Bargaining over Remittances in Tajik Extended Families

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of male labor migration upon wives living among their husbands' extended families in Tajikistan. It studies the risks and choices available to such wives in bargaining for remittances, with a particular focus on the risks that daughters-in-law (*kelin* in Tajik) undertake when negotiating remittances with their mothers-in-law. This paper explores age and gender-specific norms in Tajik transnational families and their minimal opportunities for *kelins* to bargain and negotiate the risks associated with making "claims" on remittances by using Deniz Kandiyoti's "patriarchal bargain" and Bina Agarwal's household bargain framework, as well as extensive fieldwork conducted in Tajikistan. The study concludes that international migration and remittances have had a complex impact on gender norms in Tajikistan, with emerging new forms of passive negotiation by *kelins* unlikely to undermine patriarchal gender norms in their favor.

Keywords

Tajikistan – patriarchy – bargaining – extended families – migration – daughter-in-law – mother-in-law

1 Introduction

Tajikistan, formerly part of the Soviet Union, experienced turbulence after the dissolution of the Union in 1991, including a bloody civil war between 1992 and 1997 that destroyed the country's economic backbone and reduced job opportunities.[1] With major declines in government and private sector jobs, the post-Soviet civil war endangered the economic well-being of the country, which remains the poorest of the newly independent countries of the post-Soviet region. This has taken place alongside huge increases in male labor migration to Russia.[2] In 2013, the Republic of Tajikistan ranked first in receiving remittances, which accounted for 43.8% of the total GDP; however, the rate declined to 28.6% in 2019 due to the crises in the Russian economy.[3] Moreover, Russian legislation banned the re-entry of migrants who breached administrative regulations, resulting in roughly half of Tajik migrants barred from returning to Russia.[4] Consequently, Russian Federal Law amended the duration of stay for foreigners in 2015, as well as the terms and conditions regarding entry and exit, which resulted in reduced seasonal male labor migration from Tajikistan.[5] Nonetheless, according to the World Bank, Tajikistan remained one of the foremost dependent countries in terms of remittances in 2019.[6] Remittances sent to families contribute at both the national and household level in Tajikistan, especially by ensuring the economic well-being and living standards of its citizens.[7] However, remittances do not only impact family well-being; they also initiate a complex process of negotiations, mostly determined by interpersonal relations and the gender hierarchy, upon which this paper focuses on.

1 Olimova, Saodat, and Igor Bosc. Labour Migration from Tajikistan. (International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2003), https://publications.iom.int/system/files/pdf/labour_migration_tajikistan.pdf.

2 Mary Elaine Hegland, "Tajik Male Labour Migration and Women Left Behind: Can They Resist Gender and Generational Hierarchies?," *Anthropology of the Middle East* 5, no. 2 (2010), https://doi.org/10.3167/ame.2010.050203.

3 The World Bank, "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)," n.d., https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/BX.TRF.PWKR.DT.GD.ZS.

4 Karolina Kluczewska, "Migrants' Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation: The Tajik Story," *Central Asia Security Policy Briefs* 16 (2014).

5 Mikhail Denisenko, "Migration to Russia and the Current Economic Crisis," in *Migration and the Ukraine Crisis: A Two-Country Perspective*, ed. Agnieszka Pikulicka-Wilczewska and Greta Uehling (Bristol, England: E-International Relations, 2017).

6 The World Bank, "Personal remittances, received (% of GDP)."

7 International Organization for Migration, *Tajik Migrants with Re-entry Bans to the Russian Federation*, IOM (Dushanbe, Tajikistan: IOM, 2014), https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/gdc/gdcovop/2014363405/2014363405.pdf.

When migration occurs, there remains a group called the "left behind," the family members of migrants. Mondain and Diagne[8] illustrate that in various literature, this group is homogenized as "victims" abandoned by their loved ones. However, remittances do just the opposite by providing these people with economic solvency and household well-being. Many researchers have explicitly addressed migrants' motivations for remitting and the variables which impact their remitting behavior,[9] showing how the remittances have improved the financial condition of their household or on the issue of migration, with a focus on socio-cultural impacts.[10,11,12] However, the allocation of remittances based on gendered experiences still needs to be investigated. Nonetheless, recent papers have argued that migration and remittances could alter household organization, familial relations, and couples' communication patterns in both immediate and extended families.[13,14,15,16,17]

8 Nathalie Mondain and Alioune Diagne, "Discerning the Reality of 'Those Left Behind' in Contemporary Migration Processes in Sub-Saharan Africa: Some Theoretical Reflections in the Light of Data From Senegal," *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 34, no. 5 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2013.827831.

9 Theodore P. Lianos and Anastasia Pseiridis, "I Trust, Therefore I Remit? An Examination of the Size and Motivation of Remittances," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014/04/03 2014), https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.857593, https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2013.857593.

10 A. Hadi, "Overseas migration and the well-being of those left behind in rural communities of Bangladesh," *Asia-Pacific population journal / United Nations* 14, no. 1 (1999).

11 Liem Nguyen, Brenda S.A. Yeoh, and Mika Toyota, "Migration and The Well-Being Of The 'Left Behind' in Asia: Key themes and trends," *Asian Population Studies* 2, no. 1 (2006), https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730600700507.

12 Mohammad Jalal Uddin Sikder and Vaughan Higgins, "Remittances and social resilience of migrant households in rural Bangladesh," *Migration and Development* 6, no. 2 (2017/05/04 2017), https://doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2016.1142752, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21632324.2016.1142752.

13 Jessica Martone et al., "The Impact of Remittances on Transnational Families," *Journal of Poverty* (2011), https://doi.org/10.1080/10875549.2011.616462.

14 Sylvia Lopez-Ekra et al., "The impact of remittances on gender roles and opportunities for children in recipient families: research from the International Organization for Migration," *Gender & Development* 19, no. 1 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2011.554025.

15 Allison J. Petrozziello, "Feminised financial flows: how gender affects remittances in Honduran—US transnational families," *Gender & Development* 19, no. 1 (2011).

16 Alberto Zezza et al., "Assessing the impact of migration on food and nutrition security," *Food Policy* 36, no. 1 (2011).

17 Sayyokhat Dushanbieva, "The Impacts of Migration: The Tajik Women's Experiences of Their Husband's Migration" (Master of Arts Central European University, 2014).

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Bargaining power over remittances between family members decides intra-household resource allocation,[18] where gender plays a critical role. Lopez-Ekra et al.[19] note that a woman's position, education, age, and family background work as influential factors in deciding whether the money will be sent to them or their in-laws. Women can only utilize the resources for their own needs if the money is directly sent to them in their own names.[20] Some scholars find that there is a link between women's empowerment and the allocation of remittances.[21,22,23,24] They conclude that increased economic autonomy positively influences women's decision-making powers within the household.

Conversely, women living with their in-laws and who are deprived of direct remittances often fail to exercise power or may become more vulnerable to patriarchal norms due to their economic dependency on their in-laws. The hierarchy of power in extended families tends to favor parents-in-law due to men's obedience to their parents, the transfer of money to mothers, and consistent gender norms.[25] Analyzing the anthropological work of Harris,[26] Hegland[27] elaborates on the social conditions that a daughter-in-law experiences as a woman, who is aware of the risks associated with demanding equal

18 Indika Sampath Dharmadasa, Jeevika Weerahewa, and P.A. Samarathunga, "Gender and Intra Household Allocation of Remittances: Evidence from Estate Sector of Sri Lanka" (13th International Conference on Business Management (ICBM) Sri Lanka, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka, 2016).

19 Lopez-Ekra et al., "The impact of remittances on gender roles and opportunities for children in recipient families: research from the International Organization for Migration."

20 Ibid.

21 Babita Sinha, Smita Jha, and Nalin Singh Negi, "Migration and empowerment: the experience of women in households in India where migration of a husband has occurred," *Journal of Gender Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012), https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2012.639551.

22 Hein de Haas and Aleida van Rooij, "Migration as Emancipation? The Impact of Internal and International Migration on the Position of Women Left Behind in Rural Morocco," *Oxford Development Studies* 38, no. 1 (2010/03/01 2010), https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810903551603, https://doi.org/10.1080/13600810903551603.

23 Jamie P. McEvoy, "Male Out-Migration and the Women Left Behind: A Case Study of a Small Farming Community in Southeastern Mexico" (Master of Science Utah State University, 2008) (179).

24 Maria Martínez-Iglesias, "Being Wives, Mothers and Sisters in the Absence of Men: Bargaining Power of Women Left Behind in Oaxacan Rural Areas (Mexico)" (paper presented at the XVIII ISA World Congress of Sociology (July 13–19, 2014), 2014).

25 Hegland, "Tajik Male Labour Migration and Women Left Behind: Can They Resist Gender and Generational Hierarchies?."

26 Colette Harris, *Muslim Youth: Tensions and Transitions in Tajikistan* (Boulder: Westview, 2006).

27 Hegland, "Tajik Male Labour Migration and Women Left Behind: Can They Resist Gender and Generational Hierarchies?."

rights and autonomy. In general, young women lack financial security and the opportunity to reap the economic benefits of remittances. This inevitably weakens the bargaining power of daughters-in-law, who are frequently silenced by elderly family members, especially their husband's parents.

Despite the significance of this bargaining issue, very few researchers have directly analyzed the negotiation process in-depth, particularly with respect to understanding the impacts of the honor and shame system and restrictions on *kelin's* mobility in relation to *kelin's* bargaining power with their mothers-in-law.[28] In light of this, our paper examines how the gender hierarchy is constructed, contested, and executed within the patriarchal structure between those of the same gender. It unravels the implications of power and dominance over resources, daughters-in-law and surroundings, and the challenges daughters-in-law face in transnational families. We shed light on *kelins'* strategies for bargaining and how mothers-in-law perceive or respond to such bargains. Although we could not interview male migrants due to inherent difficulties of gender relations in Tajikistan, we aim to analyze the facts from women's experiences and perspectives.

2 "Bargaining" as a Concept in Households within Classic Patriarchal Settings

This paper explores the concept of "bargaining" to understand intra-household negotiations within a framework of classical patriarchy. To do so, we use the "bargaining in intra-household model" of Agarwal[29] and the "classic patriarchy" theory elaborated by Kandiyoti.[30] This paper merges these two theories with empirical evidence from research sites in Tajikistan to understand how bargaining is processed and contested in a patriarchal setting. These theories are relevant explanatory tools as patriarchy still prevails in Tajikistan, and gender relations are enacted based on discriminatory gender norms resulting in violence against women.[31] In addition, these two theories are rarely used

28 Colette Harris, "State business: gender, sex and marriage in Tajikistan," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 1 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2011.554057.

29 Bina Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household," *Feminist Economics* 3, no. 1 (1997/01/01 1997), https://doi.org/10.1080/135457097338799, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/135457097338799.

30 Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy," *Gender and Society* 2, no. 3 (1988), https://doi.org/10.1177/089124388002003004.

31 Robin N Haarr, "Wife Abuse in Tajikistan," *Feminist Criminology* 2, no. 3 (2007).

together to explain research on migration, gender, and bargaining power, providing an opportunity to analyze the issue from a new perspective.

Social norms can influence the bargaining process, as gender relations define and influence different dynamics which then determine bargaining powers.[32] Agarwal also argues that "models and policies could go awry if intra-household dynamics are assumed (as they often are) to exist in isolation, without examining the extra-household socio-economic and legal institutions within which households are embedded, and how these institutions might themselves be subject to change".[33] Gender differences, which are based upon gender norms, merely entitle men and women with certain "bargaining power" to consumption, production, division of labor, mobility, and right to self-interest. Gender norms are collectively approved social codes of conduct that distinguish between men and women by idealizing a gender hierarchy.[34] In addition, these norms define and determine women's gender-specific roles, which mostly work as hindrances to those wishing to access employment, education, resources, or negotiation.

Households are complex institutions that are run by different sets of actors, with the distribution of resources and tasks allocated differently to different members. A member's bargaining power depends on many factors, perhaps most importantly gender norms and the strength of the person's fallback position or economic status outside the family. This is particularly pronounced in the case of women. If a woman has a weak economic position or limited access to employment or the public sphere, she may face "threats" in the household and prefer to avoid conflicts by abiding by prescribed norms and adopting a submissive position vis-a-vis other member.[35] Similarly, the presence of social institutional support that allocates power to one gender may influence family members in terms of identifying bargaining power or choosing to remain silent in the household.

Gender ideology shapes women's gendered subjectivity based on the social structures constructed by patriarchal ideas.[36] These roles are performed by way of overt or covert strategies in various contexts. Where gender norms are adhered to strictly, and women are made to play a passive role in the household by staying away from decision making, women are most likely to

32 Agarwal, "'Bargaining'" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household."
33 Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household," 2.
34 Rebecca Pearse and Raewyn Connell, "Gender norms and the economy insights from social research," *Feminist economics* 22, no. 1 (2016).
35 Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household."
36 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."

experience unequal treatment from their husband's family. Kandiyoti[37] argues that households formed in classical patriarchal settings (such as in Tajikistan) follow powerful patriarchal cultural ideals, despite demographic or other changes within multi-generational households. In a patriarchal extended family, men are endowed with the power to control the household, even if they are the youngest in the family. However, with age, women also build power over other subservient female groups—especially daughters-in-law. Under classic patriarchy, younger women—daughters-in-law—are expected to obey their mothers-in-law, often at the cost of ties with their own kin groups. Many women adhere to this to protect the honor of their families.[38]

Kandiyoti[39] explains that the cycle of domination of older women over younger women exemplifies the context of Muslim communities, where women enter their in-laws' houses as "dispossessed" individuals from their maternal home. Culturally, women are expected to earn a place in the newly-wed house by giving birth to a male offspring and working hard to satisfy other family members. In return, they often experience discrimination, deprivation, and exploitation as a young bride; a pattern which, in turn, is often enacted by them on their daughters-in-law decades later, once they have gained household power and control with age. In this way, "the cyclical nature of women's power in the household and their anticipation of inheriting the authority of senior women encourages a thorough internalization of this form of patriarchy by the women themselves."[40] Thus, patterns of patriarchal domination are reproduced, re-implicated and rationalized by women as well as men.

As products of patriarchal social structures, mothers often consider their sons to be the most valuable security resource in their lives, which they may not wish to share with another woman. To preserve their son's loyalty, mothers create hurdles or try to destroy the romantic relationship between their sons and their brides, resulting in bitter relations between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law.[41] Within this classic patriarchy, older women obtain relative bargaining power over resources and decision making whereas daughters-in-law experience the unequal distribution of resources, ill treatment, and discrimination, which gives them weak bargaining power over remittances. In addition, our study finds that young women's bargaining power within their house is unaccepted and discouraged when elders are present.

37 Ibid.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid, 279.
41 Ibid.

Using both theories, this research demonstrates the challenges of bargaining power in a patriarchal society and addresses some changes found in women's bargaining power through passive and covert strategies. In order to further explore the dynamics of this relationship, this study sheds light on the aspects of familial relations in transnational extended families, with a particular focus on *kelins'* risks and choices in the absence of their husbands. It also examines the way in which *kelins'* bargain over remittances with their in-laws and their husbands living aboard, underscoring the dimensions of intra-household bargaining within a classic patriarchal setting.

3 Objective and Methodology

This paper is based on empirical data collected in Tajikistan from June to August of 2012. One of the authors, who is an Iranian national, conducted the fieldwork in four different regions: Hisor, Faizobod, Shahrino, and Dushanbe. Being an Iranian national, the researcher had limited access to visit places and mainly had connections with people staying at Dushanbe, which helped her to access participants. Later on, her friends and acquaintances working in Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) advised her to visit three other cities from the same province to gain deeper insight into the existing situations. They also provided her with necessary assistance in getting familiar with some families in those cities. Although the researcher interviewed people at different geographical locations, the households she interviewed had similar incomes, living situations (i.e., *kelins* living with mothers-in-law), and the findings were also quite similar. With assistance from the Academy of Science, the researcher contacted the International Organization of Migration (IOM), who introduced her to a partner organization working with transnational families in Hisor. An expert from IOM in Hisor primarily assisted the researcher in becoming familiar with the participants; however, the researcher selected participants without any interference from the organization. Additionally, the Committee of Women in the Government of Tajikistan helped the researcher to access participants in Faizobod.

This research follows qualitative methodology using semi-structured interviews and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) to explore power relations between mothers-in-law and *kelins*. Altogether, 18 semi-structured interviews and four FGD s consisting of four to six participants were undertaken with mothers-in-law and *kelins*. The *kelins* were between 20 and 35 years old, while mothers-in-law were between 45 and 70 years old. Most of the *kelins* had two children; however, a few had three, and two *kelins* had no children as they were newly

married. The researcher selected housewives who were not involved in income-generating activities. Our intention was to understand whether their economic dependency on the male breadwinners within a household created tension between mothers-in-law and *kelins* and how these women negotiated over the money sent to them by the migrant men. At the time of the interviews, the participant *kelins* were either living or had lived with their in-laws while their husbands were away due to seasonal migration. All of the *kelin's* husbands were seasonal migrants who returned once a year to visit the family. At the time of our interview, husbands were away from home for at least six months on average.

Apart from the interviews and FGDs, the researcher participated in various social events including a shopping trip, a wedding party, and family parties in order to build a good rapport and observe social interactions and practices. The similarities in culture and language between Iran and Tajikistan helped the researcher to grasp the nuances of the participants' life experiences. After gathering the information, the researcher transcribed the data based on thematic coding. The themes were categorized by drawing attention to the research objective and theoretical approach to understand the relationships between *kelins* and mothers-in-law and their individual everyday experiences. The thematic coding helped to understand themes such as patriarchy, gender relations, the family economy with an emphasis on *kelins* care work, submission towards traditional norms, restriction over mobility, the power and control of mothers-in-law over *kelins*, and their bargaining power.

Following ethical guidelines, the interviews were conducted mostly at the participants' homes, although privacy was often a challenge. Each interview lasted about 45 minutes. To avoid discomfort and any possible conflict between *kelins* and mothers-in-law, the researcher interviewed them separately and conducted the FGDs in separate groups. No mother-in-law or *kelin* was interviewed from the same household in order to prevent unwanted clashes between the women after the researcher left the house. In addition, the *kelins* felt more comfortable and willing to open up when no one from their families was interviewed. The interviews were conducted in Persian with informed consent. The researcher explained to all participants that their responses would be kept confidential. Moreover, the researcher asked the participants to either refrain from answering any questions or withdraw from the interview if they felt uncomfortable. All focus groups and most of the interviews were recorded after receiving verbal permission. However, a few participants were not comfortable with recording so the researcher took notes instead. In addition, pseudo names were used to maintain the confidentiality of all participants.

This research mainly concentrated on households where fathers-in-law were either dead or had migrated to Russia. In this way, there was the possibility for elderly women to hold a powerful position within the family. The researcher learned that mothers-in-law were mainly responsible for *kelins* even in the presence of fathers-in-law, as they were "completely disengaged from the organizational matters of their sons' marriages."[42] Whatever the context, patriarchy seemed to rule over migrant extended families, as members, being raised in a patriarchal setting, were following the gendered power structure familiar to them. However, one of the limitations of this study is that we could not explore if the mothers-in-law had gone through similar experiences of discrimination as *kelins* that then influenced their behavior with their daughters-in-law. Bringing this up in discussion could make the mothers-in-law either sensitive or uncomfortable. Moreover, we did not explore the interpersonal relations between *kelins* and mothers-in-law when husbands/sons were present in the home. Since men are absent from the scope of this study, we do not claim to present a complete picture of extended familial relations. However, our main focus is to explore the allocation of remittances within the households with particular attention to the relationship between *kelins* and mothers-in-law in the absence of migrant men.

4 The Position of *Kelin* in Extended Families

Tajikistan is a traditional society with strong familial bonds. This study finds that the importance of family is highly valued due to its function as an extended economic-cultural unit, where family members such as parents, children, married brothers, and uncles live together. In Tajikistan, hierarchy is based on gender and age following the division between men and women in terms of power, access to resources, and control over income.[43] Women of Tajik society are treated less than men in all families, expected to be submissive and weak in the home. Nourzhanov and Bleuer[44] mention that the older man attains higher status in the family, allowing the older woman to also enjoy

42 Aksana Ismailbekova, "Migration and patrilineal descent: the role of women in Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 33, no. 3 (2014): 387, https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2014.961305.

43 Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, "Between Lenin and Allah: women and ideology in Tajikistan," in *Women in Muslim Society: Diversity within Unity*, ed. Bodman Herbert L. and Tohidi Nayeren (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1998).

44 Kirill Nourzhanov and Christian Bleuer, "Traditional Society and Regionalism in Soviet Tajikistan," in *Tajikistan: A Political and Social History* (ANU Press, 2013).

hierarchy over younger women but not more than men. Harris[45] emphasizes that Tajik "women can never be conceptualised as household heads. This is partly because they are supposed to live under male control."

As per our study, when elderly male members are absent from the household, mothers-in-law reap the benefit of having control over others due to this absence. Generally, the *kelins* occupy the lowest position in the hierarchy of power in an extended family with very limited or no decision-making power. As daughters-in-law usually live with their in-laws, at least for the first few years of their married life, the *kelins* hold the weakest position in the household.[46,47,48] According to the participants, extended family members participate in shared activities such as cooking, eating, and cleaning communal areas, such as the kitchen and bathroom. Daughters-in-law do all the household chores, including cooking, cleaning, and washing, under the strict supervision of mothers-in-laws. Bahare, a daughter-in-law, explains the collective way life, the gender division of labor, and her mother-in-law's existing role in the household:

> Everybody works in our household. We are three *kelins* and we all work together. Men buy the required ingredients that we need in the kitchen. We have a shared kitchen and when I make food for everybody. One day I make lunch and the other days, another one. We help each other and my mother-in-law mostly monitors us or may give us advice or recommend how to do our jobs better. When the food is ready, we all sit together and eat. We all help each other to set the table, bring dishes and serve the food and clean up the dishes afterwards. We have a shared budget as well. When our husbands work, they give money to our father-in-law, because he is the eldest person in our family and also is the head of the household. However, I ask my mother-in-law if I need anything as she is the one who buys our clothes and the children's clothes as well.

In Bahare's narration, one thing seems especially clear: *kelins* are mostly responsible for household works and shared duties within extended families. Mothers-in-law take part in household chores in a small way, rather distribute the tasks between *kelins*. Assigning women household chores is an implication

45 Harris, *Muslim Youth: Tensions and Transitions in Tajikistan*, 71.

46 Nourzhanov and Bleuer, "Traditional Society and Regionalism in Soviet Tajikistan."

47 Sitora Khakimova, "The Impact of Male Migration and Natural Disaster on Women Headed Households and Their Families," ed. Keith Griffler and Sharmistha Bagchi-Sen (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2011).

48 Colette Harris, "Intergenerational Family Control" in *Control and Subversion*, ed. Colette Harris, Gender Relations in Tajikistan (Pluto Press, 2004).

of the gendered division of labor, as men are mainly responsible for earning income and doing the shopping. Consequently, according to the participants, the distribution of resources between family members—including finances—and gendered relations are woven together through the collective economy. Within the patriarchal setting, women tend to depend on men or the older women in the house for resources. In addition, women are found to minimize their needs and put others' interests before their own. Kelins inform in Tajikistan they face discrimination in terms of equal status, equal access to resources in families due to gendered social norms that put them in an unfavorable position within the society and family.

However, as gender norms define the gender hierarchy as a "culturally specific ideal,"[49] power can be handed over to women as they age, especially when they give birth to sons.[50] *Kelins* note that becoming a mother is, therefore, a way to obtain a higher value, freedom, and integration into their new family. But the number and gender of children also matter. The more children—preferably sons—enable *kelins* to obtain a better position in the family.[51,52] Similarly, Agarwal[53] highlights that norms in Muslim and Indian communities priorities older daughters-in-law with a son over new brides when it comes to family decision making.

According to a *kelin* named Bahare, when a *kelin* becomes a mother-in-law, she not only makes important decisions in relation to younger *kelins* in the household, but also attends social events and maintains social relations within the neighborhood. With time, mothers-in-law hold a greater position in the family after the eldest man and break the monopoly of men's exercise of power within the patriarchal system. They can directly control *kelins* lives, especially because mothers are highly respected in Tajik society. Therefore, *kelins* act in a submissive manner and prefer to obey their mothers-in-law, as per our findings. Surprisingly, mothers-in-law inflict persistent dominance over generations as a result of gendered upbringings in patriarchal settings.

49 Colette Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan* (Pluto Press, 2004), 14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt18fsbb0.

50 Ismailbekova, "Migration and patrilineal descent: the role of women in Kyrgyzstan."

51 Ibid.

52 Madeleine Reeves, "Staying put? Towards a relational politics of mobility at a time of migration," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3–4 (2011).

53 Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household."

5 Mobility Constraints within an Honor and Shame System

All our participants, both *kelins* and mothers-in-law, mention that *kelins* are supposed to get permission from their husbands before leaving the house. Getting permission from the husbands is strictly practiced by wives, even in those families where the husbands have migrated. Agarwal[54] argues that intra-household gender roles situate household family members in specific power positions; thus, *kelins* who usually possess the lowest position in the hierarchy of power are the ones who must be supervised, especially when they live with their in-laws.

Control over mobility is connected to the basic practices of a family life. The *kelin* participants reported that parents-in-law provide the necessities and thus they do not need to go outside the house. The primary reasons for leaving the household are visiting their own families, attending social and family events, buying clothes for themselves or for their children, visiting doctors, and attending other necessary appointments. Although women's participation in the workforce is increasing, our participants informed us that their husbands do not allow them to engage in any income-generating activities outside the family compound. Even if they need to visit the neighborhood, local markets, or public places, mothers-in-law, older *kelin*, or brothers-in-law often accompany them. Sitora, a mother of four children, remarked that "Tajik men expect their wives to get permission before leaving the house, even to visit *kelins'* mom."

In the case of the husband's absence, most of our participants experience the mothers-in-law as taking the place of husbands. Our research also finds that older women and mothers-in-law actively control young women as well as protect the honor of the family. Mothers-in-law step forward to resolve the everyday conflicts between *kelins*, unless the problem is complicated enough to be handled by the oldest man in the family if he is alive and present. In the field, we found that participant *kelins* accept the elders' or mothers-in-laws' interference in everyday living due to the "respect" and "obedience" they are expected to show.

According to the field data, our participants tend to avoid any behaviors that are considered *eib*, which in the Tajik language refers to all shameful behavior or activities. Based on our in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, we found that arguing with mothers-in-law and showing disobedience are known as *eib*, which *kelins* willingly try to avoid. The ethnographic research of Harris[55]

54 Ibid.
55 Harris, *Muslim Youth: Tensions and Transitions in Tajikistan*.

also echoes our findings. The honor and shame system practiced in Muslim communities puts men and elder women in pre-existing higher positions of controlling younger women.[56] Therefore, *eib* is often more complex than it is portrayed in Muslim countries. Harris[57] points out that "each individual is enmeshed in a family, so that any hint of shame attaching to one member affects them all."

Thus, any shame associated with *kelins* affects the honor of the whole household or even a community. The same goes for daughters themselves, who are equally restricted by mothers in terms of accessing public places. For example, community people may find *kelins* or daughters' mobility without an elder's company in public places as disrespectful of social customs, which can bring shame upon the family. Accordingly, women tend to avoid any behaviors that are considered *eib* within and beyond the household. Reeves[58] interprets that the monitoring and control over women's mobility by mothers-in-law or mothers is done to protect the honor of the family. Needless to say, as women are made responsible for the honor and shame of families and communities, their ability to access public places is bound to face restriction.

Our study also reveals that getting permission from mothers-in-law in the husband's absence not only helps to sustain the traditional community-based honor and shame system, but also indicates that the system is applicable within the family. As "a good *kelin* doesn't argue with her mother-in-law, and respects her in-laws and husband" (Bibi, a mother-in-law), the *kelins* avoid disobedience to not bring *eib* upon themselves. In this way, mothers-in-law can restrict *kelins'* mobility more easily. Moreover, in a Focus Group Discussion, mothers-in-law reported that sons expect their mothers to control their wives when they are away. As one of our mothers-in-law describes, "our sons call us on the phone and ask us to make sure that their wives do not go out without our permission, so we have to make sure that someone accompany them, either other *kelins* or I." The other mother-in-law participants agreed with this statement.

All the participants acknowledged that the Islamic belief that heaven is under the feet of mothers makes the sons value their mothers with high regard in Tajikistan. This is why mothers-in-law enjoy superior positions over *kelins* granted to them by their migrated sons. Some of our *kelin* participants told us that their husbands advised them to obey their mothers as much as possible. In fact, the participants believe that the more they obey their mothers-in-law and remain silent, the more they will be respected and loved by their

56 Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan*.
57 Ibid, 92.
58 Reeves, "Staying put? Towards a relational politics of mobility at a time of migration."

husbands in return. However, we could not verify this information as we did not interview the migrant men. The important thing to note here is that this submission can be regarded as a strategy for survival and bargaining in future. This obedience to mothers-in-law helps *kelins* navigate their long-term self-interest and guarantees the continuity of marriage, as per the interviews with our *kelin* participants. Habibeh, who lives with her in-laws, expresses concern about divorce initiated by mothers-in-law:

> If *kelin* makes a mistake, some mothers-in-law may inform their sons. For instance, they tell their sons abroad (over phone) that their wives behave badly with them or other family members. It can lead to divorce if mothers-in-law push their sons hard and make promise of finding better wives for them.

Participant *kelins* fear that mothers-in-law can cause disruption in a marriage leading to divorce; this can also happen due to a couple's lack of affection or understanding. Marriage dissolution can put *kelins* at greater social and economic risk. It is worth mentioning that according to observation and informal talks in the market, divorced or abandoned wives enjoy more freedom in terms of communication in public places than migrant husband's wives. However, these women have to work outside the home to manage their expenses under the burden and social stigma associated with divorce. Divorce and abandonment by husbands are viewed as shameful, indicating that women have to tolerate difficult or conflictful marriages in order to avoid this socially-induced stigma.

6 Bargaining over Remittances: Covert Strategies

Gaining insights into *kelins'* bargaining powers entails a holistic approach with regard to familial relations within the household, which are rather complex. The collective Tajik lifestyle combines a joint family economy, sharing of family resources, and living in the same households. Typically, *kelins* who live with their in-laws receive neither remittances nor any other money directly from their migrated husbands.[59,60] Migrant men remit to their parents for them to

59 Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Socio-economic inclusion of women from migrant households in Tajikistan: Assessment report*, OSCE (Dushanbe: OSCE, 2012).

60 "Abandoned wives of Tajik labor migrants: IOM study on the socio-economic characteristics of abandoned wives of Tajik labor migrants and their survival capabilities = Broshennye zheny Tadzhiksikh trudovykh migrantov," 2009, https://lccn.loc.gov/2014363497.

take care of familial needs including food, education, health, clothing, housing, and social responsibilities. Sending money to his parents enables the migrant man to ensure that his mother has full control over the *kelin* during his absence.[61] Under this system, both men and women enact traditional patriarchal gender norms in transnational families, with little room for negotiation over practices.[62] However, this research finds two types of covert negotiation processes over remittance, which Agarwal[63] has noted as well. She explains hat in situations where women cannot express themselves freely, they choose covert strategies. This study finds that *kelins* perform dual covert strategies, and seem to prefer the practice of risky hidden negotiation over remittances.

6.1 *Obedience as a Part of Covert Strategy*

Women's obedience is a part of the gender norms that women intentionally show[64] and can be regarded as a strategy for covert bargaining. Agarwal[65] illustrates that family members do not necessarily have the same bargaining power. She also elaborates on how the intersection of age, gender, and norms construct "appropriate female behaviour,"[66] which puts pressure on women to be submissive. According to the participants, *kelins* are fully familiar with appropriate behaviour, and the price of failing to do so. Therefore, a strategy to avoid conflict is to remain silent, as Agarwal[67] mentions in her study. In one focus group with *kelins*, Habibeh informed us that:

> I do not argue with my mother-in-law to avoid possible clashes. Any reply can cause unwanted misunderstanding. My husband has told me to respect his mother, if I want to show my love to him. To have a smooth relation with him, I never make my mother-in-law upset.

The rests of the *kelins* agreed with this sentiment: that being tolerant, remaining quiet, and not answering back were all part of their covert strategy. The reasons behind why they remain submissive are to impress their in-laws, be treated nicely by husbands, and gradually ask for their own needs and interests over

61 Martone et al., "The Impact of Remittances on Transnational Families."
62 Rattana Jongwilaiwan and Eric C. Thompson, "Thai wives in Singapore and transnational patriarchy," *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography* 20, no. 3 (2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2011.624588.
63 Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household."
64 Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan*.
65 Agarwal, "'Bargaining' and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household."
66 Ibid, 17.
67 Ibid.

time. However, women deliberately sacrifice their needs to ensure "immediate welfare for future security,"[68] such as their children's education. Our participants also agree that they would prefer their children's interests to be fulfilled before their own. To do so, they tend to follow mothers-in-laws' instructions, as *kelins* know that obedience is a key element that can guarantee the continuity of a marriage (also found by Khakimova).[69]

However, the participants remarked that obedience does not solely guarantee peaceful relations with mothers-in-law, especially because mothers-in-law can cause problems in the couple's romantic relationship. Kandiyoti[70] points out that older women, particularly mothers-in-law, tend to downplay the romantic love between couples to remain a priority in the relationship with their sons. This is because of the economic dependency and cultural practice of treating sons as a most valuable resource. As the sons are aware of this fact, most of them value their mothers over their wives. According to our findings, some of them never agree to send money to their wives separately, considering this a disrespectful practice.

However, having grown-up children gives our participants higher bargaining power over remittances in order to pay for the children. Tahmina told us that she has paid tuition fees for the children with the money she received from her husband, with her mother-in-law's approval. Therefore, the strategy of showing submission and respect works for some of the *kelins* in terms of financial benefits and avoids familial conflict. However, this strategy does not benefit the woman immediately, nor does it allow them to negotiate over remittances directly. Thus, most *kelins* have adopted the alternative covert strategy nowadays.

6.2 *Receiving Remittance Secretly Is Another Covert Strategy*

Despite the inherent intra-family power imbalance, some participants acknowledge being able to receive money independently, often in secret. A *kelin's* ability to do such, however, depends on factors such as whether she has support from her own family, her level of bargaining power with her husband, the degree of her husband's willingness, the extent of her mothers-in-law's power, the degree of the *kelin's* mobility, and the *kelin's* ability (and willingness) to hide the transactions from her mother-in-law and other family members in the household. In addition, access to cell phones enables *kelins* to communicate

68 Ibid, 26.

69 Khakimova, "The Impact of Male Migration and Natural Disaster on Women Headed Households and Their Families."

70 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."

with husbands directly to ask for separate money;[71] although, very few of our participants had access to cell phones or internet, particularly in village areas. Moreover, women could not access the proper channel—banks—for receiving remittance money.[72] Therefore, *kelins* had to use other available options to negotiate over remittances.

Having support from one's own family in the process of negotiation plays a critical role in kelins' lives. According to some of the *kelins*, their parents help them in two ways. First, in terms of receiving money secretly from their husbands, they use their parent's name as the provider of the extra amount. As Shohre, who enjoys her own family's support, mentions:

> My husband works in Russia and he sends some amounts of money to me secretly. I buy some clothes for my children and myself with that money, but I tell my mother-in-law that I have got them from my parents. It will not be a problem as long as I can hide it properly from my mother-in-law.

This process helps *kelins* not only to conceal the bargaining process from their mothers-in-law, but also increases the status of their families in the eyes of the in-laws. However, if the *kelin's* parents are poor, they cannot justify this process. The inability to leave the house alone works as a barrier to receiving independent remittances; thus, a few of our participants use the excuse of visiting their parents' homes to visit banks. In this scenario, parents and siblings support the *kelins* by concealing this lie, which contributes to their increased access to secret remittances.

The negotiation over remittance must be covert, as the receiving of money is not a simple financial transaction but a sign of interpersonal connection between husbands and wives.[73,74] Similarly, sending remittances a sign of a son's care, affection, and respect towards his mother and family.[75,76] Since

71 Eliza Isabaeva, "Leaving to enable others to remain: remittances and new moral economies of migration in southern Kyrgyzstan," *Central Asian Survey* 30, no. 3–4 (2011).

72 International Labour Organization, *Migration and Development in Tajikistan—Emigration, Return and Diaspora*, ILO (Moscow, 2010), http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/grouc-europe/---ro-geneva/---sro-moscow/documents/publication/wcms_308939.pdf.

73 Jan Pahl, "His money, her money: Recent research on financial organisation in marriage," *Journal of Economic Psychology* 16, no. 3 (1995); Pahl, "His money, her money: Recent research on financial organisation in marriage."

74 Viviana A. Rotman Zelizer, *The Social Meaning of Money* (BasicBooks, 1995).

75 Dinah Hannaford, "Intimate remittances: marriage, migration, and MoneyGram in Senegal," *Africa Today* 62, no. 3 (2016).

76 Patricia R Pessar and Sarah J Mahler, "Transnational migration: Bringing gender in," *International migration review* 37, no. 3 (2003).

remitting is the principal way of showing affection, bond, and care from a man's side, who is getting the money denotes the importance of a given relationship. All the participant *kelins* agree that they have a fear of being abandoned by their migrant husbands, as men could become romantically involved with other women while in Russia. Due to this possibility, as long as the husbands send money, *kelins* have an assurance that the transnational family is still functioning. Moreover, sending money secretly to wives indicates a developed emotional bond between the couple, which mothers-in-law hardly approve due to their fear of becoming their son's second priority. Moreover, mothers-in-law consider this behaviour disrespectful, as one mother-in-law explained:

> There are some *gande* (nasty) *kelins*, who disrespect their in-laws. They secretly get money from their husbands and they hide it from their mothers-in-law. It is hard to accept when a mother does not receive money, but the son sends money to his wife, and the *kelin* buys stuffs for herself, while the mother also needs some. If your son doesn't respect you as a mum, how can you expect respect from your *kelin?*

In this way, mothers-in-law resist any changes to the power balance that would favor *kelin and* attempt to remain connected with their beloved sons. In the eyes of mothers-in-law, sending money secretly signals the son's priority to his wife over his mother. Therefore, when the secrecy is discovered, *kelins* pay a higher price than their husbands. Freshte explained that her mother-in-law hit her physically for her "mistake," forcing her to cease the secret transactions. This echoes with the findings of Harris,[77] who finds that the practice of abusing *kelins* verbally, economically, and psychologically is a technique designed to exert power over the subservient group by the elder women. This notion derives from the patriarchal upbringing that women internalize living within the system and continue the system of power discrimination.[78] We do not blindly accuse these women of being rigid or less welcoming to *kelins* as they "have paid the heavy price of an earlier patriarchal bargain, but are not able to cash in on its promised benefits."[79] It is the patriarchal system that must be blamed for influencing these women to exercise the same forms of domination and not allowing *kelins* to have remittance money that would give them power within the family.

77 Harris, "Intergenerational Family Control."
78 Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy."
79 Ibid, 282.

However, our study finds that mothers-in-law are not always abusers, as was also found by Reeves.[80] One *kelin* noted in her in-depth interview that "not all mothers-in-law are *gande*. Some treat *kelins* as their own daughters." Needless to say, this number is very small, and it is often the case only if the mother-in-law is an aunt due to the marriage between cousins. The fact that someone's mother-in-law is her own aunt brings some degree of peace and security to the *kelin*.[81] However, we did not study the impact of cousin marriages systematically in relation to *kelin's* bargaining power. Only one of our participants is married to her cousin; thus, we cannot depict how the bargaining process works in such transnational families, or if an aunt, being a mother-in-law too, is more supportive of *kelin's* bargaining powers.

7 Conclusion

This study mainly focuses on the negotiation power of *kelins* over remittance in transnational families, as well as the resistance they face due to the gender norms within classic patriarchal settings. Different studies draw attention to the possibility of altering household level bargaining, family relations, and couples' communication patterns for positive negotiation power.[82,83,84,85,86] Male migration in Tajikistan is unlikely to change the gender norms in favor of *kelin* or *kelin's* decision making powers while they reside in their in-laws' households.[87,88] Our research also does not find significant evolution in *kelins'* bargaining powers over remittances due to mothers-in-law's powerful hold over their sons and family matters.

Gender norms dictate particular forms of behaviour for each sex, specific duties, and rights for each member, which leaves little room for negotiations.

80 Reeves, "Staying put? Towards a relational politics of mobility at a time of migration."
81 Ibid.
82 Martone et al., "The Impact of Remittances on Transnational Families."
83 Lopez-Ekra et al., "The impact of remittances on gender roles and opportunities for children in recipient families: research from the International Organization for Migration."
84 Petrozziello, "Feminised financial flows: how gender affects remittances in Honduran—US transnational families."
85 Zezza et al., "Assessing the impact of migration on food and nutrition security."
86 Dushanbieva, "The Impacts of Migration: The Tajik Women's Experiences of Their Husband's Migration."
87 Sinha, Jha, and Negi, "Migration and empowerment: the experience of women in households in India where migration of a husband has occurred."
88 Khakimova, "The Impact of Male Migration and Natural Disaster on Women Headed Households and Their Families."

The relevance of male migration is an indicator of patriarchal social structure, where the breadwinning role is associated with men. Akiner[89] also mentions that women and men act mostly upon gender-based roles following religion and culture. Consequently, when Tajik men migrate with the responsibility of earning a livelihood and securing the economy of the family, *kelins* are expected to execute household chores and abide by the instructions of mothers-in-law. This domination becomes quite easy, as women's mobility and access to public life are restricted in the name of protecting the family's honor. The appropriate set of behaviors produced within patriarchy and reproduced by mothers-in-law puts *kelins* in the lowest position in the family economy, where bargaining over remittance is difficult.

The household, being an economic unit, decides the individual position, consumption, and control over resources based on gender, creating greater discrimination between men and women. In Tajik transnational families, when in-laws' take charge of a household's economic setting, women become entangled in the patriarchal control of domination by way of their "guardians." Depending economically on in-laws puts our participants means *kelins* have to obey the family rules and compromise their own needs to avoid conflicts. Therefore, *kelins* show their obedience as a *strategy*. But it is hard to claim if all of our participants are truly submissive. Harris[90] proposes the concept of "gender masks" to elaborate on her theory of variant gender performances, meaning that *kelins* act differently based on the situation and their audience. Our participants adopt the strategy of obedience to receive greater benefits in the long run by keeping a good relationship with their mothers-in-law.

This study also finds that some young *kelins* enjoy their husband's collaboration to bargain with their mothers-in-law for remittances. We believe this form of negotiation introduces some new dimensions to familial relations which did not exist before. In order to receive hidden remittances, *kelins* need to strategize in a very constrained environment. First, they need to negotiate with their husbands to send remittances secretly. Second, they must be able to access the money with the help of their parents. And finally, they must hide the money from their mothers-in-law. If the secrecy is revealed, mothers-in-law create hurdles for the *kelins* due to this "disrespectful behaviour." Considering remittance as an indication of love and care of the family, both mother-in-law and *kelin* desire receiving money personally as a symbol of emotional preference

89 Shirin Akiner, "Between tradition and modernity-the dilemma facing contemporary Central Asian women," in *Post-Soviet Women: From the Baltic to Central Asia*, ed. Mary Buckley (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

90 Harris, *Control and Subversion: Gender Relations in Tajikistan*.

in a man's life.[91] Thus, sending money secretly to wives can cause insecurity among mothers, resulting in household animosity and portraying the mothers-in-law as threats to *kelins'* economic or social rights. Nevertheless, we think it is the cultural and social norms that are responsible for making mothers-in-law exercise the formulations and dynamics they learnt themselves within a patriarchal setting.

Nonetheless, the question remains unanswered: to what extent does this hidden bargaining power alter gender norms within and outside the household? Agarwal[92] argues that "social norms are not immutable and are themselves subject to bargaining and change, even if the time horizon for changes some types of norms maybe a long time." We also believe that existing gender norms are the result of past ideological struggles, and that today's women's contestation and bargaining could potentially form a base for a different future. The increasing number of hidden remittances demonstrates that women's bargaining power is fluid and dependent on different associated factors. *Kelins* in Tajikistan are using covert strategies and gradually contributing to modestly change women's bargaining power in patriarchal families. We recommend that future researchers investigate how the use of smartphones and the internet impacts a couple's relationship and access to remittance through formal banking systems, and whether or not intra-household bargaining has changed over time.

91 Hannaford, "Intimate remittances: marriage, migration, and MoneyGram in Senegal."
92 Agarwal, ""Bargaining" and Gender Relations: Within and Beyond the Household," 19.