Seeking Freedom: Does it Exist?**

Finally, I want to reflect on the pursuit of freedom. Participants in this research talked about seeking freedom and saw Russia as a free, open, and more egalitarian society. Some wanted to run away from the tight rules and gender roles in Tajikistan. They saw Russia as a destination for freedom where gender relations are more equitable. One of the female participants mentioned that: “In Russia, no one cares how you are dressed and where you go. There is freedom here...” My personal voice questions this freedom.

I do not see Russia as a fairer society where migrant workers can enjoy freedom. Yes, perhaps they can be partially free from the gossip and rumours which are prevalent in Tajik society. At least they can be physically apart and therefore not hear gossip and rumours. Yes, some of the participants saw the change in their clothing styles as a manifestation of freedom. Personally, I do not at all see this change in clothing as freedom. The choices they make in relation to their styles of dress are not free, as they are dictated by the socio-political context in Russia. Women must change their clothing styles to ‘melt in’ to the society, to become like others, and to not be Othered. I do not see this as freedom. I do not see it as freedom when women must lighten their hair to look more like blond Russians. I do not see it as freedom when some women must take off their head scarves so that Russian people are not scared of them. For me, this is not freedom at all.
For me, some of the bright indicators that can inform the status of gender equity in the country are rates of domestic violence and sexual assault, participation of women in all public sectors, and equal pay for all. None of these indicators are perfect in Russia. Domestic violence is widespread in Russia to the point that it is called an ‘epidemic’ by human rights defenders. On one of my previous business trips to Russia, I had a chance to see various social work services for vulnerable children. I heard horrendous stories from social workers on how children, especially girls, are raped, sexually abused, mutilated, and oppressed. These are unimaginable stories which still cannot fit into my head. These are not stories of freedom. On a trip to Moscow to visit my father, I was approached in a Moscow subway by a group of drunken male youth. For the first time in my life, I was thankful to Moscow subway police who protected me from assault. This is not an experience of freedom for me.

However, as a migrant living in Canada, do I see freedom even here? Do I see freedom when I am approached on the streets by men in downtown Kitchener or Toronto or Waterloo? Does my teenage daughter feel freedom if she is approached by wolf-whistling younger guys, especially when she is wearing short shirts? This is not freedom either. Women’s bodies are controlled and abused transnationally; the context may differ, but violence is common. It is ugly, horrendous, and unspeakable. I will feel freedom when a woman can walk on a lonely dark street at night and not be afraid of being abused or raped. When we reach this point, perhaps we can start talking about freedom in gender relations. However, until then, there is so much work to do transnationally regardless of the country and physical space we are in.
**Education - Is it a Neutral Process?**

A number of research participants in this study talked about formal education as a pathway to a better life and consequently to better gender power relations. In their narratives, participants discussed education in abstract terms of obtaining a specific profession and skills. However, I would like to step back and think about education more critically. Is education a neutral process, like the participants envisioned it in their interview? Here, I am reminded of Paulo Freire (1999), who in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* states:

> There is no such thing as a neutral education process. Education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate the integration of generations into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity to it, or it becomes the ‘practice of freedom,’ the means by which men and women deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world. (p. 16)

Education is not an innocent process. Although Freire in his book is talking about the concept of freedom, this theorizing is relevant in relation to educating and instilling specific gender scripts. I agree with Freire that education is never neutral. Regardless of whether we are in Russia, in Tajikistan, or elsewhere, education can transmit patriarchal gender structures and require people to conform to them. Education can reinforce and reproduce the same gender binary perspectives and stereotypes that exist in a society. Education can reinforce conformity with an inequitable gendered system, retaining the status quo which maintains oppressive gender relationships. Equally, education can be a ‘practice of freedom’ where it can construct more egalitarian gender relations, and where
it can re-construct gender binary perspectives. hooks (1994) also sees “education as the practice of freedom” (p. 19), and “the classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy” (p. 12). I support hooks and firmly believe that classrooms and schools could be unique avenues to create new possibilities that go beyond traditional gender boundaries. In this unique environment, it is possible to engage in transformative conversations about how we, as a community, are complicit with the existing gender oppressive system.

In addition, education is more than just a curriculum. It is not about the knowledge that pours into us; it is more than just subjects learned within the educational institutions. It is about the relationships and behaviours modelled to the learners by their instructors and educational professionals. Traditional gender performative scripts could be transmitted to students through the enactment of these scripts by the instructors who model for students how to behave and function within society. Ultimately, the students will embody and reproduce similar gender scripts later on. Teachers should be aware of themselves. Teachers should teach the students from non-oppressive ways by modelling non-oppressive ways themselves. As hooks argues (1994), teaching is a performative act that can offer opportunity for change, and teaching envisions modelling as well.

In sum, I believe, education could be one of the key contributing instruments of transforming society. Education is never a neutral and innocent process; consequently, it is important to analyze what gender performative scripts are portrayed and enacted within the educational system. Together with hooks (1994), I believe that classrooms, regardless of their limitations, remain a place where the possibilities are created, where “…we can collectively imagine ways to move beyond boundaries, to transgress” (p. 205). In this
field we can reconstruct, reimagine, and recreate new practices of more equitable gender relations. And this idea gives me hope that a more equitable world is possible.
Chapter Six: Implications and Further Directions

I conclude my dissertation by highlighting some of the ‘so what?’ questions I have engaged in throughout the previous chapters. I start by briefly discussing how the findings address the overarching research question and sub-questions; I continue by exploring some implications for social work practice, theory, and research; and I end with my finishing blues.

In the previous sections, I argue that gender relations change in the intersection of gender relations theories, the local context of Tajik migration, and the global context of international migration. To understand the transformation of gender relations of power in families and communities, it is necessary to study migration experiences. The purpose of this study was specifically to understand how gender relations change in the midst of labour mobility from Tajikistan to Russia and back. In order to complete this study, I utilized the theoretical lenses through the feminist theories of gender relations, including masculinity and femininity, intersectionality, and transnationality interacting with the local and global contexts of migration. In this study, I have argued that change in gender relations has multiple layers and multiple interconnected pieces, and I have tried to critically engage with and illustrate some of the nuanced processes of change.

Flowers Collected from the Study

In this section, I present as flowers some of the findings I have collected through my research journey. Prior to this discussion, I briefly point out that this study has a few unique characteristics in comparison with other studies conducted in the context of migrant workers from Tajikistan in Russia. First, I included the voices of both men and women and collected diverse stories representing different age groups, marital status,
family structures, and religious affiliations. Moreover, I conducted the study transnationally both in Tajikistan and Russia which not many studies have done. Third, I collected the stories from people coming from low socio-economic backgrounds – many of whom live in vulnerable situations both in Tajikistan and in Russia. These are some of the main unique features of this work in comparison to other studies on gender and migration from Tajikistan to Russia and back. I now focus on each individual flower I collected, starting with the research questions.

*How do gender relations change in the context of Tajik labour migration to Russia?* This first flower is the overarching research question I posed to guide the conduct of this research. My findings addressed this question in its holistic complexity as illustrated in the overarching theme of ‘gender relations as trampoline’. The metaphor of the trampoline highlights the tension between the reproduction of old gender power relations and the production of new ones (Butler, 1993). I illustrated the jump on the trampoline as representing the change in gender relations and the ability to transform. The falling back represented a return to the norm, usually after migration; however, frequently this norm is not the same as it was before. My study highlighted these complexities and illustrated that gender relations in the experience of participants are not linear; they are not entirely transformed but they are not entirely returning to tradition either. Gender relations go back and forth between tradition and transformation (Butler, 1993). I tried to understand these processes by dividing the overarching question into sub-questions.

*How do Tajik migrant workers experience their gender roles before migrating to Russia?* Addressing this first research sub-question, I found that escape from societal
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control, traditional gender power relations, together with other systems of inequality serves as one of the factors that pushes some young Tajik women to migrate to Russia. I focused on gender roles and gender scripts because they are tangible expressions of gender relations of power. Consistent with other studies (Reeves, 2013a; Zotova & Cohen, 2020), for many men who are constructed as ‘breadwinners’, migration became one of the pathways fulfilling this role of supporting their families and elderly parents. However, as Roche (2014) argues, age is an important intersecting social factor which should be analyzed in the context of Tajikistan. This was also highlighted in my study. Specifically, I argue that older sons feel more responsibility as breadwinners toward not only their own families, but also their parents and other kin. Many participants talked about being ‘the older son’ who ‘must’ support their elderly parents, siblings, children, and partners. For some, migration was the only tangible way to fulfill their gender roles and become breadwinners. In addition, lack of education and inadequate participation of female partners in formal labour also forced many men to migrate to Russia for work. Families where both partners have high or professional education and adequate wages tend to migrate less.

Interestingly, some younger unmarried men wanted to migrate not necessarily because they were older sons or had to support their families but because they wanted to confirm their masculinity. Here again, confirming masculinity ties in closely with gender roles being tangible expressions of gender relations of power. My findings are consistent with the argument of Reeves (2013a) that if masculinity in the past was confirmed by serving in the Soviet Army, today, this confirmation of masculinity has shifted to labour migration. In the case of successful labour migration, men are more established in society
while fulfilling their gender roles dictated by hegemonic masculinity. My findings also indicate an adventurous slant in that some of the young men decided to migrate to Russia for work to confirm their masculinity by demonstrating their ability to overcome the dangers of the hard life out there and earn tangible income. I observed that this is particularly true for the younger generation of male migrant workers.

For women, traditional gender roles dictate the opposite of men’s performative scripts which reinforce the hegemonic gender relations of power. Women in Tajikistan are encouraged not to migrate for work in Russia. My findings are consistent with Herrera (2013) who discusses that migration flows are usually dictated by the social and cultural acceptance in specific countries. Women tend to migrate less in more traditional, patriarchal societies with specific gendered expectations. My findings affirm that other intersecting social categories such as age, marital status, motherhood experience, family arrangements, and kinship structures are also very important to understand female migration flows. For example, society demands that younger unmarried women not leave for migration independently without male or kin support. This is to protect hegemonic femininity that could be violated as a result of labour migration; it stands in stark contrast to married women who go to Russia with their husbands and children, thus playing their script within hegemonic gender relations of power.

 Communities spread continuous rumours and gossip to prevent some of the single or divorced women from migrating, as traditionally women are not the ones who travel overseas for work. Ironically, the rumours and the necessity to perform gender in specific normative ways do not prevent women from migrating. My study suggests that, on the contrary, rumor and gossip make some younger women think about migration as an
opportunity to live in an imagined freer society. Fleury (2016) and my study suggest that some women decide to migrate in order to avoid potential gender-based violence. In my study, some women also thought of Russia as a freer society where they will have freedom. They did not talk directly about the gender-based violence but more about running away from family, community control, and continuous gossip in Tajik society.

Reeves (2013a) argues that women in Central Asia are not encouraged to leave for labour migration. Femininity scripts dictate them to ‘stay put’ and wait for their husbands while looking after the children and the elderly. Young, unmarried women also do not leave for migration due to anticipated problems with their future ‘marriageability’ (p. 308). My findings affirm this as participants were clear that the marriageability status of young single women could be harmed by labour migration. Some women expressed that family members perceived that the ‘honour’ of the family could be harmed if young, unmarried women left for migration. Hegemonic gender norms do not support unmarried women from Tajikistan who travel alone for labour migration. However, my findings suggest that this is slightly different for younger women who have the ‘male protection’ of a close relative while in migration. It is more accepted by the society when a young woman travels to Russia for work and is ‘looked after’ by the close male relative.

Interestingly, there are stories of women who migrate to Russia to seek freedom but fall back on male protection due to necessity. For example, some divorced or single female migrant workers in Russia without ‘male protection’ felt they could be targeted by other men who would like to ‘use’ them for their own (usually intimate or romantic) purposes. If women do not have male protection, these men want to keep them as lovers. This can come from male migrants who leave their wives in Tajikistan and seek sexual
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gratification while in Russia. However, I have also found that other factors such as a safe physical place to stay and workplace conditions also mediate and determine if these women may be targeted in Russia.

My findings also indicate that married women who migrate to Russia with their husbands and leave their children in Tajikistan do not face the same rumours and reproaches from society as women who travel alone and leave their children in Tajikistan. Moreover, because of labour migration, many women were separated from their husbands who decided to divorce, stay in Russia permanently, and establish new relationships with other partners. These circumstances forced some women to migrate and become breadwinners for their families in their own right. Therefore, my findings address the question of how Tajik migrant workers experience their gender roles before migrating to Russia in these complex and multilayered ways where hegemonic gender relations of power are both transmitted and transformed in the lives of participants.

How do Tajik labour migrants experience their gender roles while in Russia and following their return to Tajikistan? Addressing these two research sub-questions, my findings suggest that gender relations of power, as tangibly expressed in gender roles, are continuously changing during migration to Russia and after return to Tajikistan. From some of the stories it is clear that both men and women felt more freedom while in Russia from societal control; moreover, they enjoyed the ability to make independent decisions. On the other hand, some women felt more controlled by their male relatives while in Russia. Men who were working in Russia with their partners expressed that it is necessary to control their wives to a greater extent while both were in Russia because
they felt ‘threatened’ by women enjoying more freedom while living in a more egalitarian society.

Other international studies have also discussed the issue of control but largely in the context of remittances and how remittances can be used as a tool for further control of women (Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991; Kyle, 2000; Herrera, 2013). Although I did not focus primarily on the issue of remittances, my findings highlighted that remittances are a major factor in mediating gender relations of power. Participants’ stories demonstrate diverse experiences with remittances that have direct ramifications for complex gender relations of power. In some situations, women who worked together with their husbands in Russia did not receive their wages directly; instead, husbands received these wages for their wives. Other women who were migrant workers themselves and returned to patrilocal families also did not see remittances from their husbands. These women could control remittances and spending only after they moved out from patrilocal families. However, some women were able to control the wages and remittances independently.

Expressing changes in gender relations of power, the issue of control was rampant not only in relation to remittances but also in lifestyle issues. This was especially clear among the women migrant workers. Control originated not only from male relatives or partners but also from general society in Russia. It was expressed particularly in relation to clothing styles and head coverings. Women who wore *sutr* (or *hijab*) felt they were more targeted on the street and that members of general society in Russia were afraid of them. Even though there are many committed women who continued wearing *hijab* in Russia despite the discrimination, some women decided to take their veil off or were told to do so by their employers or family members. Some women took off their headscarves
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in order to ‘melt’ into the general Russian public and not be targeted by police and other people. Men did not experience the same challenges in relation to clothing styles and control of their bodies. Here is where my findings highlight intersectionality and transnationality in gender relations of power where gender is intertwined with lifestyle, religion, ethnicity, and nationality.

Some women needed male relatives’ approval for not wearing head coverings while in Russia. Nevertheless, back in Tajikistan, they were expected to return to traditional dressing styles of long skirts, long sleeves, and head coverings. However, I would like to be clear. First, there are Tajik women who continue wearing hijab while working in Russia regardless of discrimination. I call them rebellious women who, in the face of discrimination, keep their religious symbol with them. I did not meet any such women in my research but I do know them in my personal and professional life.

Second, I do not see the wearing of head coverings as a form of gender oppression and marginalization of women as it is widely represented in the Western discourse where wearing hijab becomes a sign for the oppression of Muslim women who are passive and voiceless victims (Mirza, 2012). Tajik women face more discrimination and oppression in Russia if they wear satr because of the rising global Islamophobia where Muslim female bodies are constructed as a threat, thereby symbolizing the ‘barbaric’ Muslim Other (Mirza, 2012). Hence, some women decided to take off their veil while they were in Russia in order to protect themselves and the people they worked with from discrimination.

Even though I firmly believe women should have a full right to freely decide independently what to wear, including their religious symbols, in reality, this is not
always the case. Participants had to renegotiate their clothing styles in different transnational spaces. These necessities to revision dressing styles are usually dictated by local and global contexts. Within the global rise of Islamophobia and nationalism, women do not always have the free choice to decide whether to wear hijab or not. Hijab-wearing Tajik women in Russia had to make tough decisions in order to ‘melt’ into the general public and remove any visual markers that could potentially harm them and construct them as “barbaric” Others. However, relatives and communities then police them when they return to Tajikistan.

From these stories it is clear that many women are caught between their own devotion to wear their hijab and the need to remove it because their employers asked them to or because of experiences of systematic discrimination and fear toward the Islamic symbols which are widespread in Russian society today. My research indicates that clothing styles and societal norms in both Russia and in Tajikistan rip women into opposing directions, hence placing them in more marginalized positions. Women must constantly negotiate and renegotiate their clothing styles and head scarves with their employers, partners, and the community in general both in Tajikistan and in Russia. Therefore, religious symbols such as hijab do not oppress or marginalize women as argued in some Western discourses (Shaikh, 2003). It is the general public that constructs Muslim hijab-wearing women as weak, oppressed, and dangerous at the same time. This constructs hijab-wearing Muslim women as marginal within systems of gendered relations of power.

My findings also address these research sub-questions in terms of how the perception of education started to change in the context of labour migration. International
studies note how the education and welfare of families usually changes for the better during labour mobility (UN Women, 2013; Fleury, 2016; Antman, 2012). In my study, participants talked about education in a slightly different way. Specifically, more families started to realize the importance of education. Some of them expressed that if they had education and well-paying jobs, they would not leave Tajikistan and seek labour in Russia. This was also expressed in relation to female partners and daughters. More husbands and fathers realized the necessity of education as a pathway to a better life and consequently more equitable gender relations. However, even though they understood it, many did not make it a reality. While they continued to talk about their regret for the lack of education, they did not imagine it as a possible achievable reality.

Realizing the importance of education is not enough to change gender relations of power. My findings affirm how achieving equitable gender relations in education intersects with other factors such as connection with kinship, funding, proper childcare, family support, and age. All these factors must be considered when thinking about access to higher or professional education, especially for women. However, education is important for men as well. Many men had to leave for migration immediately after finishing high school to fulfill their gender role of being a breadwinner for the family, whether they are married or not. If unmarried, they had to support their parents and other siblings and save for their own weddings which were traditionally established in their early to mid-twenties. My findings are affirmed by studies that highlight how migration can harm not only girls’ but also boys’ education (McKenzie & Rapoport, 2010).

How do participants’ experiences of gender roles in different contexts affect their relationships with their partners, families, and communities? My findings address these
last two research sub-questions in ways that construct gender relations of power both as transformative and oppressive at the same time, as highlighted by the trampoline metaphor. While the community and extended family serve the role of police to ensure that people do not deviate from the traditional gender order, migrant women and men resist and find their own path to freedom while carving out spaces for alternative gender relations of power. Through the trampoline metaphor, this is one of the tensions I demonstrate in Chapter Three. The tension is especially palpable in relation to single or divorced women migrant workers. Neighbours and relatives in Tajikistan view returned women migrant workers very skeptically, and they spread rumours about the private lives of these women. This community policing originates in deeply-rooted notions of controlling women’s bodies, and these notions are very prevalent in Tajik society even today.

I have also demonstrated that gender roles shifted for some of the men who started to perform gender-assigned roles differently in Russia. This shift in gender relations of power was specifically manifested in household chores which were strictly segregated in traditional gender relations. Men, who migrated to Russia alone, and who were raised in families where household chores such as cooking and cleaning were performed by female relatives or wives, had to learn these skills while in Russia. However, when they come back to Tajikistan, they continue to ‘depend’ on women who traditionally perform household chores more frequently than men do. Some men were proud of their new cooking skills which they learned and practiced in Russia, but they felt ashamed of taking up these chores in Tajikistan permanently.
Furthermore, partners who established more equitable gender relations while in Russia, as demonstrated through equitable household chores, freer expression of affection between the partners in public, and their clothing styles, needed to revert to behaving traditionally upon their return to Tajikistan. They needed to come back to the ‘norm’. Arias (2013) argues that women migrant workers from Mexico returned to the same norms of gender relations imposed upon them by brothers and fathers. However, the findings of my study suggest that keepers of traditions are not necessarily men; they are women too. I have also argued that after return, migrant workers do not perform the same traditional gender norms as the basis of these gender relations start to change slowly in subtle and complex ways.

Another interesting finding in how migrants’ experiences of gender roles affect their family and community relations is manifested in motherhood and power. International migration studies discuss fertility issues in the context of labour migration which changes the traditional reproductive cycles of women in their reproductive age as these women must renegotiate their fertility plans and practices (Collantes, 2016). My findings affirm that some married women must renegotiate their fertility plans. By having more children, women felt that men were less likely to leave them to establish relationships with second wives while in Russia. This is consistent with the previous study by Olimova and Bosk (2003). My findings also indicate that some women see motherhood as an empowering experience. Through children, they could negotiate their power in society in Russia and in Tajikistan. Women with younger children could have access to migration services more freely while in Russia. In addition, children gave them more acceptance and power to renegotiate gender relations of power.
Furthermore, my findings highlighted the complexity of gender relations of power in male-female, female-female, and male-male relationships that change as a result of migration. Studies in international migration do not focus in detail on these relationships, especially male-male and female-female relationships. I argue that the prolonged absence of fathers has a detrimental effect on father-son relationships. Sons who are second-generation migrants felt no emotional connections with their fathers. This is true both in families where fathers were in migration for many years and supported the family, and in families where fathers left permanently and did not provide support. This emotional grief generated by the ‘symbolic’ loss of father was acute when the migrants were boys. Besides the emotional grief, the absence of a father has a significant social dimension. The existence of a father brings public pride and honour. Boys see their fathers as symbols of protection and acceptance in society. It is the source of their power and respect among their peers and in their communities. Thus, participants expressed deep emotional grief for being raised without a father.

My findings also address these research sub-questions of gender relations in connection to mother-son relationships, which are equally significant emotionally and socially. Sons, who lived with their mothers for many years because of their fathers’ long-term migration, tend to respect, obey, and transmit their own power to their mothers. As a result, mothers are endowed with mother-power, which could be both dangerous and rewarding. It could be rewarding, because some women whose older sons migrated to Russia obtained more power and acceptance in the community and family. The ability to wield power is generated not only from having the son in migration, but also with the mother specific age. Roche (2014) highlights the importance of age in Tajik society.
Affirming this, I found that older women tend to have more power than younger women. This is one of the ways in which mother-power can be dangerous for younger women, especially daughters-in-law, as many sons expect their wives to fully obey and listen to their mothers. Sons have tremendous bonds with and respect for their mothers because of the many years of their sacrifice while their husbands were in migration or while they were abandoned to raise their children alone. Exalted mother-son gender relations can be detrimental to husband-wife relationships, and this tension emerged in participants’ stories.

However, not all mothers wield power equally, as mother-power intersects differently with age, marital status, access to remittances, and relations with husband, sons-in-law, etc. My findings indicate that daughters, especially younger girls, are the most marginalized and placed in the lowest position within the hierarchy of power. Furthermore, some mothers tend to value sons more than daughters, because daughters marry and move away to serve other families. Sons, on the contrary, bring their wives home to serve their new families. As a result, mother-power has less hold on daughters than on sons.

In sum, through this study I demonstrated some of the nuances of change in gender relations in the context of labour mobility. Gender-segregated roles are transmitted from family to family and from person to person, but during this transmission process, they also transform and produce other gender relations. I have tried to grasp this complexity by deploying the metaphor of the trampoline. The challenge now is to articulate the implications of these findings for changes in gender relations beyond the experiences of the participants in this study.
Implications

The research questions have been asked. Invited participants have shared their stories of gender relations in their experiences of labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia. Their stories have been interpreted, thematized, and re-storied. The findings have addressed the research questions, some more fully than others. My research is completed. However, how do I respond to the larger “so what” question every researcher must address at the end of their research? Moving beyond the stories of participants in this research, what do my findings mean in broader contexts of gender relations? Below, I briefly discuss implications for social work practice, theory, and research.

Implications for Social Work Practice

Through the study, it was clear that many migrant workers lack a confidential support system and culturally sensitive counselling services both in Tajikistan and in Russia. Migrant workers in this study did not access services in Russia or in Tajikistan. However, there are some programs for migrant workers and most of them are focused on legal aid and legal counselling. Legal support and counsel are absolutely important; however, it is equally essential to offer other types of support related to the disruption of normative gender relations due to migration, adaptation to new gender roles, support for separated families, communication and connection with communities, and support for work and education. This type of support should be specifically designed for different genders, ages, marital status, family and kinship structures, religion, and regions because all these social groups have different needs.

However, before discussing some key recommendations for the migrant workers, I would like to highlight the present development of social work in Tajikistan. Social
work, a new profession for Tajikistan, was introduced in the early 2000s. Even though it has already been approximately 20 years since the profession was first introduced, it still lacks professional capacities (Partskhaladze, 2017) in the form of education, professional workers, regulations, clear guidelines, etc. Social work education is “in its infancy” in Tajikistan (McInnes, 2013, p. 678) and is offered at just one Tajik national university. Social services were provided during Soviet times primarily to children and people with disabilities through institutions. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the situation did not improve much. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that in Tajikistan low levels of government spending on social welfare generally, where children in particular are negatively implicated the most (UN CRC, 2017). Numerous social services that exist in Tajikistan today are primarily initiated and implemented by international non-governmental organizations and are not quite sustainable (Milligan, 2016). This present context can prevent social work recommendations from being implemented because there is not enough institutional capacity for social work practice. However, social work services are slowly developing and some services still exist even with the support of international funding in collaboration with governmental agencies. My hope is that social work in Tajikistan will further progress, transmitting even more ownership and responsibility to community and governmental structures. For this to happen, it is necessary to raise awareness about the importance of social work practice in the country. This awareness could be raised with local communities working together with professionals who have background in community development, social work, human rights, gender studies, and children’s rights.
While thinking about the social work practice in Tajikistan, it is important to design the programs that meet all four levels of needs (Maslow, 1970) for migrant workers and their families in both countries. However, the programs should be designed not only to focus on the needs and vulnerabilities of people but to also focus on their strengths. It is necessary to understand these strengths not only from an individual perspective, but also from the perspective of the community as a whole (Klipatrick & Holland, 2009). Culturally-informed social work counselling should be established in Tajikistan as well, where migrant families can have access to social work support. For example, participants felt emotional holes in relation to their fathers who were in migration. Programs focused on strengthening attachment for children and their migrant parents should be developed both for children and their parents. It is important to develop the programs based on human relatedness, which is key for human development and adaptation. From my personal observations as an insider-outsider, and from my previous professional experience in social work development in Tajikistan, I notice that numerous social service programs in Tajikistan lack the concept of parent-child relationships. There are community organizations that support children with disabilities and include in their program development parent-child relationships and an attachment lens. However, parent-child relationships in migrant families are still lacking. I believe changing the vision toward family social work is an important area to develop to further support migrant families. Through this study, participants indicated the emotional holes that were developed as a result of lengthy parental migration. This is a generational pattern exists in Tajikistan as a result of labour migration. This emotional connection is worth paying attention to in future program development.
Reproductive health programs should be established as well, where both men and women could get advice regarding fertility matters, protection from STIs, pregnancies, and abortions. It is important to have access to these types of services both in-person and through telephone communication. It is equally important to mobilize the knowledge about these services among the migrant workers. Through the interviews, it was clear that some participants are seeking reproductive services through their networks. However, their mistrust of these networks ultimately prevents them from seeking and using the services. For example, some female migrant workers expressed their mistrust toward other migrant workers they know in Russia who share the same Central Asian identity (e.g. Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz). They are afraid of rumours, gossip, and losing their jobs. One of the important factors for trusting the services is confidentiality. Hence, confidentiality should be a foundational principle while designing and implementing reproductive services for migrant workers.

Many migrant workers in my study highlighted the importance of religion or embedded their conversations in Islamic narratives. It is vital to develop services which are not only socially and culturally sensitive but spiritually meaningful as well. Especially in Russia, the establishment of free cultural- and spiritual-informed social work counselling services would benefit the well-being of many migrant workers. It is imperative that these services be confidential and have a strong referral system both for men and for women.

However, the implications of my findings for social work practice go beyond Tajikistan and Russia because the challenges of changing gender relations and family disruptions due to migration are a global phenomenon. Migrants also experience these
challenges in major immigration countries such as Canada. Social work in Canada and other Western countries must develop socially, culturally and spiritually meaningful services that can be sensitively tailored to the specific needs of various migrant communities. For example, reflexive, culturally-sensitive, and globally-minded individuals (Anand & Das, 2019) should be recruited and trained for delivering the services. These social work professionals should not impose their own values and judgements on people. As people are deeply influenced by their cultures, religions, and ways of living, it is necessary that social work professionals work with people through their worldviews while exercising anti-oppressive practice (Anand & Das, 2019).

Furthermore, the implications of this study will also mean that social work practiced in the West should normalize religiosity and spirituality discourses into its work and practice. Social work historically emerged from religious values and later was professionalized, promoting neo-liberal ideas. Over time, it erased spirituality discourse from its practice (Graham et al., 2012). However, it seems that, for many migrant workers, spirituality is deeply important to self-realization, making meaning, relationality, and human connectedness. Hence, it is important to integrate the lens of spirituality and religiosity into the social work with migrant workers and their families, as for many of them religiosity is tightly interconnected with their own worldviews and ways of living.

My research has also shed light on important lessons for international social work research and practice. Specifically, it emphasized the connection between the global and the local: how global events and discourses affect migrant workers locally. Furthermore, it highlights how historical events, culture, religion, and specific socio-political contexts
are important in understanding the life of migrant workers. For example, it was interesting to observe Kamilla, Zamira, and other participants discussing their experiences of taking off the hijab to melt into the norms in Russia and be less targeted and profiled by the police. The global ‘Otherness’ toward Islam and Muslims is a familiar discourse in Western media. This was first clearly depicted by Edward Said in his well-known book *Orientalism* (1978), and this post-colonial lens was further expanded by other scholars. This discourse is familiar for Russian society too, where Islam and its symbols are associated with violence and oppression.

For example, some of the Tajik migrant workers I met who had covered their head with *hijab* in Tajikistan decided to take it off in Russia. The decision was primarily driven by the desire to protect oneself from being a target of verbal and physical violence. However, interestingly, together with the desire to self-protect and melt into Russian society, some of the women talked about taking off *hijab* and changed dressing style with pride. That phenomenon was very interesting to me, because while living in Canada I am exposed to a different story of Muslim women living in Quebec who are dictated by the provincial secular government to take off their religious symbols while attending or working in public institutions. This has created significant discontent in Canada where many Muslim women felt they were stripped of their identity. In the case of Tajik migrant workers in Russia, I experienced another story when some of the women talked about their clothing practices and taking off their *hijabs* while feeling both shame and pride. Their pride was connected with their sense of modernity. It is my contention that the ‘pride’ phenomenon goes back to the Sovietization policies when the veiled women were associated with backwardness and oppression, and taking off the veil publicly
during *hujum* campaign was portrayed as an act of freedom, liberation, and modernity. A similar tendency is still taking place in the global discourses in relation to Muslim women where the veil is associated with oppression and discrimination. Hence, reflecting on these examples of the ‘taking off the veil’ in two different countries reminded me once more of the importance of context: both local and global. Hence, I concur with the theorizing presented by Mohanty (2003), Razack (1995), and other transnational feminist scholars who have emphasized the importance of historical, cultural, and other events in understanding women’s experiences in different parts of the world. Context is key in understanding people’s experiences, and social work practice should be grounded in understanding the realities of local people and how they are implicated by the local socio-political contexts together with the global discourses. I also concur with Ross-Sheriff (2006) who argues that “effective social work practice will require the empowerment of women within their cultural contexts before change can occur” (p. 218); hence, deep understanding of culture and context is key in transformation of gender relations.

Furthermore, it is important to dismantle the global narratives about the women from the Global South who are usually portrayed as weak and victimized. Deepak (2012) calls for centring the principles of solidarity in transnational social work by “acknowledging the reality of current and historical power inequities” (p. 789). In addition, I echo the call of Moosa-Mitha and Ross-Sheriff (2010) to challenge unequal power relations between the scholars of social work in the Global North and the Global South. Instead of the Global North teaching the Global South how to practice social work, a dialogue should be established where North-South relationships are “equitable, mutually reinforcing, and directed toward social justice” (p. 105). Hence, I firmly believe
this study can participate in equitable dialogue. The findings of this study are equally important for social work practitioners working with migrant workers both globally and locally.

**Implications for Theory Development**

Changing gender relations of power in the context of transnational labour migration is a very rich site for theory development. This is particularly true for the development of intersectional and transnational feminist social work theory. Here I highlight both the strengths and limitations of my study to summarize the implications for theory development.

To start with strengths, the significant contribution of my study to social work theory development is the theoretical framework that comprises multiple theories of gender relations and the local and global contexts of migration. Examining the experiences of changing gender relations among Tajik labour migrants through this framework enriches social work theory development. This framework also extends theories of migration research by examining the nuances of the lived experiences of Tajik migrant workers. Economic factors are significant in making the decision to migrate, but they are not the only factors as some of the international migration studies claim. My findings extend these theories by highlighting other push and pull factors such as escaping societal control and confirming masculinity.

Although economic issues are important, there are more intersecting factors that need to be theorized in order to more fully understand changes in gender relations in the context of labour migration. Seeking liberation from societal control is itself a concept that needs further theorization, as my findings indicate, because those who seek to escape
from societal control encounter new forms of control in the new country such as racism, Islamophobia, and Russian nationalism. Gender-based violence also continues in other forms. Moreover, just as some younger men join labour migration for the adventure of overcoming hardships in another country and confirming their manhood, some women migrate just to explore new possibilities in another country. For example, Yasmin joined labour migration by becoming a cook in Russia although she had a well-paying professional job in Tajikistan. All these factors need to be considered in social work theorizing.

Another strength of my theorizing is the fluidity of gender relations. Although I set out from a reductionist perspective focusing on the male/female gender binary, participants’ stories compelled me to break open this conceptually and practically limiting gender binary. I needed to explore the fluidity of gender in male-male and female-female relations as well. I argue that these relationships require further theory development and understanding. I concur with Paechter (2018) who argues that femininity should not be conceptualized in relation to masculinity alone. In order to understand gender relations, it is very important to understand the relationships between the same genders and how, together, they all sustain and support hegemonic gender order.

In this research, I primarily analyzed same gender relations within the familial context. Through this process, I demonstrated that women can participate in gender oppression just like men. They could be embedded in dominant patriarchal narratives that perpetuate inequality. At times, they are survivors of gender oppression who later continue perpetuating this gender oppression upon a younger generation. Intersecting factors such as age, ability, education, marital status, family and kinship structures,
citizenship status, nationality, religion, and regional belonging should be considered while developing new theories and studies. All these are important elements for the development of intersectional and transnational feminist theory.

In terms of limitations, although I was able to break open the gender binary within the opposing poles, my study still does not theorize the full range of gender relations because of what I set out to examine. A major limitation in the scope of my research is not being able to include the full range of gender fluidity. I focused on heterosexual workers and presumed that they conformed to traditional Tajik gender norms. I did not focus on queer workers and the role of sexuality in shaping their labour decision, conditions, and opportunities. If I were to do this research all over again, I would include these dimensions because they are vital core experiences of migrants and because they are rich sites for theory development. Literature discussing the experiences of queer Tajik migrant workers does not exist. Further theorization is required for understanding how sexuality intersects with the economic factors which push queer people to migrate, as well as how sexuality intersects with labour conditions and work. These are far-reaching implications for intersectional and transnational feminist social work theory.

**Implications for Further Research**

The strengths and limitations of my research point to important implications and several directions for further research. Here I highlight a few of these directions:

First, the wealth of qualitative experiences examined in my research and the rich stories of participants form a solid foundation for larger scale studies to examine changes in gender relations in the context of labour migration. The conceptual and methodological strengths of my qualitative narrative inquiry can be augmented by mixed and quantitative
methods to examine larger scale impacts of labour migration on changes in gender relations within and beyond Tajikistan.

Second, a field that requires the greatest attention is the experiences of migrant children in the absence of parents. How does growing up without one of their parents impact the well-being of children? How does the absence of father affect father-son and father-daughter relationships and emotional attachments? How does the absence of mother affect mother-son and mother-daughter relationships and emotional attachments? These are important implications for further research in a globalized world where migration is increasingly becoming the norm.

Third, one of the limitations of my study is that I did not focus on couples/families. It is important for future research to conduct in-depth, qualitative research on couples’ experiences of changing gender relations of power because of migration. It is also very important to understand changes in gender power relations from a holistic perspective where all members of families and extended families are included.

Fourth, it is important to further research the notion of mother-power and its impact on gender relations of power in the context of both patrilocal and nuclear family structures. How is mother-power wielded in the context of labour migration? What impact does it have on female-female gender relations? How does it influence the gender relations of sons and daughters? How do women’s decision-making power and autonomy compare when living in patrilocal and nuclear family settings?

Fifth, it is important to understand how changes in gender relations of power are happening among the people who belong to different regions of the country. Tajikistan is a country where there are sharp divisions among the regions. It is important to understand
how labour migration impacts gender relations among the people of the different regions. Future comparative studies on this theme are required to enhance our understanding. Finally, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the lives of migrant workers and their families is an extremely important area for future research. Although the pandemic was not part of my research, the devastating impact is resonating through my personal life and the lives of migrant workers. Both Tajik and Russian news agencies are overwhelmed with news that the virus hits hard on migrant workers in Russia. COVID-19 is targeting the most vulnerable people and communities around the world.

The economic impact of COVID-19 is equally important to examine. For example, seasonal migrants could not work in Russia this spring of 2020 due to travel bans. Because many migrant workers lost their jobs, they could not remit to their families who are highly dependent on remittances. The World Bank has projected sharp decline in remittances. Tajikistan is already affected by this decline, as more than 61 per cent of migrant households in Tajikistan reported a decline in remittances in April 2020. Future research is required to enhance our understanding of the impacts of the pandemic on the lives of vulnerable migrant workers and their families –particularly how this is playing out in gender relations of power.

**Finishing Blues**

Completing this study feels like experiencing the baby blues after giving birth. I name this experience finishing blues. I feel blues because I find myself at a crossroads. When I started this journey, I was eager to scratch the surface and find the truth about changes in gender relations in the context of labour migration from Tajikistan to Russia. Together with participants, we went down a long pathway of love and heartbreak, joy and
Changes in Gender Relations: Tajik Migrant Workers

sorrow, truths and lies in their lives. I am now going through this journey of finding truths, excavating meanings, and picking the flowers of conclusions. However, this process of picking the flowers has brought my journey to the crossroads of uncertainty. As I stay here and simultaneously look back, I am realizing that whilst my flowers are diverse and rich with vibrant colours, they are also bringing me great sadness and aching grief. I am asking myself where this grief is coming from. What is causing the heartbreak that has been haunting me to no end? Looking at my bouquet of flowers, I have drawn very important findings from my search.

Yes, I collected the stories of people and was able to demonstrate some of the complexities of changes in gender relations. I realize that I contributed to the field of gender and migration and I hope to publish some of these stories in the near future. Nevertheless, regardless of this sense of achievement, I still feel profound sorrow. I now recognize that this heartbreaking sorrow is coming from the voices of the families I listened to and their everyday struggles. It is coming from the fact that I cannot support these families, I cannot offer them tangible assistance, I cannot return women and girls to schools, I cannot transform the poverty, I cannot stop the violence many migrants are dealing with every day. The sorrow is also coming from the numerous news and videos I constantly see in the media reporting the continuous violence and humiliation against migrant workers.

Today, seated in my office, I ask what I can do. What can I ever do to help these people? This sorrow, this sadness, comes from the recognition of helplessness. It also comes from knowing that many people who are suffering and going through many sacrifices in their lives are the people I was raised with. Whether they are my neighbours
or complete strangers, I was born alongside them. These are my people. And my people are being scrutinized, beaten, humiliated, arrested. This is my sorrow. This is where it’s coming from. As well, the sorrow is also coming from understanding that my dissertation is a little drop in the ocean and cannot make a big difference. Simultaneously, I also remind myself that the ocean consists of billions of drops, and that my one drop has just added to the vastness. This thought inspires me.

As I conclude this dissertation, I realize that change for the better is a long process, but through that process we transform, we imagine, we create, and we change. The hope is there. The seeds for change are there. We need to water, nurture, and care for these seeds. This is what I hope to continue doing in my life by caring, naming, and publishing these stories. This is my action plan for now. My hope is that these stories will transform the sorrow into tangible change for the better, for the creation of more equitable relationships and a more just and fairer world.
Appendices

Appendix 1. Informed Consent in English

WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

From Tajikistan to Russia and Back: Understanding Changes in Gender Relations through the Lived Experiences of Tajik Migrant Workers

Principle Investigator: Takhmina Shokirova, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, shok5080@mylaurier.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Martha Kuwee Kumsa, Professor, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, mkumsa@wlu.ca

You are invited to participate in a research study, entitled “From Tajikistan to Russia and Back: Understanding Changes in Gender Relations through the Lived Experiences of Tajik Labour Migrants”. The purpose of this study is to understand changes in gender relations among Tajik labour migrants. The study is conducted by Takhmina Shokirova, PhD Candidate, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, under the supervision of Dr. Martha Kuwee Kumsa, Faculty of Social Work, Wilfrid Laurier University, for the purposes of completion of PhD dissertation.

INFORMATION

The interview will be conducted by the researcher in the location of your choice, such as secure rented apartment of the researcher, your home, your workplace, Chaihana (Tea House) or any other places you suggest. The interview will take place for around two hours. You will choose the language – Russian or Tajik - you prefer to conduct your interview in. During this interview you will be asked to talk about your life, changes and challenges connected to labour migration experiences. The interview will be in a form of conversation. I will have some guiding questions for myself. You can ask me any questions during our conversation. You can omit any questions that you do not want to answer or discontinue the interview at any time without penalty. In order to honour your individual pace, the interview is not time limited and will last until you want to terminate it or feel you have exhausted all you wanted to say. The interview will be audio-taped with your permission.

At the end of the study, you can choose whether or not you want to continue having a contact with the researcher to follow up about research. The researcher may have any questions later on and will seek your permission to contact you further by phone or other means of chosen communication. Also, if you will choose, you will receive the description of the research findings and interpretation and will be asked to provide your
feedback on these findings and interpretation. You can give the feedback to researcher, either by email, phone or skype conversation. The researcher will take handwritten notes during the discussion to ensure no information is lost or forgotten. Your feedback will be incorporated into the final research report.

**USE OF AUDIO TAPE**

Only the interview with you will be audio taped. The recording is made for this research purposes only to ensure that all the information provided by you is accurately used for research analysis. The tapes will not be used for any other purposes. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to the tapes. Both the researcher and the transcriber have the obligation to keep the information shared during the interview confidential.

After the transcription of interviews, the tapes will be stored in a locked file in the researcher’s office in Canada and will be destroyed after the completion of the study after two years. If you choose to withdraw from the study, the tape with your interview will be destroyed.

I agree to the use of audio tape during my interview.  Yes  No

**RISKS**

During or after the interview you may experience some emotional discomfort as a result of recollecting potentially uncomfortable experiences. If this is the case, you are encouraged to talk to a researcher.

**BENEFITS**

Participation in this study provides you with the opportunity to share your understanding and experiences while being in labour migration in Russia, and/or after return. As a result, new understanding of the experiences may be achieved. Also, your participation is important as it leads to generating new information and knowledge. Your personal knowledge and your lived experience will be used to educate professionals and academics in the field of social work and social policy.

Also, in order to appreciate the time and effort, each participant will receive compensation in the amount of 7-10 US dollars (equivalent amount in Russian rubles or Tajik somoni).

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

The information provided by you during your participation in the study will be confidential. If you choose to participate in the study, you will choose pseudonyms that will be used in the research report or any publications/presentations of the study. All identifying information (e.g. your names, address, workplace), if shared during the
interview, will be omitted from transcripts and reports; names will be replaced by the pseudonyms. The stories on your personal experiences will be reported in an aggregate way to ensure that you are not identified through the story.

In socio-demographic forms, I will not seek your real name, but rather pseudonyms. The information will remain at the researcher’s possession only, kept in a secure locked file and destroyed once the study is completed and the dissertation defended, which is anticipated in around two years after the interview. Only the researcher and the transcriber will have access to the data. The transcriber will be committed to the obligation to keep your confidentiality anywhere beyond the research team by signing a confidentiality contract. Your interview will be stored in computer protected by password place in the locked briefcase during the travel.

The quotations from your interview may be used in the final research report. Only participants’ pseudonyms will be used for quotations in the publications. The results of the study will be presented in the researcher’s thesis paper, social work/academic conferences, published in professional journals/books and may also be used for professional workshops or for teaching purposes. If you do not consent to having your quotations used in the final report, you may choose participation only. In this case, the information provided by you will be used by the researcher for developing interpretation only.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study REB#5334 or the procedures, (or you experience adverse effects as a result of participating in this study) you may contact the researcher, Takhmina Shokirova, at shok5080@mylaurier.ca or by phone (to be determined)

This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Robert Basso, Chair University Research Ethics, (519) 884-0710, extension 4994.

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed your data will be returned to you or destroyed. You have the right to omit any question(s) you choose.
FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The findings of the study will be presented in the researcher’s thesis paper, at social work/academic conferences, published as articles in professional journals/books. They also can be used for professional workshops, teaching purposes, applications for funding proposal and/or other professional/academic research interests.

If you are interested in this study’s findings, you will receive the copy of the final research report.

I would like to receive the final research report.  Yes ☐  No ☐

CONSENT

I have read and understand the above information. I have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

I agree to the use of my quotations in the research report and further publications/presentations of the study.

Yes ☐  No ☐

Participant's signature____________________________  Date _________________

Investigator's signature____________________________Date _________________
Appendix 2. Informed Consent in Russian

УНИВЕРСИТЕТ УИЛФРЕД ЛОРИЕ

СОГЛАШЕНИЕ ОБ УЧАСТИИ В ИССЛЕДОВАНИИ

ИЗ ТАДЖИКИСТАНА В РОССИЮ И ОБРАТНО: ИЗМЕНЕНИЕ ГЕНДЕРНЫХ ОТНОШЕНИЙ ТАДЖИКСКИХ ТРУДОВЫХ МИГРАНТОВ В РОССИИ

Главный исследователь: Тахмина Шокирова, Кандидат на звание доктора философии, факультет Социальной Работы университета Уилфред Лори в Ватерлоо, shok5080@mylaurier.ca

Научный руководитель: доктор Марта Кувии Кумса, факультет Социальной Работы университета Уилфред Лори в Ватерлоо, mkumsa@wlu.ca

Вы приглашены участвовать в научном исследовании, названном "Из Таджикистана в Россию и обратно: изменение гендерных отношений таджикских трудовых мигрантов в России". Цель этого исследования состоит в том, чтобы понять изменения в гендерных отношениях среди таджикских трудовых мигрантов. Исследование проводится Тахминой Шокировой, Кандидатом на звание доктора философии, факультета Социальной Работы университета Уилфред Лори в Ватерлоо, под руководством доктора Марта Кувии Кумса, факультет Социальной Работы университета Уилфред Лори в Ватерлоо, в целях завершения докторской диссертации.

ОБЩАЯ ИНФОРМАЦИЯ

Интервью будет проводиться исследователем в выбранном вами месте, таком как безопасная арендованная квартира исследователя, в вашем доме, на вашем рабочем месте, в Чайхане, ресторане или в любом другом месте которое будет удобным для Вас. Интервью будет проходить около двух часов. Вы можете выбрать язык - русский или таджикский - на котором вы предпочитаете провести собеседование. Во время этого собеседования вас попросят рассказать о вашей жизни, изменениях и проблемах связанных с опытом трудовой миграции. Интервью будет проводиться в форме беседы. Вы можете задать мне любые вопросы во время разговора. Вы сможете пропустить любые вопросы, на которые не захотите отвечать, или прервать собеседование в любое время без каких либо последствий. Данное собеседование не ограничено по времени и будет длиться до тех пор, пока вы не захотите его прервать или не почувствуете, что вам больше нечего сказать или добавить. Интервью будет записано на аудио устройство с вашего разрешения.
ИСПОЛЬЗОВАНИЕ АУДИО УСТРОЙСТВА

Интервью с вами будет записанным на аудио устройство. Цель записи - гарантировать точность переданной вами информации для анализа. Аудиозапись не будет использована ни в каких других целях. Только исследователь и помощник исследователя (тот кто будет делать расшифровку) будут иметь доступ к аудиозаписи. И исследователь, и помощник обязаны сохранять конфиденциальность информации, предоставленной во время интервью. Все записи будут храниться в запертом сейфе в офисе исследователя в Канаде и по окончанию исследования будут уничтожены, примерно через два года после проведения интервью. Если вы по какой-либо причине решите прервать своё участие в исследовании, ваша аудио запись будет тут же уничтожена.

Я согласен/на использование аудиозаписи во времени моего интервью.

Да ☐ Нет ☐

ВОЗМОЖНЫЕ НЕУДОБСТВА

В течение или по окончании интервью Вы можете испытать некоторый эмоциональный дискомфорт в результате разговора о возможно неприятных для вас событий. В таком случае Вам рекомендуется поговорить с исследователем.

ВЫГОДА

Участие в этом исследовании дает вам возможность поделиться своим пониманием и опытом во время трудовой миграции в России и/или после возвращения. В результате Вы сможете переосмыслить свой опыт. Кроме того, ваше участие важно, поскольку оно ведет к формированию новых знаний. Ваш жизненный опыт
будет использован для обучения профессионалов и исследователей в области социальной работы и социальной политики.

Также, чтобы оценить время и усилия, каждый участник получит компенсацию в размере 600 рублей.

**КОНФИДЕНЦИАЛЬНОСТЬ**

Информация обеспеченная Вами в течение вашего участия в исследовании является анонимной и конфиденциальной. Если Вы согласитесь участвовать в исследовании, Вы можете выбрать псевдоним, который будет использован в отчете о научно-исследовательской работе и/или последующих публикациях/презентациях в данном исследовании. Вся личная информация, позволяющая вас идентифицировать (имя, адрес, место работы), полученная во время исследования, будет удалена из расшифровок интервью, а имена - заменены выбранными вами псевдонимами. Всё что вы расскажете на интервью, будет обработано исследователем способом не позволяющим идентифицировать вас через предоставленный материал.

Ваше имя будет заменено выбранным псевдонимом в социально-демографической форме. Все материалы будут храниться в распоряжении исследователя в защищенном сейфе и будут уничтожены через два года после завершения исследования. Только исследователь и помощник имеют доступ к этим материалам. Помощник также подписывает согласие о неразглашении информации собранной во время исследования. Ваше интервью будет храниться в компьютере защищенным паролем и будет помещено в кейс во время поездок.

Цитаты из вашего интервью могут быть использованы в финальном отчете данного исследования. Только псевдонимы участников будут использованы в цитатах этого исследования. Результаты исследования будут опубликованы в диссертации, профессиональных и академических журналах, представлены на симпозиумах и использованы в преподавательских целях. Вы в праве не согласиться на использование ваших прямых цитат. В этом случае информация переданная вами будет использована исследователем только для последующей интерпретации.

**КОНТАКТЫ**

Если у вас возникнут вопросы об исследовании REB # 5334 или процедурах (или у вас возникнет дискомфорт в результате участия в этом исследовании), вы можете связаться с исследователем, Тахминой Шокировой, по электронной почте shok5080@mylaurier.ca или по телефону: (#).
Этот проект был рассмотрен и утвержден Университетской Комиссией по Этике Исследований. Если Вы считаете, что Ваши права в течение проекта были ущемлены или какие-либо условия этого соглашения не были соблюдены, Вы можете связаться с доктором Биллом Бассом, Председателем Университетской Комиссии по Этике Исследований, Университет Уилфред Лори в Ватерлоо, тел. (519) 884-0710, дополнительный 4994.

УЧАСТИЕ

Участие в этом проекте абсолютно добровольное. В любое время вы можете отказаться от участия в проекте без каких-либо негативных последствий. Если вы решили прервать ваше участие прежде чем сбор данных закончен, все материалы о вас будут возвращены вам или уничтожены (по-вашему желанию). Вы имеете право не отвечать на не понравившееся вам вопросы.

ОТЗЫВЫ И ПУБЛИКАЦИИ

Полученные в ходе исследования данные будут опубликованы в виде докторской диссертации исследователя и в последующих статьях в профессиональных журналах и книгах, представлены на профессиональных симпозиумах, использованы в преподавательских целях и для заявок на финансирование последующих исследований в профессионально-академических целях.

Если Вы заинтересованы в получении и ознакомлении с материалами исследования, Вы можете получить копию заключительного отчета.

Я хотел /а бы получить заключительный отчет о научно-исследовательской работе. Да [ ] Нет [ ]

СОГЛАСИЕ

Я ознакомился /ась и понимаю вышеуказанную информацию. Я получил /а копию этой формы. Я согласен/на участвовать в этом исследовании.

Да [ ] Нет [ ]

Подпись участника ____________________________ Дата _________________

Подпись исследователя ____________________________ Дата _________________
Appendix 3. Information and Consent Form in Tajik

Варажкун ризоийат

ДОНИШГОҲИ УИЛФРИД ЛОРІЕ

Аз Тоҷикистон ба Русия ва боъзаъат: Дарки таъгириот дар муносабатҳои гендерӣ аз таърихбаи азсаргузоронидаи муҳоҷирони мехнатни точик

Тадқиқотчии асосий: Таҳмина Шокирова, н.и.и., факультан кори ичтимой, Донишгоҳи Уилфрид Лорие, shok5080@mylaurier.ca

Роҳбари илмий: Доктор Марта Куви Кумса, Профессор, факультан кори ичтимой, Донишгоҳи Уилфрид Лорие, mkumsa@wlu.ca

Шуморо барои иштирок дар тадқиқоти илмӣ таҳти унвони "Аз Тоҷикистон ба Русия ва боъзаъат: Дарки таъгириот дар муносабатҳои гендерӣ аз таърихбаи азсаргузоронидаи муҳоҷирони мехнатни точик" даъват мекунем. Мавлида ин тадқиқот фахмидани тагириот дар муносабатҳои гендерӣ дар байни муҳоҷирони мехнатни точик мебошад. Тадқиқот аз чониби Таҳмина Шокирова, номзади илмҳои ичтимой, доктори факультан кори ичтимой, Донишгоҳи Уилфрид Лорие, таъти роҳбарии Доктори илмҳо Марта Куви Кумса, факультан кори ичтимой, Донишгоҳи Уилфрид Лорие, бо максади анчом додани рисолан докторӣ гузонида мешавад.

МАЪЛУМОТ

Мусоҳиба аз чониби тадқиқотчӣ дар чои интихоби шумо гузонида мешавад. 12. Мисоли хонаи бехатари ба иҷорагирифташудаи тадқиқотчӣ, хонаи шумо, ҷои кори шумо, чойхона, ё дигар ҷое, шумо пешкаш менамоед, мусоҳиба ду соат давом дорад.

Мусоҳиба бо интихоби шумо бо забони русӣ ё точики сурат мегирад. Дар давоми ин мусоҳиба аз шумо хоҳиш карда мешавад, ки дар бораи хаётатон, тагириот ва мушкилоти марбут ба таърихбай муҳоҷирати мехнати сўхбат кунед. Мусоҳиба дар шакли сўхбат баргузор мегардад. Ман якчанд саволгошои роҳномо барои худам хоҳам дошт. Шумо метавонед хангоми сўхбат ба ман ягон савол дихед. Шумо метавонед ба хар саволе, ки чавоб додан намехоҳед, онро истисно намоед ё мусоҳибаро дар вакти дилхоҳ бе чарима катъ кунед. Барои эҳтироми суръати накли шахсии шумо, мусоҳиба вакти маъхбуд надорад ва метавонад, то он лахзае, ки шумо меҳоҳед онро ба охир ра分销 ё хис мекунед, ки дигар чизи гуфтанӣ надоред, идома ёбад. Мусоҳиба бо ичозати шумо бо аудио сабт карда мешавад.

Дар охир кенди, шумо метавонед оиди дастраси маълумоти баъдина бо тадқиқотчӣ дар тамос будан ё не (хамкори намудан ё не), интихоби худро намоед. Баъдтар, агар тадқиқотчӣ ягон савол дошта бошад, аз шумо рухсат мепурсад, ки бо телефон ё бо рохи дигар табассути василани интихобкардаатон бо шумо тамос гирад. Инчунин, агар шумо давом додани хамкориро интихоб намуда бошед, ба шумо тавсифи натиҷаҳои тадқиқот ва тафсирин пешниҳод шуда, аз шумо хоҳиш карда мешавад, ки фикру мулоҳизазаи худро оид ба ин натиҷаҳо ва тафсирҳо
пешниҳод кунед. Шумо метавонед фикру мулоҳизахоятипро ба тадқиқотчий
tавассути почтаи электроний фиристед, ваё сухвати телефоний ё скайп дошта бошед.
Дар давоми сухват, тадқиқотчий барои гум нашудан ё фаромуш нашудани
мављумот, қайдҳои худро дарч менамояд. Сипас, фикру мулоҳизахои шумо ба
гузориши ниҳоии тадқиқот дохил карда мешаванд.

ИСТИФОДАИ АУДИО САБТ
Танҳо мусоҳиба бо шумо ба аудио сабт мешавад. Сабт танҳо барои хадафҳои ҳамин
тадқиқот карда мешавад, то бовари хосил шавад, ки тамоми маълумоти
пешниҳодкардаи шумо барои тахлили тадқиқот дакик истифода шудааст.
Сабтҳо бо максади дигар истифода наҳоханд шуд.
Танҳо тадқиқотчий ва транскрипторчий ба
сабтҳо дастрасй доранд. Ҳам тадқиқотчий ва ҳам транскрипторчий ўхладоранд, ки
маълумоти дар рафти мусоҳиба хосилшударо ҳақиқий нигоҳ доранд.
Пас аз стенограммаи мусоҳибахо, сабтҳо дар дафтари тадқиқотчий дар Канада нигоҳ
doшта мешаванд ва пас аз ба охир расидани омўзиш, баъд аз ду сол набуд карда
мешаванд. Агар шумо аз иштирок дар тадқиқот даст кашед, сабт бо мусоҳибаи
шумо нест карда мешавад.

Ман розӣ ҳастам, ки ҳангоми мусоҳиба сабти аудио истифода бурда шавад.

ҲАВФХО
Ҳангоми мусоҳиба ё пас аз муусоҳиба, шумо мумкин нороҳатии эҳсосиро ҳангоми
ба хотир овардани лахзаҳои эҳтимолан нороҳат хис кунед. Агар ин тавр бошад, ба
шумо маслиҳат дода мешавад, ки бо тадқиқотчий сухбат кунед.

ФОИДА
Иштирок дар ин тадқиқот ба шумо имкон медиҳад, ки мубодилаи афдор ва
тажриби худро ҳангоми мухоррирати мекнати дар Русия ва / ё пас аз боғашти ифода
намоед. Дар натича, мумкин фахмиши нав дар бораи тажрибаҳо ба даст оварда
мешавад. Инчунин иштироки шумо хеле мухим аст, зеро он боиси эчоди иттилоот
ва дошиҳои нав мегардад. Мављумоти шахсин шумо ва тажриби зиндагин шумо
барои таълим додани мунаъассисои ва академикҳо дар соҳаи кори ичтимой ва
сиёсати ичтимой истифода бурда мешавад.

Инчунин, барои қадр кардаи вакт ва саъо кўшиш, ҳар як иштирокчий дар ҳачми 50
сомони чубронпул мегирад.
МАХФИЯТ

Маълумоте, ки шумо хангоми иштирокдар ин омӯзиш пешниҳод мекунед, махфӣ хоҳад буд. Агар шумо дар омӯзиш иштирок кардан хоҳед, шумо тахаллусхоеро интихоб мекунед, ки дар гузоришти тадқикоти ё ҳар гуна нашрияхо / муаррифии тадқикот истифода хоҳанд шуд. Ҳама маълумоти мушаххаскунаанда (масалан номҳо, суроғаи шумо, чои кор), агар онҳо хангоми мусоҳиба мубодила карда шаванд, дар стенограмма ва хисоботҳо дарч намегарданд; номҳо бо тахаллусҳо иваз карда мешаванд. Ҳикояҳо дар бораи таҷрибаи шахсии шумо ба таври маҷмӯй гузориш дода мешаванд, то он ки аз рӯи наклатон, шумо муайян карда нашавед.

Дар варакахои иҷтимоино-демографӣ, ман номи ҳақиқии шуморо чустучу наземунам, балки тахаллуси шуморо мучўям. Маълумот танҳо дар ихтиёри тадқикотчӣ боқӣ хоҳад монд, ки он дар парвандаи бозъимод иншоҳо дошта мешавад ва пас аз ба итном расонидани тадқикот ва дифон рисола, ки дар давоми ду зол баъд аз мусоҳиба пешбино шудааст, нест карда мешавад. Маълумотро танҳо тадқикотчӣ ва транскрипторчӣ дастрас карда метавонанд. Транскрипторчӣ ҳўдалдор мешавад, ки маҳфияти шуморо дар ҳеч кучу берун аз гурўхи тадқикоти наборад ва қарородари маҳфиятиро имзо намояд. Мусоҳиби шумо дар компютер бо рамзи махфӣ (парол) хифз карда мешавад ва дар чомадони куфлкардашуда дар вакти сафар иншоҳо дошта мешавад.

Иқтибосҳо аз мусоҳибаи шумо метавонанд дар гузориш ишторий лигирии тадқикот истифода шаванд. Танҳо тахаллуси ишторий-чун барои иқтибос дар нашрияҳо истифода хоҳад шуд. Натиҷаҳои тадқикот дар рисолаи илмий тадқикотчӣ, корҳои илмий ҷономӣ/ конференцияҳои илмӣ, дар мағаллахо / китобхои касбий нашр карда мешаванд ва инчунин метавонанд дар семинарҳои касбий ё барои таълим истифода шаванд. Агар шумо барои истифодан иқтибосҳои худ дар гузориши лигирии розӣ набошед, шумо метавонед танҳо ишториро интихоб кунед. Дар ин холат, махлумоти пешниҳодкарда шумо аз ҷониби тадқикотчӣ танҳо барои таълим тафсир истифода мешавад.

ТАМОС

Агар шумо дар вакти тадқикоти REB № 5334 ягон савол дошта бошед (ё нороҳатӣ хис карда бошед) шумо метавонед ба тадқикотчӣ Тахмина Шокирова бо нишонии shok5080@mylaurier.ca ё ба воситаи телефон тамос гиред. (муайян карда шавед)

Ин лоиҳа аз ҷониби Шўрои Тадқикоти Этикии Донишгоҳ баррасӣ ва тасдик карда шудааст. Агар шумо фикр кунед, ки тики тавсифи ин варак ба шумо муносибат ба амал наомадааст ё ҳукукҳои шумо ҳамчун ишториқчи тадқикот дар ҷараён ин лоиҳа поймал шудаанд, шумо метавонед ба Роберт Бассо, Сардори Кафедраи Этикаи Тадқикотӣ (519) 884-0710, раками тамдиди 4994 дар тамос шавед.
ИШТИРОК
Иштироки шумо дар ин тадқиқот иктиёрист; Шумо метавонед аз иштирок дар ин тадқиқот бидуни оқибатҳои манфӣ даст кашед. Агар шумо карор дихед, ки дар тадқиқот иштирок кардан мехоҳед, шумо метавонед аз он дар ҳар вакти дилҳоҳ бидуни ҷарима ва бидуни аз даст додани имтиёзҳое, ки ба он хукук доред, даст кашед. Агар шумо пеш аз чамъоварии маълумот аз тадқиқот даст кашед, маълумоти шумо ба шумо баргардонида мешавад ё нест карда мешавад. Шумо хукук доред, ки ба савол (ҳо) -и интиҳобкардаатон чавоб надихед.

НАТИЖА ВА НАШРИЯ
Натиҷаҳои тадқиқот дар рисолаи илмии тадқиқотчӣ, дар корҳои ичтимой/конфронсҳои илмӣ, дар маколаҳо дар мағаллаҳо / китобҳои илмӣ нашр карда мешаванд. Онхоро инчунин метвонанд барои семинарҳои илмӣ, максадҳои таълимӣ, дарҳост барои пешниходи маблағгузорӣ ва / ё маънфиатҳои дигар илмии таълимӣ истифода бурда шаванд.
Агар шумо барои шиносоӣ бо маводи тадқиқотӣ таваҷҷӯҳ дошта бошед, шумо метавонед нусхаи гузориши ниҳоиро дастрас намоед.

Ман мекоҳам хисботи ниҳоии тадқиқотро гирам. Ҳа [ ]  Не [ ]

РОЗИГӢ
Ман маълумоти дар боло овардашуна бо ин тадқиқот кунам. Ман розӣ хастам, ки ин тадқиқот иштирок кунам.
Ман розӣ хастам, ки иқтибосҳои ман дар гузориши тадқиқотӣ ва нашрияхои / муаррífии минбаъда истифода шаванд.

Ҳа [ ]  Не [ ]

Имзои иштирокчӣ ________________________________ Табрихи руз __________________

Имзои тадқиқотчӣ ________________________________ Табрихи руз __________________
Appendix 4. Interview Guide in English

Interview Guide

This interview guide is applicable for participants in Russia and Tajikistan for both men and women. Depending on the country, some of the questions will be adapted to the context. Furthermore, some of questions for men and women will be slightly changed. Many of the questions are the probing questions that will help to collect and understand the story of each individual.

- Can you please tell me about yourself? You life, childhood, adulthood. Can you please narrate your ordinary day when you were a child, teenager? (Some probing questions are around extended family, parents, and siblings).

- Please tell me how did you get married (if married)? (Probing questions around decision to get married, the role of parents, siblings, family, and community? If not married, later during the conversation, I will ask questions about future partner (hopes, choices, dreams). What qualities should the partner have?)

- Can you tell me about your life after marriage? How did your ordinary day look like? (Probing questions, if needed are around pregnancy, and child bearing: When you found out that you were pregnant what the reaction from your partner was? In-laws, parents, siblings? During pregnancy, after delivery did you get help from your partner, relatives etc. What kind of help?).

- Could you please share your pre-migration story? How did you come to this decision? (What was the reaction from your family, partner, siblings, community, co-workers).

- In your opinion, what makes Tajiks to leave for migration?

- Could you please share about your whole process of departure? (Some probing questions: How did you buy the ticket? Where did you find money? How did you
organize everything? Did you have anyone in Russia? Where did you find accommodation? Can you tell me about your first day when you arrived?)

- *Can you please tell me more about your work in Russia?* (Some probing and follow-up questions: How did you find your work? Could you please narrate me ordinary day/week? How did you feel about it? Did you have any expectations about the work and life in Russia? How did you imagine your live and work there? How these expectations were different from the realities?).


- *How do you communicate and keep relationships with your family members, friends?* (Follow-up and probing questions: How often? What do you feel after you talk to parents, family, friends? What are you thinking about after these conversations? How are you feeling?).

- *What do you think, how your life became different while you are here in Russia?* (Some probing questions: What have changed in you? In your life? Your worldviews? Did you notice any change in relationships with your family members, siblings, community, co-workers?).

- *What relationships do you have with other Tajiks living and working in Russia?* (Some probing and follow-up questions: Do you like being in contact with Tajik community here in Russia? Why do you like (or not)? What do you do together? How do you feel being with them? How is your experience with Tajik community here in Russia? As a
female labour migrant how do they see you? Do you want to connect more with local
community here in Russia? With whom specifically? Any specific ethnic group?)

- How do you think how people here in Russia are different than people in TJK? (Probing
  questions: What do you like or don’t like about the society here? What was your
  experience like while connecting with local ethnic Russian people).

- What do you think, what is different in your everyday life experience while you are here
  in Russia and when you are back in TJK? What are the commonalities?

- What are the challenges here in Russia? How these challenges are different from the
  challenges in TJK? How are you dealing/coping with these challenges? (Some follow-up
  and probing questions: What do you think, what other Tajik people are going through
  while they are here in Russia? Both negative and positive sides. How are they dealing
  with that? What do you think, what would help you and others to coop with these
  challenges?)

- What makes you happy here the most? What makes you sad here the most? How about
  TJK, what made you happy/sad there?

- What do you think if local social political context here in Russia impacted you somehow?
  How? Why? What about while you were Tajikistan?

- What is your experience in TJK as a woman? And in Russia? What is the difference?
  (Some follow-up and probing questions: How your roles/responsibilities changed? How?
  Why? What has changed with your labour migration experience here in RF? What in
  your relationships with partner, community, siblings, kids, and friends have changed?
  Why do you think so? Ask about specific examples, situations).
- What are your hopes and desires for future? Why is that specifically? Why do you feel it is important?

- Would you like to tell me something else? Add? Any questions for myself?
Appendix 5. Interview Guide in Russian

Руководство по проведению собеседования для участников в России и Таджикистане

Это руководство по собеседованию применимо к участникам из России, и Таджикистана, как к мужчинам, так и к женщинам. Однако некоторые вопросы, будут адаптированы для каждой страны. Также они будут адаптированы для мужчин и женщин. Многие из вопросов помогут мне собрать и понять историю каждого человека

- Можете ли вы рассказать мне о себе? О вашем детстве и зрелой жизни.

Расскажите, как проходил ваш обычный день, когда вы были подростком?

(Дополнительные вопросы касающиеся семьи, родителей, братьев и сестер)

- Расскажите, пожалуйста, как вы поженились/вышли замуж (если женаты/замужем)? (Дополнительные вопросы о решении вступить в брак, и о роли родителей, братьев и сестер, семьи и сообщества? Если не женаты/замужем, позже во время разговора я задам вопросы о будущем партнере (надежды, выбор, мечты).

- Можете рассказать о своей жизни после замужества/женитьбы? Как выглядел ваш обычный день? (при необходимости задам дополнительные вопросы, касающиеся жизни во время беременности и после рождения детей. Когда вы узнали, что беременны, какова была реакция вашего партнера? Родителей партнера, ваших родителей, братьев и сестер? Помогал ли вам ваш партнер, родственники во время беременности и после родов? Какая была помощь?)

- Не могли бы вы поделиться своей пред-миграционной историей? Как вы пришли к такому решению? (Какова была реакция вашей семьи, партнера, братьев и сестер,
сообщества, коллег). Что, по вашему мнению, заставляет таджиков уезжать в миграцию?


- **Расскажите, пожалуйста, о вашей работе в России?** (несколько дополнительных и уточняющих вопросов: Как вы нашли свою работу? Не могли бы вы рассказать мне об обычном дне / неделе? Как вы себя чувствовали? Были ли у вас какие-либо ожидания относительно работы и жизни в России? Как вы представляли себе свою жизнь и работу там? Есть ли какие-либо отличия от того что вы ожидали и что было реальностью?).


- **Как вы общаетесь и поддерживаете ли вы отношения с членами семьи, с друзьями?** (Дополнительные и уточняющие вопросы: Как часто? Сопутствующие затраты? Что вы почувствовали после разговора с родителями, семьей, друзьями? О чем вы думаете после этих разговоров? Как вы себя чувствуете?).

- **Как вы думаете, насколько изменилась ваша жизнь, пока вы здесь, в России?** (Несколько уточняющих вопросов: Что изменилось в вас? В вашей жизни? В вашем мировоззрении, взглядах на жизнь? Заметили ли вы какие-либо изменения в
отношениях с членами вашей семьи, братьями и сестрами, сообществом, коллегами?.

- Какие у вас отношения с другими таджиками, живущими и работающими в России? (Уточняющие вопросы: Нравится ли вам общаться с таджикской общиной в России? Почему вам нравится (или нет)? Чем вы занимаетесь вместе? Как вы чувствуете себя с ними? Каков ваш опыт с Таджикским сообществом здесь, в России? Какими они Вас видят в качестве трудовой мигрантки (мигранта)? Хотите ли вы больше общаться с другими местными сообществами здесь, в России (пока были в России)? С кем конкретно? Любая или конкретная этническая группа? Почему?

- Как вы думаете, чем люди здесь, в России, отличаются от людей в Таджикистане? (Уточнить: Что вам нравится или не нравится в обществе? Каким был ваш опыт общения с местными этническими русскими людьми?).

- Как вы думаете, чем отличается ваш повседневный жизненный опыт здесь, в России, и когда вы вернетесь в Таджикистан? Что общего?

- Какие здесь проблемы? Чем эти проблемы отличаются от проблем в Таджикистане? Как вы справляетесь с этими проблемами? (Несколько уточняющих и дополнительных вопросов: Как вы думаете, через что проходят другие таджики пока они находятся здесь в России? Как отрицательные, так и положительные стороны. Как они с этим справляются? Как вы думаете, что могло бы помочь вам и другим справляться с этими проблемами?)

- Что вас здесь больше всего радует? Что вам здесь больше всего огорчает? Как насчет Таджикистана, что вас там радует / огорчает?
- Как вы думаете, повлиял ли на вас местный общественно-политический контекст здесь, в России? Как? Почему? Как насчет того, когда вы были в Таджикистане?

- По вашему опыту, что означает быть женщиной в Таджикистане (в России)?


- Каковы ваши надежды и пожелания на будущее? Почему именно это? Почему вы считаете это важным?

- Хотите ли вы сказать мне еще что-нибудь? Добавить? Есть у вас вопросы ко мне?
Appendix 6. Interview Guide in Tajik

Дастури Мусоҳиба

Ин дастури мусоҳиба барои иштирокчилару дар Русия ва Точикистон барои мардон ва занон татбиқ карда мешавад. Вобаста аз кишовар, баъзе саволҳо ба контекст қабул карда мешаванд. Инчунин, баъзе саволҳо барои мардон ва занон каме тагири дода мешаванд. Бисёре аз саволҳо саволҳои санчисий мебошанд, ки барои чамъовари ва фаҳмидани саргузашти ҳар як шахс кўмак мекунанд.

- Метавонед ба ман дар бораи худ накл кунед? Дар бораи зиндагии худ, давраҳои кўдакӣ ва калонсолатон? Метавонед дар бораи рӯзи оддий худ, вақте ки шумо кўдак, наврас будед, накл кунед? (Баъзе саволҳои санчисий дар атрофи оилаи калон, волидайн ва бародарон мебошанд).

- Лутфан бигўед, ки чӣ тавр шумо издивоҷ кард аёд (агар оиладор бошед)? (Саволхо дар бораи карор дар бораи издивоҷ, накши волидон, бародарон, оила ва чомеа? Агар оиладор набошед, пас дар вақти сўхбат ман дар бораи шарики оянда (умед, интихоб, орзу) саволҳо медиҳам.


- Киссаи пеш аз муҳоҷирататонро накл карда метавонед? Чӣ гуна шумо ба ин карор расидал? (Аксуамали оила, шарик, бародарон ва хоҳаротон, чомеа ва хамкоронатон чӣ гуна буд?).

- Ба назари шумо, точиконро чӣ маҷбур мекунад, ки ба муҳоҷират раванд?
- Бо аъзоёни оилаатон, дӯстонатон чӣ гуна муошират мекардед ва робита доштед? (Саволҳои пайгирӣ ва санҷиш: Ҳар чанд вакт? Харрочотҳои шумо чӣ гуна буданд? Пас аз ин сӣҳбатҳо шумо дар бораи чӣ фикр мекардед? Хиссиётатон чӣ гуна буданд?).
- Шумо бо дигар тоҷиконе, ки дар Русия кору зиндагӣ мекунанд, чӣ гуна муносибат доред? (Баъзе саволҳои санҷишӣ ва пайгирӣ: Оё ба шумо дар тамос будан бо чамъияти тоҷикони ин кишвар дар Русия маъқул аст? Чаро ба шумо маъқул аст (ё не)? Шумо бо онҳо чӣ кор мекунед? Бо онҳо буданатонро чӣ гуна хис мекунед?

Таҷрибаи шумо бо чомеаи тоҷикони Русия дар мачмўъ чӣ гуна аст? Ҳамчун як зани мухочири корй шуморо чӣ гуна мебинганд? Оё шумо мехалҳо бо чомеаи маҳалли ин кишвар дар Русия робитаи бештар дошта бошед? Бо кў, бо кадом гурўхи этникӣ?)

- Ба фикри шумо, чӣ гуна одамон дар Русия аз одамони Тоҷикистон фарқ мекунанд?

(Саволҳои санҷишӣ: ба шумо дар ин робита чӣ маъқул аст ва на? Таҷрибаи шумо дар вакти иртибот бо мардуми маҳаллии Русия чӣ гуна буд?)

- Ба фикри шумо, ҳангоми дар Русия буданатон чӣ фарқияте мекунад аз вақте, ки шумо дар Тоҷикистон ҳастед? Кадом муштаракҳо мавчуданд?

- Дар Русия кадом мушилиҳо ҳастанд? Чӣ тавр ин мушилиҳо аз мушилиҳои дар Тоҷикистон фарқ мекунанд? Шумо ин масъалаҳоро чӣ гуна ҳал мекардед? (Баъзе саволҳои санҷишӣ ва пайгирӣ: Ба фикри шумо, дигар шаҳрвандони тоҷик хангоми дар Русия буданашон аз чӣ мегузаранд? Ҳам тарафҳои манфий ва ҳам мусбат. Онҳо чӣ тавр паси сар мекунанд?)

- Чӣ шуморо бештар дар инчо хушбахт мекунад? Чӣ шуморо дар инчо бештар гамгин мекунад? Чӣ шуморо дар Тоҷикистон бештар хурсанд / гамгин кард?

- Ба фикри шумо, оё контексти сиёсии маҳаллии Русия ба шумо то андозае таъсир кардааст? Чӣ хел? Чаро? Дар холе, ки шумо дар Тоҷикистон бошед, чӣ гуфтан мумкин аст?

- Умед ва орзуҳои шумо аз оянда чӣ гунаанд? Чаро ин маълум ёфт? Чаро шумо инро муҳим мешуморед?

- Мехоҳед ба ман чизи дигаре биғђед? Илова кунед? Ягон савол ба ман доред?
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