



Lund University

Master of Science in International Development and Management

**LIFE IN DOMINATION: STAY OR ESCAPE?**  
*What Wives of Tajik Migrants Think and Do*

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# ABSTRACT

The thesis focuses on the perceptions and strategies of migrant's wives in Tajikistan influenced by the male out-migration. We discuss how migrants' wives view and bargain their positions in the family setting. We point to the power relations in the families and scrutinize the mechanism of misrecognition through which the domination is justified by the migrant wives. We also suggest how such perceptions can be adjusted to improve their positions.

To benefit from the sociological discourses we choose the Theory of Practice by Pierre Bourdieu which recognizes both objective and subjective aspects influencing agents' choices. This theory allowed us to conceptualise the misrecognition of power and make it operational for the development.

We apply a qualitative research drawing on open-ended interviews. Composite narratives followed by the discussion serve to interpret our data.

Our findings indicate that it is the combination of individual behavioural patterns and resources that make women either reconcile with their inferior positions or opt for changes. Taking their life conditions as inevitable many lack agency or do not see opportunities brought about with the migration. Only very few succeed in turning the new conditions to their benefit.

Recommendations to development practitioners finalise the research.

**Key words:** *power structures, misrecognition, change, women, agency, Tajikistan*

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# GLOSSARY

Hijab	Muslim head scarf for women
Kishlak	Village
Khukumat	Municipality
Madrasa	Religious Islamic school
Nikokh	Muslim wedding
Sharia	Islamic Law
Talok	Muslim divorce
ZAGS	Civil registration authority (Russian abbreviation)

# ABBREVIATIONS

GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
OECD	Organization for Cooperation and Development
USD	United States Dollar

# FOREWORD

Elaborating this thesis was a quest which took almost one year and was an enjoyable journey with great learning for both of us. Not always was it smooth but this just ignited our interest. Even defining our research focus became challenging to such an extent that it deserved special attention in our thesis.

Our internship in Tajikistan was agreed in early 2012. This allocated enough time for us to conduct a preliminary study on the country. Plenty of developmental problems were on the agenda. What stood out was a massive labour out-migration which seemed to be the only hope for the Tajik economy. Every single report mentioned its extraordinary dependence on remittances. Some sources indicated 60% of national GDP (IOM 2009). The statistics turned into reality when we arrived in Tajikistan. *‘Every family here has at least one member who migrated... either it is a husband, a son, a father or a father-in-law’* (Fieldwork data). This and similar statements were repeated to us over and over again from the first moment we stepped into the field.

Financial aspects of the problem had already received quite an attention both from the government and international agencies. What we became specifically interested in were great numbers of women living for years without husbands. Exploring their problems and life conditions became our main focus since we believed that the social and psychological sides of the migration should not be missed.

Entering the field we had livelihoods and empowerment approaches in mind. First interviews proved there was something beyond this in the stories we heard. We learnt about the problems in women’s lives associated with migration, perceptions of their positions and expectations. Migration brought a different order to their lives, something not complying with their views. Financial benefits from the remittances were closely associated with sour experiences of families left behind. Surprisingly to us, women did not admit their situations unjust, instead offered excuses and justifications. It was this acceptance that caught our attention again and again.

Why do women reconcile with injustice so obvious to us? How to best consider subjective perceptions? Answering these questions we particularly benefited from

working in a pair. Our academic ambitions and interests complemented each other and resulted in this thesis.

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Our fieldwork was carried out during the internship with the Centre for Sociological Research (CSR) ‘ZERKALO’ in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. It was thanks to the support of its staff that many doors opened to us. We specially thank Kahramon Bakozoda, Director of the CSR ‘ZERKALO’, for inviting us to Tajikistan. We highly appreciate efforts of Gulnora Beknazarova for guiding us throughout our stay and providing contacts to scholars, practitioners and respondents. We are grateful to Soleh Sharipov who made our logistical arrangements during the data collection much easier. We also express our gratitude to Parviz Kamoliddinov, Malika, Aziz Azizov, Aziz Kasymov, Abdoukhalim Mirzoev, Rakhima Kasymova, Olim Sattorov, regional teams from Khoudjand and Kourgan-Tyube and all other people in ‘ZERKALO’ for their friendship and support.

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

Power is being widely discussed by scientists from various fields for centuries. In sociology this dispute became really heated. The ubiquitous presence of power practically in each and every type of human interactions was recognized by sociologists throughout the world. When discussed in academia the matter looks hypothetical. Anyhow, it gains tangible features when observed in the field.

In Tajikistan power manifested itself in many ways. We could observe how the state controlled the citizens, international agencies imposed power through funding activities, religious institutions preached dogmas, parents dictated to children, men controlled their wives, etc. Power structures could be observed at all levels of Tajik society. Naturally, the family domain was no exception. Power exercised among family members was responsible for many sufferings.

Behaviour of husbands and in their absence mothers-in-law was often abusive against sons' wives, if not physically then psychologically. Yet the most striking experience from the field was the justification of such behaviour by all members of the family, including wives themselves. It was a shocking understanding that for some reason women refused to admit they were exposed to domination.

All these fuelled our interest to explore the phenomenon. We realized that, although imposed by the outer structures, submissiveness roots somewhere in inner attitudes and dispositions. To figure out why women reconcile with the unjust order we needed to grasp it from their subjective perspective. So, we opted to understand how migrants' wives perceive their situation and what effects their perceptions and actions have on the existing order. We saw a need to analyze the subjective dimension in its interconnection with the external factors as it did not receive an accurate attention in the current development practice. Hence, we centred the thesis around a sociological notion of subjectivity in our attempt to re-discover the importance of this dimension for the development practices. In the light of this we formulated our research question:

- **How do wives of Tajik out-migrants perceive their positions within the local family context?**
  - How do migrant wives negotiate their positions within the prevalent order?

- How do their attitudes contribute to the schemes of domination?
- How can a space for change be discovered, if any?

To grasp the subjective dimension still recognizing the objective truth about injustice we employed the Theory of Practice by Pierre Bourdieu which infuses economic issues into the sociological studies of subjectivity and enables us to have a grip of both aspects at a time (Callinicos 2007). Bourdieu's synthesis of earlier utilitarian ideas of Marx with abstract theorizing by Nietzsche, Foucault, Habermas and others made it possible to consider subjective notions within the developmental problematics. We found this approach a great opportunity since Bourdieu's network-like theorization allows us to explore subjective perceptions of migrant wives within the wider objective context. We also experienced in Tajikistan that not all women share a common interest as would a feminist concept claim (Benton & Craib 2010). Thus, it is exactly Bourdieu's stance which could, in our opinion, comprehensively respond to our academic and practical ambitions within the development.

His theorization also influenced our methodological choices. A qualitative research type served to best explore views of women and open ended interviews provided enough flexibility for our respondents to express whatever views they considered important or interesting. Throughout our fieldwork we established friendly and trustful relationships with many of those women.

We elaborated this thesis believing that its findings and recommendations would contribute to future achievements in this sphere.

## 1.1 Originality

We strongly believe the genuine improvement of the quality of life may be achieved only when economic wellbeing is combined with changes in the people's inner attitudes. A review of the existing research and development programmes in Tajikistan shows that there is already a great focus on the former. Yet we believe the latter aspect is under-represented.

A focus on the migrants' wives perceptions of massive male out-migration would fill up a gap in the available research on the problem.

The study gives a voice to women at the grassroots level. Their active involvement, we believe, may discover a potential for changes in the Tajik society. We hope our findings

will be interesting and useful for the academic community, social workers and, especially, our respondents.

## **1.2 Note on the respondents**

All the characters presented in the thesis have fictional names to preserve their anonymity. We generally refer to our study group as migrants' wives, women in Tajikistan or Tajik women considering them geographically, not ethnically.

## **1.3 Disposition**

The thesis is divided into several main parts. The methodology comes directly after the introduction and explains our philosophical assumptions, research approaches, data sources, data collection tools and analysis. The next part is dedicated to the contextual economic, cultural and social background of Tajikistan with a special focus on the family setting. The theory and key concepts applied are presented in the fourth part. This is followed by the data interpretation in a form of three composite narratives with a short analysis after each story and the discussion which summarizes main results. The conclusion is represented in the sixth chapter. Our recommendations are captured in the seventh part which closes the thesis.

## 2 METHODOLOGY

Our methodological choices were influenced by Bourdieu since his scientific vision and practice are synthetic: they cover disciplinary, theoretical and methodological issues at a time (Wacquant 2006). Besides, his extensive theorization was based on multiple empirical proves.

### 2.1 Philosophical stance

Bourdieu attempts to reconcile structuralism and constructivism and claims he goes beyond this dualism. Anyhow, he uses terms ‘*genetic structuralism*’ and ‘*constructivist structuralism*’ when speaking of his position. His perception of the social environment is agonistic: for him social world is an arena for never ending struggle which generates diversity (Callinicos 2007). He tries to resolve the agency-structure ontological problem in sociology which represents the situation where, on one hand, structures make actions possible and at the same time hinder them and, on the other, only social agents may either reproduce or modify social structures (Benton & Craib 2011: 133).

Bourdieu believes there is true and false knowledge. Scientific knowledge is needed to grasp the genuine character of social phenomena. The external existence of the objects of the social knowledge and the need to continuously explore the true hidden nature of those objects imply our social ideas to be always open to ongoing corrections as we get to know more about them (Callinicos 2007). In this he to a great extent follows the tradition of **critical realism**.

Together with critical realists, Bourdieu admits that externality exists independently and not just in our minds. We can try to understand it although it cannot be known fully (Callinicos 2007: 291). The laws of social sciences can be treated as natural laws, but we need to use different tools to understand them (Grenfell 2008: 23; Benton & Craib 2011). In particular, sociological discourses help us to get knowledge of subjective matters - notions that cannot be sensed. But what we express is always a representation; it is not the thing itself. (Grenfell 2008: 23).

Bourdieu’s position implies another important feature in our research - reflexivity about the capacity of a thought or language to represent external phenomena the knowledge of which

is seen as a social process itself (Benton & Craib 2011). It allows us to justify ethical and moral conditions for the circumstances we scrutinize and elaborate measures to preserve or transform the situation. This brings the discussion very close to the needs of the development practice. If structures can be proved to bear negative effects of suffering, oppression or deprivation, we can assess them as such and consequently prove their eradication. We realize there cannot be a single approach to what is good and what is not. That is why we need to carry out social practices in relation to value considerations and be clear about our own system of values. Still, common sense, empirical observations and general perceptions of human nature may serve as criteria for our judgments and, committed to a constructive dialog, we have all chances to reach consensus (Benton & Craib 2011: 212).

The impossibility of experiments is often seen as an epistemological disadvantage of critical realism. Indeed, social phenomena exist in their continuous interrelation and it does not seem possible to isolate certain conditions to experiment with them. Still, in social sciences crisis situations can be seen as an analogue to an experiment in natural sciences as they tend to disclose normally concealed structures (Benton & Craib 2010). This point is also being referred to in the Bourdieu's theorization as it will be explained below (see Theoretical Framework).

## 2.2 Research design

Our ambition to explore women's practices and reasoning behind them called us to opt for a **qualitative** research. An **explanatory** type enabled us to explore the meaning of the established practices and behavioural patterns recognizing that it is a task for a social scientist to reveal it (Dreyfus & Rabinow 1993: 38-39). Our intention to understand the world through the eyes of our respondents inevitably called for an **interpretive** approach to people's subjective experiences within the **phenomenological** discussion given we consider phenomenology here as a theorization of social issues. Taken as a set of qualitative research tools **phenomenology** implies our choice of introspective - reflexive methods to learn about the mindsets of others.

Being preoccupied with exploring our topic in the best possible way we were **pragmatic** in choosing appropriate methods sometimes borrowing them from different research designs (Creswell 2007). For this purpose we combined direct and participant observations more

used in ethnography with unstructured interviews, narratology and Bourdieu's approach to reflexivity. Moreover, we applied an ethnographic approach to the style of our paper since we spent quite a long time in the country of our respondents and feel empathy to them.

Our research process involved both inductive and deductive reasoning. Induction characterized the initial phase of our stay in the field when we were shifting the focus of the research as well as the composition of narratives at a later stage. After Bourdieu's theory of practice had been selected as our theoretical framework our approach generally involved deduction. The need to multiply shuttle between the data and the theory resulted in an **iterative** approach.

## 2.3 Reflexivity

Term *reflexivity* relates to the way how researchers view themselves, their actions and thinking, in relation to the social phenomena they study (Holliday 2007). For Bourdieu (2000), it is crucial to reflect both on the research taking place, and the identity of the researcher formed through the background and experience.

How can this be implemented? First, a researcher needs to realize that knowledge in social sciences cannot be produced impartially (Wacquant 2006: 13). Second, in the field a researcher undertakes to discover both the lived experience and impacts of the social situation. Third, a researcher builds up on the own place within the academic and professional environment, patterns of thought, values, national traditions of the researcher and the researched as well as on biases incorporated in the scientific discipline itself.

Bourdieu (2003: 287-288) is fully aware of the risk of biases when generating knowledge. On one hand, reflexivity warns a researcher against free interpretations of the object of knowledge. On the other, it may prevent him from the appropriation of the own experience. Anyhow, this exercise shall be subject to thorough analytical verification.

For us Bourdieu's approach to reflexivity is significant since it to a great extent resonates with our own visions of the field work. We believe it adds consistency and clear academic vision to our intuitive expectations.

## 2.4 We as researchers

Jointly interested in the topic of this study, we undertook the fieldwork in a pair. One of us came from Ukraine and had distinct Slavic features which immediately caught local's attention. The other one, a Muslim convert, wore *hijab* (headscarf) and puzzled people with her rather European face but Muslim clothing. We talked in English to each other, sometimes using Russian words. All these drew attention and actually opened many doors to us.

Together we could apply various means to connect to people. Common Soviet legacy for Tajikistan and Ukraine still generated a sort of retrospective sadness in many Tajiks for the lifestyle which was never to return. They eagerly recollected how stable and predictable life used to be and how hard it was to survive nowadays. Religion was another topic readily discussed and a firsthand knowledge about it was often helpful in breaking the ice between us and locals. Being women helped us when approaching our female respondents. They often called on us to understand their problems from the gender perspective. What was interesting was that we actually benefited from being outsiders to the local setting. Our respondents spoke more openly to us not fearing that their stories would be revealed to the neighbours and gossiped about.

This was our first encounter with Tajikistan and Central Asia although one of us had a living experience in South and Southeast Asian countries before. For both it was a first empirical experience with qualitative research. Yet, we were equipped with a theoretical knowledge about conducting a social study. In this regard it is worth discussing to what extent we could bring in a Western developmental perspective. Whatsoever, we consciously attempted to appreciate local values rather than press our perceptions on them. We may guess we could advance better in that than any other western researchers, since, coming from Eastern Europe, we used to be subjects to such an approach ourselves.

## 2.5 Fieldwork

Our research was initiated in May 2012 when we started to consider topics of interest and explore scientific literature on Tajikistan. One of us arrived in the country on 14 August 2012, the other - on 31 August. An active research started in September. We were collecting contextual knowledge till mid-November attending conferences, workshops, collaborating

with the host research agency and meeting international and local development practitioners. Meanwhile, we tried with first interviews in Dushanbe where we were located. Mainly, our respondents were interviewed between 15 November and 18 December 2012. In parallel, first transcriptions were performed. We finalized the fieldwork by 24 December. All interviews were transcribed by the end of January 2013. Since then we were mostly preoccupied with data analysis.

## **2.6 Data collection**

### ***2.6.1 Data type***

Our material consists of secondary (published materials) and primary data (interviews and observations). Secondary data on migration related problems, livelihoods and general situation in the country provided information on the problem and country (see de Haas 2006; Maharjan et. al. 2012; Menjivar & Agadjanian 2007; ILO 2010; IOM 2009; Sinha et. al. 2011). This was complemented with interviews with local scholars and representatives from development agencies in Tajikistan (IOM, Swiss Development agency, OECD, etc). This data served us to form our specific interest and research problem. Anyhow, only the data on the country context was included in this thesis as supportive to our discussion.

Observations were recorded throughout our entire stay in Tajikistan. They included our impressions, statements from local people (colleagues, friends, drivers, etc.), minutes from seminars and conferences and notes from our interviews. Interviews were initially designed as semi-structured with a guide developed based on the literature review. But first interviews proved that an open ended form was more suitable as our respondents touched upon many subjective issues. So, for the further data collection we developed a list of prompts which proved to be less binding (see Appendix). Our effort to collect as many interviews as possible resulted in 41 interviews when we reached the point of saturation. We accessed our respondents through multiple gatekeepers - host agency employees and local researchers.

### ***2.6.2 Selection criteria***

Based on our research design we used a purposive sampling and identified criteria for our respondents: 1) they were females whose husbands were labour migrants and 2) they spoke Russian.

These criteria allowed us to meet women of different ages, backgrounds and from different areas which enriched our material.

A special comment needs to be made on the second criterion. We specifically felt we had to include it after a couple of interviews had been conducted in Tajik. During those, we had to rely on amateur translators, often friends of the respondents. This resulted in a situation when the respondent felt uncomfortable to reveal her secrets and a deal of data was lost in unprofessional translation.

### **2.6.3 *Interviewing***

Establishing trustful relationships with the respondents became a special experience for us. The issue was not easy at all since normally family matters were not openly discussed. To make our respondents comfortable we tried to create a psychological space for the interviews.

Our strategy was to establish as informal relationship with the women as possible. When interviews were held in their homes we found it polite to start from simple compliments about their living space - both we and the woman immediately felt much more relaxed. Somehow, in this way we became more familiar to her.

A tradition of local hospitality made the issue even simpler. While we were offered tea, fruits and candies, our respondents asked us about different matters so we found ourselves researched by them. We saw it as a good chance to discuss things on equal terms.

When conducting interviews in formal venues, we had to start them directly, being limited in time and space. This sometimes implied certain tension.

We typically started interviews with quite formal data, such as household details, a place of residence, family members, etc. This opened up conversations which almost always evolved into long and detailed life stories with interesting points on different topics. Sometimes, respondents even sought for our passive support asking: '*Do you understand me like a woman?*' or '*Is it so in your country?*'

Our general strategy was active listening (Kvale 2007). This allowed us to better engage our respondents into the dialogue and motivated them to answer in an elaborate way. In this regard we may argue that the data obtained became a product of an active collaboration between the respondent and the researchers (Wells 2011).

With some it was not that smooth. They diligently tried to make up nice stories for us. We let them speak, listened attentively. Then, at some moment, we could observe signs of inner struggle occurring in the respondent's mind. She might have stopped for a while, thinking hard, and then would start a completely different story, full of emotions, opinions and perceptions.

We, anyhow, failed to establish confident relationships with few women. Here, we had to ask many questions and sometimes repeat them in different ways and at different times during the interview to 'fish' for the information. It often happened when an interpreter was present. Still, we could obtain valuable data from observations of unspoken expressions of our respondents - feelings of discomfort, fear or gratitude strongly influencing verbal statements. We considered them in the construction of composite narratives.

All mentioned would not have been probably possible if we had to conduct interviews separately. We had a privilege to split our duties during the interviews. The Russian-speaking conducted an interview; the other closely observed and took notes. It did not, anyhow, meant that we acted strictly according to this split. We at all times strived to complement each other's activities.

## **2.7 Transcription and analysis**

Our interviews were taken in Russian and directly transcribed in English by ourselves. In this way we could control the quality of the translations. The transcripts were complemented with detailed notes taken during the interviews. In addition, we could always go back to the original audio-material to verify the information in the transcripts.

Composite narratives were selected to present our data in correspondence with the how-nature of our research question since narrative stories show cultural and behavioural backgrounds they draw upon. We also opted for composite narratives as they could in the best way represent and explain multiple causalities between certain life trajectories and strategies. Squire (in Wells 2011: 42) points out that through narratives individuals justify their places in the world. A moment in time, a place, a respondent, a researcher and an audience as well as other possible factors contribute to the creation of a narrative. In this case, language was central to understand the context (Wells 2011: 3).

We referred to first-person oral life stories of events and experiences (Wells 2011: 7).

We combined conversation and narrative analysis. The first was used for collecting social and economic information which, we believe, create a context for the personal realities. The other considered how the story itself, its performance and context were interconnected. We saw the combination of the approaches as the best way since, on one hand, they give priority to different aspects of our analysis while, on the other, their boundaries were sometimes overlapping (Wells 2011).

All interviews were multiply read through and deconstructed into units of information. We proceeded with composite narratives through steps suggested by Wells (2011): obtaining stories – conceptualizing common experience – enlarging our understanding of the experience – and considering the implications of the analysis for social practices. The data analysis resulted in dividing our 41 interviews into three parts. The first story is based on 30 interviews and the second – on 10. The third story represented a single respondent - the one whose experience made significant difference. Anyhow, this split did not imply any proportional division in regard to our findings although might indicate some general trends. To verify them a further research is required.

## **2.8 Ethical issues**

Conducting our fieldwork we were specifically preoccupied with ethical concerns many of which had a gendered dimension. Not to harm our respondents was the essential idea, both during and after the research. Our concern of the comfort of every single woman from our sample was always superior to our academic interest.

We never forgot to clearly explain our purposes and intentions as well as who we were. We explicitly guaranteed anonymity to the respondents and at all times adhered to that. Typically, after our short introduction we asked for an oral consent for both an interview and audio recording. In three cases respondents refused to be audio-taped and we relied on the notes.

We cared that our respondents did not feel like research objects during our fieldwork. We followed this principle when writing and presenting our findings too.

When women had particularly difficult experiences, this made us wonder whether it was ethically right for us to recall these experiences. So, we adopted a great deal of empathy and

tact in order to comfort the respondent and pointed out that it was her choice to answer or not.

We also tried to make sure that the respondents did not retrospectively regret after having revealed their secrets to us. Therefore, we specifically ensured our appreciation of the received information and underlined our intention to contribute to the knowledge that might assist addressing the problems. In some occasions we were in return thanked for paying attention to the problems of our respondents as in their culture these would never be discussed.

A matter of payments to the respondents deserves a special attention. We initially were against any remuneration since this was generally perceived as unethical in the Western academic field (Holliday 2007; Kvale 1996). So we acted accordingly during a couple of interviews. But hard conditions our respondents lived in made us feel that we actually wanted to help them in some way. So, we never promised any reimbursement but usually managed to persuade them to take a symbolic amount of 20 Somoni (app. 4 USD) after an interview had been completed.

## 2.9 Trustworthiness

We agree with Guba and Lincoln (in Bryman 2008: 377) who believe that there are multiple aspects of the social world and, therefore, notions of trustworthiness and authenticity rather than validity and reliability are more applicable to the qualitative research.

Our research is trustworthy because we base it on the verified data from various sources: interviews and detailed observation notes. We also used probing questions during our interviews to ensure that the meanings were well understood.

Our research analysis was closely guided by the theory. The theoretical perspective provided a frame within which the interpretations were given meaning and the understanding of social world was constructed.

Reflexivity was an important aspect for our research and a great attention was paid to explain the reader our positions as researchers. Potential limitations and biases were outlined to increase the trustworthiness.

### 3 TAJIKISTAN: CONTEXTUAL INSIGHT

This section provides information on the general economic, social and cultural situation in the country with an insight into the family relations. It reflects upon the objective structures our respondents act within and this description contributes to the further discussion.

#### 3.1 Country information

Tajikistan is a Central Asian republic with the population of 7.3 mln people (IOM 2009). The country is the poorest among all former Soviet republics. Infrastructure, industry and agriculture fell in decline after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The civil war of 1992-97 made the situation even worse and profoundly contributed to the desperation of the local people. They even 16 years later see peace the only desired circumstance and do not expect much from the conditions they live in. The Soviet legacy as well as a recent exposure to Russian lifestyle pushed Tajiks into ‘*a hybrid cultural state*’ characterized by the coexistence of the local tradition and cultural views brought in from the powerful patron (Harris 2004).

The country heavily depends upon the cost-inefficient aluminium and subsidized cotton production. The job market remains insufficient. The average salary accounts for 70 USD (ILO 2009). Especially the young are forced to fight for getting a more or less decent job. Failing to get employed officially, they often end up in the shadow sector. The corrupted government does not do much to revive the economy. The social security system does not function appropriately either (Baschieri & Falkingham 2009). The government fails to provide for the health and education services. Annual school dropout rates for girls grow and reach dramatic levels in remote rural areas. The mortality rates remain high.

#### 3.2 Migration

Under such circumstances people massively migrate abroad, mostly to Russia, to sustain big families. If some years ago one could speak of a brain drain, i.e. migration of proficient and educated labour force, today even low educated population comprises a great deal of the flow. Hence, the trend is a massive out-migration of practically all men in their most productive age (IOM 2009).

The history of out-migration starts in 1990s. Some agencies estimated in 2008 more than 1 mln Tajik migrants including those unregistered. Over 60% of GDP accounted for remittances that year. From the official statistics on migration we could form migrant's profiles. The majority of them (95%) are men. Most of the migrants (77%) are younger than 40 years old. They send home approximately 20-50% of their salaries, where the average salary comprises about 400 USD (ILO 2010; IOM 2009).

Conditions for migrants abroad are often harsh. Many of them can occupy only low-skill jobs requiring physical labour, as in construction, although some engage in services, i.e. taxi drivers or sellers (IOM 2009). The number of migrants' deaths has been increasing. Only in 2008 there were reported 300 accidents that involved migrants with fatal consequences for one third (Hegland 2010). Tajiks experience tricking by their employers and often are forced to survive without promised wages. Health problems together with expensive and inaccessible medical care abroad often force them to return to their home country sick or disabled which has negative consequences for their families who temporarily or permanently lose their main breadwinners (ILO 2010).

### 3.3 Gender performance

The ruling principle in Tajik culture is the honour-and-shame system (Harris 2004). Each family has to preserve its honour in front of others. Appropriate gender performance which should be declared again and again, especially to the public, predefines family's social significance. For men, this translates into the ability to control their women and for women it manifests in their acts of submissiveness. Whatsoever, it is not crucial if the family members perform accordingly unless they are recognized to do so in public. The power of gossips is essential in maintaining the order in the society and enables each family to control how the others adhere to gender roles. To escape gossiping and misjudgement both genders prefer to participate in a kind of a survival strategy using gender masks – visibly demonstrating the power or submissiveness accordingly (Harris 2011: 98-99).

We also noted some contradictions in the people's perceptions which put them into a constant struggle for the appropriate gender performance. The case was that having intimate relationships before marriage was on the woman's side associated with a great shame, but on the man's side enhanced his masculinity. Thus, men found themselves in the continuous effort where, on one hand, they had to control their own women; on the other,

they tried to seduce womenfolk of someone else thus adding to the general tension in the society (Harris 2004).

### 3.4 Family structure

Traditional families in Tajikistan are of collective nature, patriarchal and elder dominated. Benefits of a family are superior to the personal needs.

It clearly manifests itself, for instance, in the institution of arranged marriages where the spouses often hardly know each other. This practice comes up as a result of the combination of the local culture, intra-familial power relations and Tajik ideas of masculinity (Harris 2011: 105). The advised marrying age for a girl is between 16 and 22. Being older and still single is a topic for gossips. Yet finding a good husband is becoming a great problem due to many men living abroad and increasingly more of them being drug or alcohol addicts. Religious weddings (*nikokh*) with no civil registrations are becoming more common as are marriages between relatives. Practised both in urban and rural areas, *nikokh* is specially used in cases when a man marries second or third wife since polygyny is officially illegal (Hegland 2010).

Traditionally, in-marrying daughters come to the husband's homes being perceived as strangers there (Harris in Jackson 2012: 8). Such a status makes them potentially challenging for the established intra-household setting where the husband's mother enjoys the leading role (Hegland 2010; Jackson 2011). A man's mother is his first and foremost responsibility which also explains why remittances are often sent to her. Women accept this but also demand their rights as they feel that being wives makes them eligible for receiving some portion of husband's earnings.

To suppress the perceived challenge associated with the appearance of another woman, all family members expect a wife in the husband's household to constantly perform all house work. The wife accepts this role and knows she should not complain. Indeed, many of them cheerfully and immediately carry out orders. In such a setting marriage becomes the main domain of the oppression of women. A fact that women mostly see themselves as wives and mothers also adds to the prevalence of patriarchy and male domination (Jackson 2012: 1, 5). Hegland (2010) observed that economic situation has a direct effect on gender

and generational differences in Tajikistan. Where resources are scarce, both husbands and mothers-in-law tend to be more abusive.

Regardless of economic benefits, migration often has negative effects on the overall family structure. The long absence of men in households often causes disturbances, where the majority of men feel estranged from other family members after their return. Quite often migration is a reason for divorces (ILO 2010).

### 3.5 State's position

Tajikistan is a secular state. Anyhow, the overwhelming majority of Tajiks regard themselves as Muslims, even though they do not practice daily. In any case, the secular government continuously interferes with religious life under the motto of fighting radical Islamic influence, for example, forbidding women and children to attend mosques (Harris 2004).

At the same time the family domain has not been regulated for an extended period of time. The state propaganda imposes gender roles as the family and neighbours do. The state hardly encourages women's engagement in the public sphere (Harris 2011). This is unsurprising because even during Soviet times when the gender parity was formally declared the achievements of this policy could have been seen only in public life. The private beliefs about family, marriage and gender roles remained unchanged (Harris 1998; Hegland 2010).

### 3.6 Islam and women

The recovery of Islamic norms reinforced the inferior position of many women. Current state interventions into the sphere of religion resulted in a boost of spontaneous and scattered Islamic knowledge. In such conditions, the access to religious knowledge for women and girls is limited to the family that exposes them exclusively to the pieces of it that comfort their relatives. In some cases girls are enrolled in *madrasas* (religious schools) but these replace the state education, not supplement it (Harris 2004).

Moreover, Islamic norms and local traditions are being often mixed up and blurred into each other (Harris 2004). During our stay in Tajikistan we noticed very intriguing notions of religion explained to us by Tajik women (see Data interpretation: Three life paths). For

comparison we offer below a brief introduction into Islamic norms regarding women and family based on scholarly interpretations of The Holy Qur'an and other scriptures.

Islam favours family institution and regards it as one of the most important. It instigates people to marry and have children. Anyhow, it clearly states that marriage is an institution of love, compassion, kindness and understanding between the two people. Though first-kin marriages are allowed, they are not recommended. The general practice in Tajikistan contradicts these statements with many couples married against their will and among relatives (Harris 2004). Islam allows polygyny but under strict conditions, such as equal treatment of all wives including their equal share in husband's earnings. Because it is hard to maintain in practice, it is not widely promoted (Awde 2005; Harris 2004). The religion encourages couples to have children but it also binds to feed and sustain them. Divorces are allowed but strongly disapproved (Awde 2005; Harris 2004).

To feed the family is a profound responsibility of a man. This, however, does not imply that a woman should not be allowed to work outside the household. On the contrary, the scriptures suggest that women shall be educated and there is no statement in Qur'an that would explicitly forbid women from paid employment. The scriptures do not indicate any segregation of sexes for men and women either (Harris 2004; Svensson 2000).

The suspicion that the gender stereotypes in Tajikistan are rather cultural than religious also comes from the comparison between Islam as it is perceived in this country and in other regions. Especially the understanding of men and women operating in separate worlds is largely ignored in, for example, Southeast Asia. Harris (2004) believes that it is the honour-and-shame culture rather than Islam that underlies such practices.

### **3.7 Opportunities for women**

The extended absence of men and their incapability to sustain families pose extra burden on women. In many instances they adopt roles of income earners. This is in spite of the traditional view that for women it is honourable to be fully devoted to child rearing and house caretaking (Harris 2011). We observed that although women were oftentimes allowed to work outside the household, yet this depended on the type of work and women's own appearance. Husbands might be jealous when their wives worked with men, in other cases they were not happy with the way women dressed and demanded them to put on traditional long dresses. In other circumstances we were told that certain jobs, such

as work in a hospital or selling in the market were not appropriate for girls and only poor women performed them.

Unskilled and uneducated women have limited options to enter the labour market and often end up in the informal sector with typically long working hours and low wages. In these circumstances women adopt various strategies to survive, i.e. selling in local markets, producing dairy or baked products, growing vegetables and selling them door-to-door, tailoring, etc. (Hegland 2010). Those with education might work as teachers.

### **3.8 Summary**

All in all, poor economic conditions and weak social security system add to the low expectations of the people who still remember terrifying experiences of the civil war. Perpetuating poverty loosens traditional habits. People are being disturbed by unclear perspectives. Massive out-migration profoundly reduces intellectual and labour potential. These affect family relationships negatively. Many families got split for years with the spouses losing attachment to each other and kids being brought up without fathers. A negative impact on women deserves to be mentioned separately. Many of them experience both physical and psychological pressure. Left without support, they are being forced into a conflict with the outer world: they have to look for ways to sustain themselves and their kids financially as well as cope with a hopeless status of abandoned women.

## 4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section introduces key concepts of Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice which serve to explain social phenomena that define people's actions (Grenfell 2008: 24). We systematized them in the model of our own elaboration to best address our research needs. The model serves to portray how assets and inner attitudes predefine different life choices, given that all are influenced by time and risk. The established casualties reveal how women achieve changes or reproduce power structures.

### 4.1 Theory of Practice

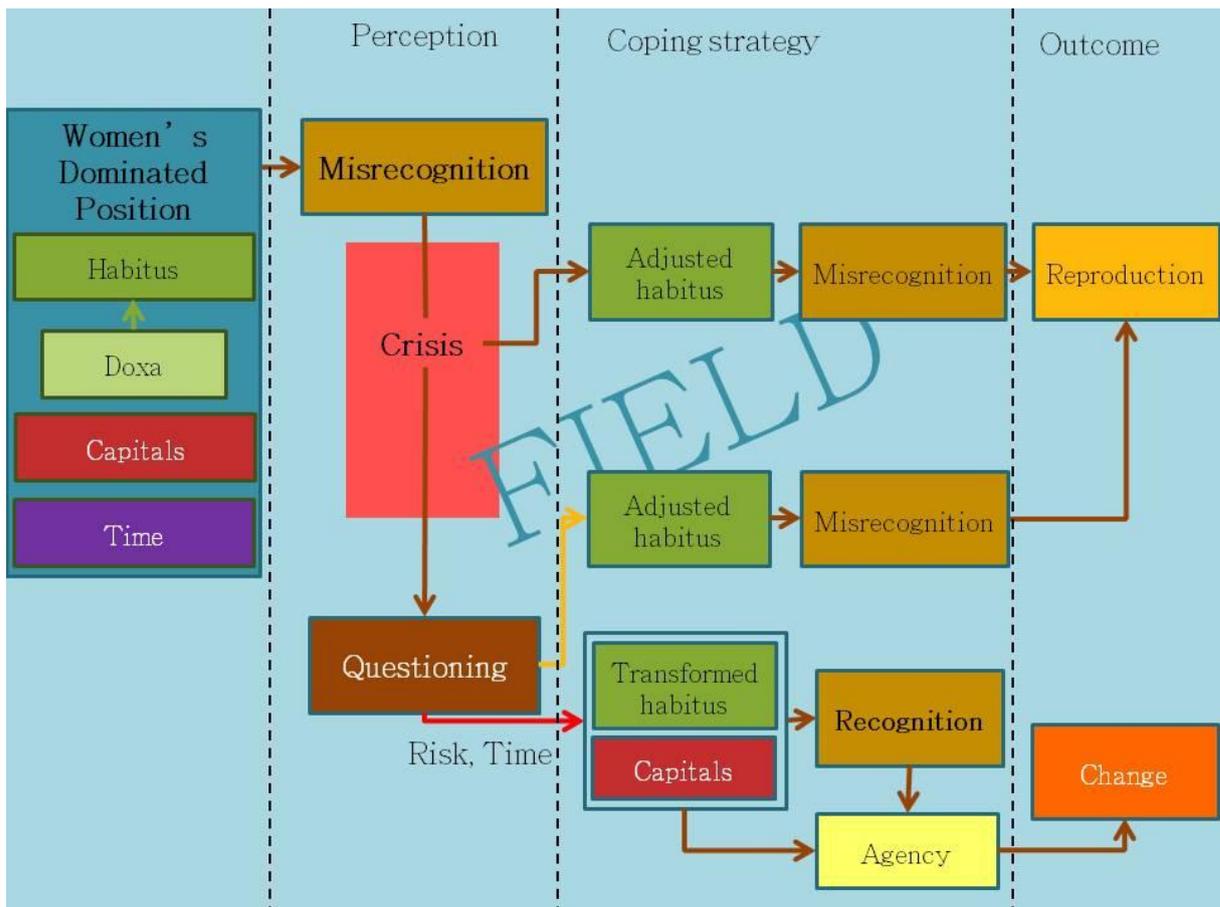
The theory of practice identifies positions and reasoning behind individuals' behaviour within the social setting. In the theory this setting is referred to as *field(s)*. The modern world represents the multiplicity of social fields interacting vertically and horizontally, i.e. economy, law, politics, family, religion, power, etc. (Calhoun et. al. 1993:5). Bourdieu does not clearly identify the boundaries of each field. Anyhow, fields should be understood as spaces for struggle with boundaries between the fields being objects of struggle themselves (Schwartz 1997). With our focus on the family field, we will consider the effects of economic, political and religious fields as they influence the family field's order and rules.

Power has been recognized specific in its universal presence throughout all other fields (Calhoun et al. 1993: 5). Indeed, social interaction between individuals is based on power relations. This designs a hierarchy in the field where holders of greater power direct it towards weaker agents creating dominant and dominated positions. How agents perceive their positions significantly contributes to how the practice of each individual is established. Where the dominated positions are not perceived as such, social and cultural inequality is being reproduced. Bourdieu identifies this with his concept of *misrecognition* (Calhoun et. al. 1993: 5). By misrecognition we understand perceptions of power by those exposed to it who simply do not realize the fact of being dominated. On the contrary, they see their destinies as unavoidable and reconcile with their exclusion as rightful (Wacquant 1993: 239).

To be minimized this phenomenon requires scientific conceptualization which then would lead to the *true recognition* of the prevailing order. Once conceptualized, it allows correcting the way power structures are being grasped by the dominated which, in turn, would help to eradicate negative outcomes of the misrecognition and open a potential space for changes. Here, the role of sociologists and intellectuals to assist in this process is particularly stressed by Bourdieu (Burawoy 2011).

Exploring inner attitudes of our respondents generated within and influenced by the local social background are central to answering our research question. Under certain conditions they allow to either critically reflect upon or misrecognize power. Going one step further we opted to see how these attitudes lead to different outcomes and what factors influence them (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Conceptual Model of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice



Source: Own elaboration

To understand how individuals perceive their positions we have to first find out how these positions are created. According to Bourdieu, three factors contribute to this: internalized

objective reality (habitus), assets (capitals) and time. All together they predefine the practical logic of every agent's behaviour (Schwartz 1997).

*Habitus* is 'our ways of acting, feeling, thinking and being' (Grenfell 2008: 52) formed through our past experience rather than intended learning. Established in our unconsciousness, habitus is being given a meaning when a person objectifies the surrounding social environment through own individual subjectivity (Bourdieu 2010; Nash 1990: 434). Bourdieu (2010) believes that even though each habitus is different, perceptions of people living in similar conditions are based on common standpoints. This explains how we can find common features in attitudes and behavioural patterns within the migrant wives' group.

The social environment mentioned above is influenced by *doxa* - established beliefs, taken for granted knowledge and traditions, sometimes slightly adjusted to the current needs. Doxa justifies practical reasoning behind habitus (Grenfell 2008: 120). When social (objective) structures and mental (subjective) perceptions are mostly reconciled, unquestionably accepting the social world, doxa allows to misrecognize existing power relationships, leading to their reproduction and reinforcement. The reproduction occurs in the habitus of social actors through their unconscious adherence to the unquestioned norms.

*Capitals* represent a combination of utilized financial and/or non-financial means through which each individual defends and enhances own position in the field. The accumulation of capitals is attributed to gaining power in the field only when they are recognized as valuable – symbolic – resources. It is through the transformation of available capitals into a symbolic form one gains influence over others (Adkins & Skeggs 2003; Calhoun et. al. 1993: 101; Schwartz 1997).

Capitals are generally represented in three forms: economic, cultural and social. All three are convertible into each other. Economic capital represents wealth in any form. It is the

most easily convertible into the other forms. Social capital manifests itself in networks of established relations created by individuals. Cultural capital is manifested in the long-lasting dispositions of an agent, such as education, qualifications, skills and capacities.

**Gender** is identified as an additional, and the most hidden, form of capital. Bourdieu defines gender through sexual difference (2010). For him, sexual identity is a prerequisite to the social one. Early gender identities of individuals are being formed in the family when children observe parents' bodies and behaviours. As a part of our habitus, gender appears universal and natural. Therefore, it is often misrecognized. That is why, femininity, in particular, is a subject of dominance by masculinity. Only recognized and symbolically legitimized, gender can be used and turned into a different form of capital. (Adkins & Skeggs 2003; Fowler 2000: 37, 39).

**Time** in Bourdieu's theorization comes as an independent variable. It is through time that certain positions can be achieved. In this way, time directly influences the habitus of the person along an entire life trajectory and capitals allowing to accumulate them (Bourdieu 2010; Grenfell 2008).

Each individual adapts to the changing field through **practices** - more or less appropriate strategies informed by doxa and called to defend and strengthen agents' positions. Here time also plays an important role as a certain time lag is inevitable for practices to take place and correct the mismatch between the field and one's habitus. Outcomes of the practices cannot be fully predicted which associates them with uncertainty and **risk** (Schwartz 1997). In addition, each agent's behaviour bears a certain level of ignorance of his own practical mastery because he actually focuses on the practice itself, not on its principles. Because of this, some options remain invisible for him limiting agent's range of choices. (Bourdieu 2010; Schwartz 1997).

Established practices lead to different outcomes. Typically, when agents misrecognize their dominated position their actions contribute to the **reproduction** of the prevalent order. The

reproduction preserves existing norms throughout generations even if this includes social inequality and unfavourable power relations (Nash 1990). The construction of these schemes occurs unconsciously and their preservation happens even if people do not specifically strive for this (Adkins & Skeggs 2003; Bourdieu 2010). Stable social settings where changes occur gradually are favourable to the reproduction of the order as it offers its agents greater predictability. Thus, the majority of people would reproduce the prevalent context even if it is not fully favourable to them just because they somehow managed to ‘*find their way*’ within it (Grenfell 2008).

However, in a case of abrupt modifications - *crisis* seen as a clash between an individual’s habitus and the field conditions - social agents need to critically assess and adjust their attitudes (habitus) to the new opportunities in the field. This makes them question their positions and offers a *potential for change*. Anyhow, field modifications do not allow foreseeing future, besides, new practices may bring greater risks (Grenfell 2008). That is why the potential for change will not always translate into social transformations if other conditions are not fulfilled. Factors, such as *individual agency* and *collective mobilization* are crucial to subvert existing power structures (Thorpe 2009: 508). When the combination of these is lacking being hindered by prevailing habits and opinions, an individual is often left to reconcile with the current order and adjust his habitus to match existing field conditions. Hence, those who recognize their unfair positions and challenge the current order are not that many.

Considering all mentioned aspects, Bourdieu’s work reveals how uneasy changes occur although they are seen as a natural outcome of his notions of habitus and field (Grenfell 2008).

## 4.2 Limitations

### 4.2.1 *Theory Limitations*

We are aware of the limitations coming from our choice of the Theory of Practice. As indicated by Calhoun et. al. (1993), Dreyfus & Rabinow (1993), McCall (1992), Schwartz (1997) and Thorpe (2009), Bourdieu introduces concepts circularly with no specific boundaries. This is considered as a certain weakness and can cause overlaps in our

analysis. Particularly the concept of habitus is very hard to grasp as Bourdieu himself never introduced any means to evaluate it. Therefore, we can only discuss its manifestations (Grenfell 2008).

Burawoy (2012) criticises Bourdieu's view of the change and social transformation. Since Bourdieu considers individual submissiveness being predefined by the obligatory contribution from both the subjective habitus and the objective field, structural changes seem almost impossible.

Still, with our focus on the potential for change in the Tajik context we found Bourdieu's concepts insightful and explanatory.

#### ***4.2.2 Study Limitations***

Methodologically, we were limited by the concept- and context-dependence of interpretations as well as our own subjectivity. We were definitely not free of self-misrecognition Bourdieu warns against (2010). Besides, this research is our first serious attempt in sociological studies so we may lack certain experience or specific qualifications. Our backgrounds could push us into bias although they were at the same time a necessary aspect of our reflexivity. Moreover, the study was conducted at a certain moment in time. In this way our findings might be outdated at any later moment. We also realize we were unable to discover the truth in its full, if it was possible at all, but rather represented a part of it visible to us. Finally, we were aware that findings relevant to our respondents might not be generalized to the wider population.

## 5 DATA INTERPRETATION: THREE LIFE PATHS

Stories from three protagonists - Zarina, Zeba and Firuza - comprise the section below. They touch upon aspects of their married lives when their husbands are absent. The stories are composite narratives consisting of actual expressions of our respondents.

Each of the narratives represents one of the three possible paths as conceptualized in the theoretical model (see Figure 1) and shows, based on Bourdieu's theory, how the interrelation of the habitus and capitals causes differences in our protagonists' life strategies.

All stories show signs of the prevailing doxic order embedded in their habituses and requiring daughters-in-law to obey their husbands and elders without hesitations. Initially, all women misrecognized the inferior status in marital families due to the inscribed doxa. Therefore, a crisis is important to push women to reflect on their positions. Once a crisis has occurred (migration associated family problems) the interaction of habitus and capitals allows women to either question or further misrecognize their positions.

### 5.1 Zarina

Zarina's story represents the majority of our respondents who could not handle the challenges and opportunities the crisis brought about. She never critically reflected upon her status and went on perpetuating the structures of dominance.

*I am Zarina. I am from Dushanbe. My husband is in migration in Russia now. I chose my husband, it was a love marriage. Our parents were against the marriage but then they consented. I was happy. I was dreaming that my husband would earn, we build a separate house and I rear our children. We would together see how they grow up and later create their own families.*

*We had both, a Muslim wedding ceremony – nikokh and ZAGS (a civil registration body). My family bought everything for my dowry. More than 500 people were present! All in all, we spent USD 5000. Hasband's family took a loan in a bank for that. Maybe, it was a*

*bit expensive but what would people say of us otherwise? For us Tajiks a wedding is a big event and we shall not save on this.*

*After the wedding I moved to my husband's house. He is from kishlak (village). It was first hard for me. You can imagine there was nothing: no water or electricity, only concrete walls. We have our own separate room but a toilet is in the yard and we share a kitchen with other members of the family. I got used to it now but we need our own space. It is not easy but I keep on trying to get along with all his relatives.*

*In particular it is hard with his mother. She thinks, because I am a town girl I cannot do anything. But I do all the household chores, I cook, clean, wash. She always finds a reason to scold me. But I do not respond to her. I was taught that I should respect elders and especially my mother-in-law as my own mother. That is why I always obey her.*

*I do not work now, I am a housewife. I would like to work, I am a nursery teacher. But my mother-in-law does not want that. So I stay at home. I cannot go out of the house too much. People might say bad things about me then. When our neighbours are done with the household work, they would go out to the street and chatter about others.*

*My husband did not come back home for 2 years. When he finally came, he spent a month at home. He has a good job in Russia; he works as a porter in the market. He had to leave to sustain us. He sends money to my mother-in-law and also some to me. We now have children, we have greater financial needs. When he does not send enough I have to ask from neighbours. I do not like to do it often because they will then chatter about our family. I am also too proud to do that.*

*When he calls me from Russia we speak much of private things. He got very excited when I delivered a boy. I did not tell him the pregnancy period and the delivery itself were quite hard for me, but it should not be of a man's concern anyway.*

*When someone comes back from Russia to our kishlak, I always ask about my husband. They say he is fine there. He is saving to come home soon. You know, life like this is hard. But we got used to it now. I don't know how long he would need to stay there. We will need to move out soon when his brother marries and we need a separate home. Our children are also growing; the girl will go to school soon. We need to buy uniform for her, books, pay monthly for extra lessons and school maintaining. If you do not pay, they would not even move their finger. Yet, we understand teachers and doctors are also human*

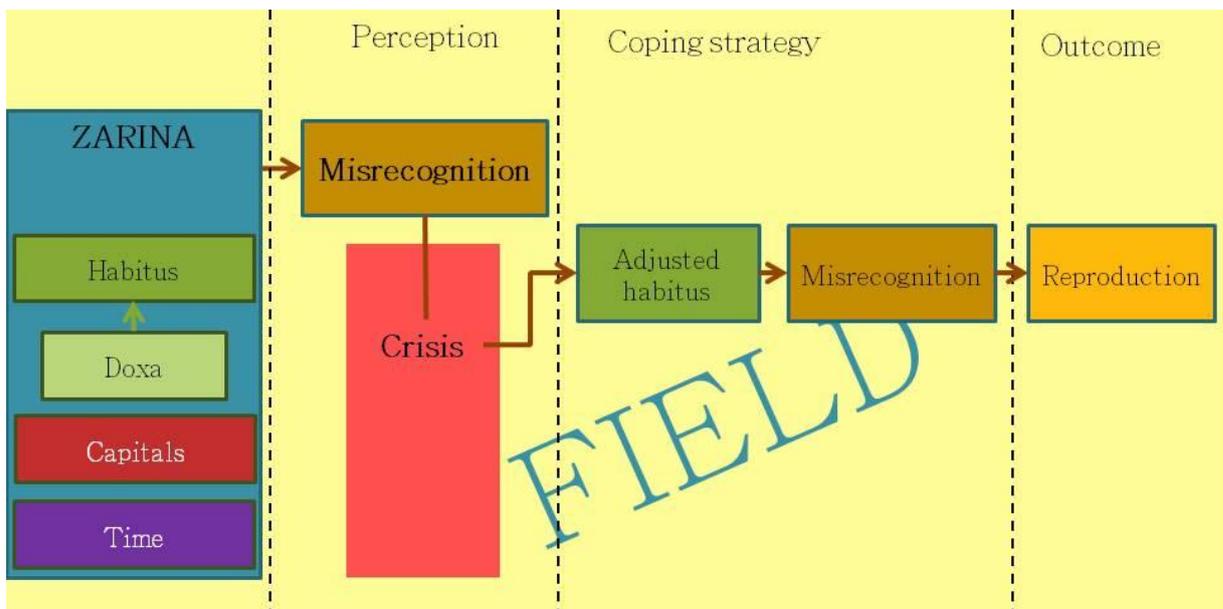
*beings, they need to eat, they have kids, their salaries are also very low. Besides, it is a matter of respect; we cannot come to them with empty hands.*

*All men from our kishlak are in Russia. There are no jobs here. Some men neither send money nor contact their families. They do not come for their children's weddings. We all have hard life here.*

*My husband told me how men live there. They all have other women there. A man cannot live without a woman for long. I was first upset about it, I love him so much, he was the only man in my life but now when I have children my priorities changed, I think mostly of them. They need their father. And he loves his children. Life like this is like a poison but what can I do? Can I go back to my parents? They would say it was my choice to marry him. I also do not want them to worry. The most important is there is no war and we are healthy.*

In our model she represents the path in the very top, common for the majority of Tajik women (Figure 2). They cannot be critical about (read: misrecognize) their positions. This extremely limited vision never lets them out of their misrecognition and leads to the further reproduction of the oppressive structures.

Figure 2: Zarina's path



Source: Own Elaboration

***Habitus***

Zarina widely referred to traditional norms. She justified any behaviour even if it looked unjust to her. In her mind certain troubles were only women's destiny and men should not be bothered with them. In her family she never questioned decisions of her mother-in-law. Outside her family she found an excuse for the need to bribe public authorities when asking for a proper service. She even considered this a sign of respect.

A few explanations can be offered for her submissiveness. First, to respect her mother-in-law as a natural mother was inculcated in her habitus during the upbringing. Zarina's understanding of respect opened up a space for her mother-in-law to persistently dominate her, in particular, when Zarina was forbidden to work outside the household and overall restricted in movements. The notion of respect for Tajik women deserves a separate discussion. In their mind it is synonymous to obedience while we understand it as mutual and deserved appreciation and understanding.

Second, she felt bound by her earlier rebellious decision to choose a husband when she went against her parents' will. She clearly stated this at the end of her story when she found reconciliation as the only possible option.

Third, she was worried about what other people would say about her family. She was so much preoccupied with the 'honour-and-shame complex' that feared to take any single step independently. This resulted in restricting herself beyond any limits. Trying to avoid gossiping she literally trapped herself in the household. Although in need, she even preferred not to ask for help from the neighbours just not to be chattered about.

Her coping strategy when she found out about her husband's affair also speaks for itself. Since her husband was the only man in her life, she did not see any other option apart from tolerating all his actions. Whatever happened, she was holding on to him and forgiving him as '*men cannot live without a woman for too long*'. In doing so, she unconsciously added to the prevailing understanding that men were allowed much more than women, including sexual freedom outside marriage. In other words, with her justification of the situation (misrecognition of power) she contributed to already unequal gender norms (reproduction).

***Capitals***

Very few capitals can be found at her disposal. She did not possess any economic capital. She brought her a dowry but oftentimes mothers-in-law do not allow brides to utilize these.

She was not allowed to work. This further exacerbated her dependence and restricted the ability to produce any wealth. Her mother in law was the main receiver of the scarce remittances thus the control was again outside of Zarina's reach. Even if she got something independently she could not appropriate it since their basic needs remained uncovered.

She was educated but this did not add to her critical thinking. Besides, she never worked to apply her education which in this situation could not serve as a capital. Her social network was restricted to her neighbours. She was afraid of gossips and this held her back from advancing her position. Thus, her networks could not be considered as a social capital in Bourdieu's sense. In her situation she could not use her gender to improve her position either since she could not see the benefits of it. For her, being a woman implied practically only satisfying her husband's needs, serving his family and acting as a good mother to her children. So neither of the mentioned capitals could gain symbolic value to her and be used in advancing her position in the field.

### *Outcome*

Zarina's life is a story of justified oppression and reconciliation with the inevitability of life sufferings. Zarina is likely to reproduce the current order as it is the only one she is aware of. This is conceptualized in our model: she failed to benefit from opportunities the crisis opened to her – did not transform her habitus and, lacking capitals, returned to the misrecognition. Not seeing how to act differently, she will most likely teach same norms to her own children in this way further inculcating obedience to their habituses and contributing to the reproduction of the dominating structures.

## **5.2 Zeba**

Zeba's story might look different but still her life trajectory leads her to the reconciliation and reproduction through misrecognition. Her understanding of changes in the field pushes her to adjust the habitus, but only in order to cope with the new circumstances with minimal tension. In this way she goes for different types of misrecognition and actually returns to the reproduction since she chooses not to stand against the pressure from the structures.

*I am Zeba. My husband is in migration in Russia now. My parents arranged our marriage. They thought it would be better for everybody if I marry to a guy from our relatives. I saw my husband a couple of times before our wedding. I liked him – he did not drink alcohol or smoke. Besides, our parents always know better what is good for their kids. We are Tajiks and Muslims. It is our tradition. We had nikokh. It is essential for us, Tajiks, without it we cannot live as a family. He promised to register in ZAGS later. I trusted him because he was from our relatives. We used to live with kids in his parents' house with his mother and younger siblings. Now I live with my parents.*

*My husband has been living between Moscow and Dushanbe for 11 years. He left almost immediately after our wedding. He never studied after secondary school. He could not find a proper job in Tajikistan. His mother said she could not feed us all alone. I hardly heard from him during the first year. But when he called he promised to send some money soon – once he gets a better job. He did not send any money for the first 6 months. At that time I had to find some work. I was a cleaner at a school. Each day I woke up early in the morning to do household chores and prepare breakfast. Then I went to work and in the afternoon I had to go home directly because my mother-in-law wanted me to work in the field. It was a hard work but I did not question it. Only now I feel that I worked like a slave. I did all the work but never saw results.*

*When he finally started sending money it was always to his mother. I never saw any of this money. She was the one who controlled all expenses. I think he did not send enough because we barely had enough for food. She used to give me an exact portion of ingredients to cook from. It was not enough to feed all members but I could not say anything.*

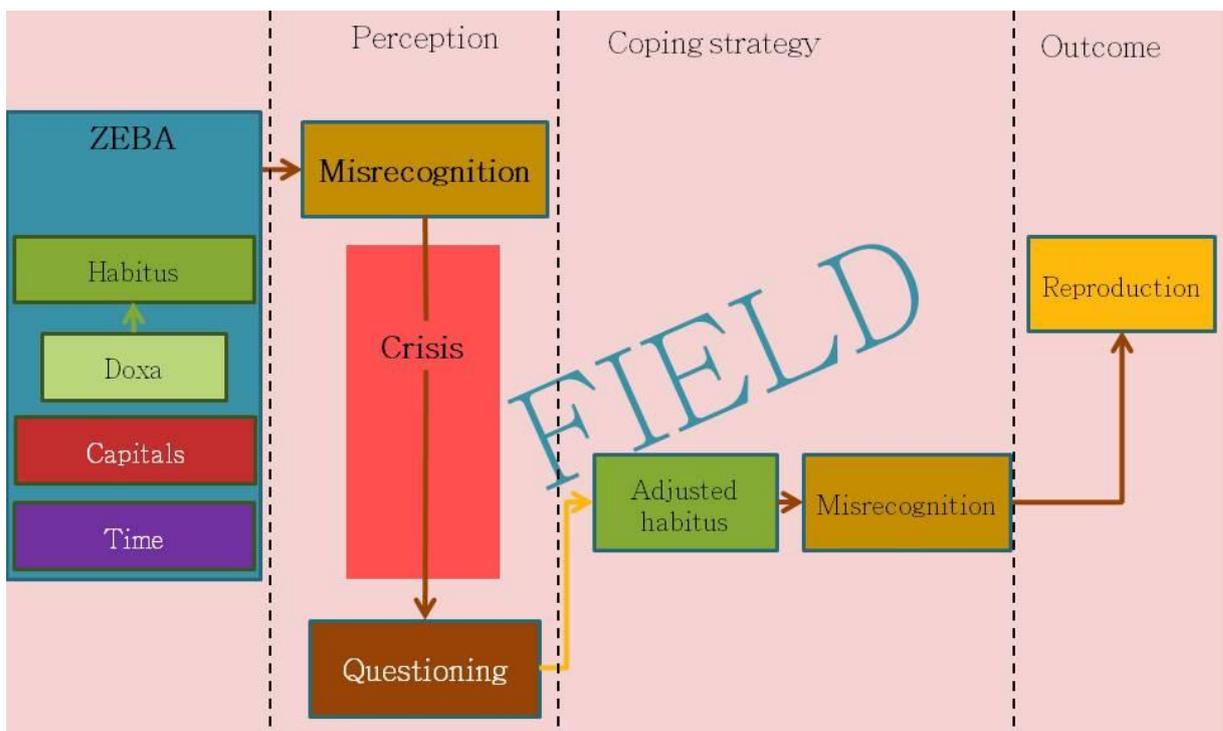
*We lived like that for two or three years. The children were growing, our financial needs increased. We started arguing about money. I always asked him to send more. He started calling us less, visit less. I thought it was all due to his hard conditions. Then I learnt the truth. He found another woman there. Can you imagine? I did not know what to do. I had a lot of problems with nerves and stress at that time. I wanted him to give me Talok (Muslim divorce). He refused. He wanted me here rearing children and the other wife there. Then my mother-in-law told me I should not complain. She said it was my fate as a woman and I had to put up with it myself. We started to have many arguments. I was no longer that obedient daughter-in-law so she threw me and my children out of her house. My husband did not care. In my parents' family it was a man who had a final word. But in*

*his house it was the mother who decided over everything. She was also the one who sent him to Russia without me knowing.*

*Now I work as a tailor. I learnt when I was still young and now I can make my own living. What I earn is enough for food and my parents also support us. Here, in Tajikistan, the situation is unfavourable to us, women. We cannot complain to anyone, otherwise people would gossip about us. They would say it was my fault. I learnt to prioritize my children and myself. I do not care about him anymore. He visited Tajikistan once, but did not even want to see his children. He never gave me Talok but according to the Muslim law I am now a divorced woman, because my husband has not supported me for more than 6 months. I tried to apply to the court for alimonies but our marriage was never registered so they sent me away. It is hard to live without a man but I will not marry anymore. Men do not want divorced women with children. They all want young girls. They do not want to be responsible for families and children. I just want my children to be happy. I want them to be educated, to marry to good families. Their happiness will bring happiness to me too.*

In our model Zeba's experience is depicted with the causal line passing from the initial misrecognition through the crisis leading her to questioning, but resulting in reproduction (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: Zeba's path**



Source: Own Elaboration

***Habitus***

She came from a similar background as Zarina and her family taught her the same principles of obedience and submissiveness which manifested in her actions. She consented for her marriage just because her parents saw it the best solution. She obeyed her mother-in-law in everything. In her mind, she fulfilled all expectations posed on her in her role of a wife and a daughter-in-law.

But she behaved differently from Zarina when she found out about the husband's affair. Zeba considered this unfair. She learned that both men and women had rights and obligations towards each other and the family. That was the reason why she demanded a divorce from her husband. But when he had refused she did not insist further. She could not reconcile with her husband having two families. This caused tensions between her and her mother-in-law resulting in her being thrown out of the household. This was another striking circumstance since they were relatives and she expected this to guarantee her a happy marriage. She also expected her husband, not his mother, to have the final say. All this pushed her to question her position. She realized she was dominated. She explicitly told us this when she compared herself to a slave in her husband's household.

***Capitals***

While living with her mother-in-law she did not have any capitals. Although she had a paid job, she could not appropriate its results. Her salary was spent on the family needs but her contribution was not recognized and only seen as a supplement to her husband's remittances while the power over the money still rested with her mother-in-law. Her social networks were more restricting than helping because she was too, like Zarina, afraid of gossips. Her marriage into a relative family did not bring an expected stability failing to serve as a capital. Neither could she benefit from her femininity. Her gender role was limited to the physical reproduction and household chores. So, all these could not be attached symbolic value to contribute to the improvement of her position.

Only when forced to sustain herself and her children did she appropriate a type of cultural capital possessed by her - tailoring skills. This happened in response to the clash between her habitus and the field forcing her to recognize and utilize this type of capital. Anyhow, the symbolic value of that capital was sufficient just to comply with the new conditions. It could not profoundly advance her position. As we see, she did not even use it as a capital

for a long time. Zeba recognized its value only after the crisis had occurred in her life forcing her to develop a new coping strategy.

### *Outcome*

In the end of her story, Zeba recognized that the situation was unfavourable for women in Tajikistan but restrained herself from discussing it with family or neighbours. She knew she would not get from them more than disapprovals and blames. This fear kept her passive and restrained from truly recognizing the oppression. Instead she tacitly justified it. She was lacking agency and did not attempt for collective mobilization. Her fears hindered her from acting against the existing power relations. She preferred not to take a risk, so she did not proceed all the way in transforming her habitus. Her capitals were limited. As a result, she reconciled with her status of an abandoned woman and adjusted her practices to comply with the environment. Accepting this power from outside, she ended up in reproducing the prevalent order.

We found Zeba's story most capturing. Why? She experienced the crisis when her own expectations of the family were overruled by her husband's behaviour. She started to question her position but in the end did not end up changing, instead she reconciled with the new conditions. When contrasting her story with Zarina's, it becomes clear that Zeba adjusted her habitus to some extent and utilized certain capitals, although with a delay. Yet the combination of these two, as Bourdieu's theorizing suggests, was not enough to advance her to changes. Zeba's case demonstrates the complexity and importance of the interrelation of structural and subjective factors when taking individual choices.

## **5.3 Firuza**

Firuza's narrative is epic and in reality represents only a single respondent from our research participants. Her story is antagonistic to Zarina's. Although holding some similarities with Zeba's it dramatically differs in the outcomes. It is through the differences between her and Zeba we conclude on how women can opt for changes.

*My name is Firuza. I am 36. I have 2 daughters. I have two higher degrees – in pedagogics and economy. I had an internship in Germany. I worked for the town khukumat*

(administration) for 3 years. But the salary was too low and I decided to change for an international agency as this offered better financial opportunities and allowed me to apply my knowledge.

I chose a husband myself. He was a good and educated guy. We had both a nikokh and a ZAGS registration. For 2.5 years we had a good family together. My husband was a lawyer but a bit shy. Due to his nature and poor employment opportunities he could not find a job and had to go to Russia in 2002. There he could not find a job for 1.5 years. So he found a woman and formally married her to get Russian citizenship. I did not know that.

I lived with his mother. There it was more or less ok but they wanted me to be dependent on them. Instead I did everything so that they did not need to help me. My mother-in-law was intrusive with her opinions. I had a paid job and they wanted money from me.

For 3 years my husband did not send us money. He did not answer my mobile calls. His mother used to tell me: "You, be patient, he does everything to get Russian citizenship and take you to Russia with kids." Once I called him and a woman picked up. That was when I learnt about his affair. His mother gave me a choice to stay with them or return to my parents. But I could not reconcile with a thought that my husband had another woman. So I went to my parents.

The other woman told me what my husband told her about me. According to him I was some illiterate woman whom he divorced according to Sharia law. I introduced myself, showed our marriage certificate. He had ZAGS registration with her too. I ensured her I did not need him anymore. I just wanted an official divorce. She decided to do the same. All in all, we became friends and exchanged documents required for the divorces in both countries.

I also managed to get alimonies from him. I requested papers from Russia via Internet. The Prosecutor personally provided me with all formal proofs that my husband resided and worked in Russia. Thus, he was obliged to support me and my kids. He directly sent me money for 2 years. He got scared of me.

I even applied for my housing rights. I decided that since the son (my husband) was not here I would suit his parents. The authorities were not impartial, tried to calm me down, they wanted me to reconcile with my parents-in-law because they were elder. They did not wish to upset relationships with one of the families. But I insisted and the court finally

*decided that I would rent an apartment which would be paid 50/50 by me and my parents-in-law until my husband came and settled the issue. It is a miserable payment but a matter of principle.*

*I raised a complaint to the prosecutor against the local authorities too. They participated in the destruction of my family by issuing a fake certificate for my husband so that he could have got married again. My intention was to let them all realize that I had certain levers to influence the situation.*

*It was a hard process. I had to overcome the resistance from the relatives, friends and local authorities. I was under terrible stress at that time. I was attending a doctor to cure a nervous disorder. In the very end, I got everything I suited them for. My alimony case became very famous. I helped a couple of women in similar troubles. I gave them all information but they should have their own initiative to proceed.*

*I have been divorced for almost 2 years so far. I have been working and even managed to earn an apartment myself. I prefer an independent life.*

*Not many women can change their lives as I did. First, they are not educated, second, they care too much of what other people say. Our traditions and religion do not allow women to reveal their problems. Whenever I talk to them in private, they look so sad and vulnerable, so dependent on others' opinions. They do not know their rights but even if they do they do not implement them. They are not able to earn themselves. They are glad that their husbands send them some money although having families in Russia. They are afraid to apply to the court; they fear mothers-in-law, the Sharia law and relatives, especially in kishlaks. What we badly need here is a kind of behavioural change to let those women in need to discuss their troubles.*

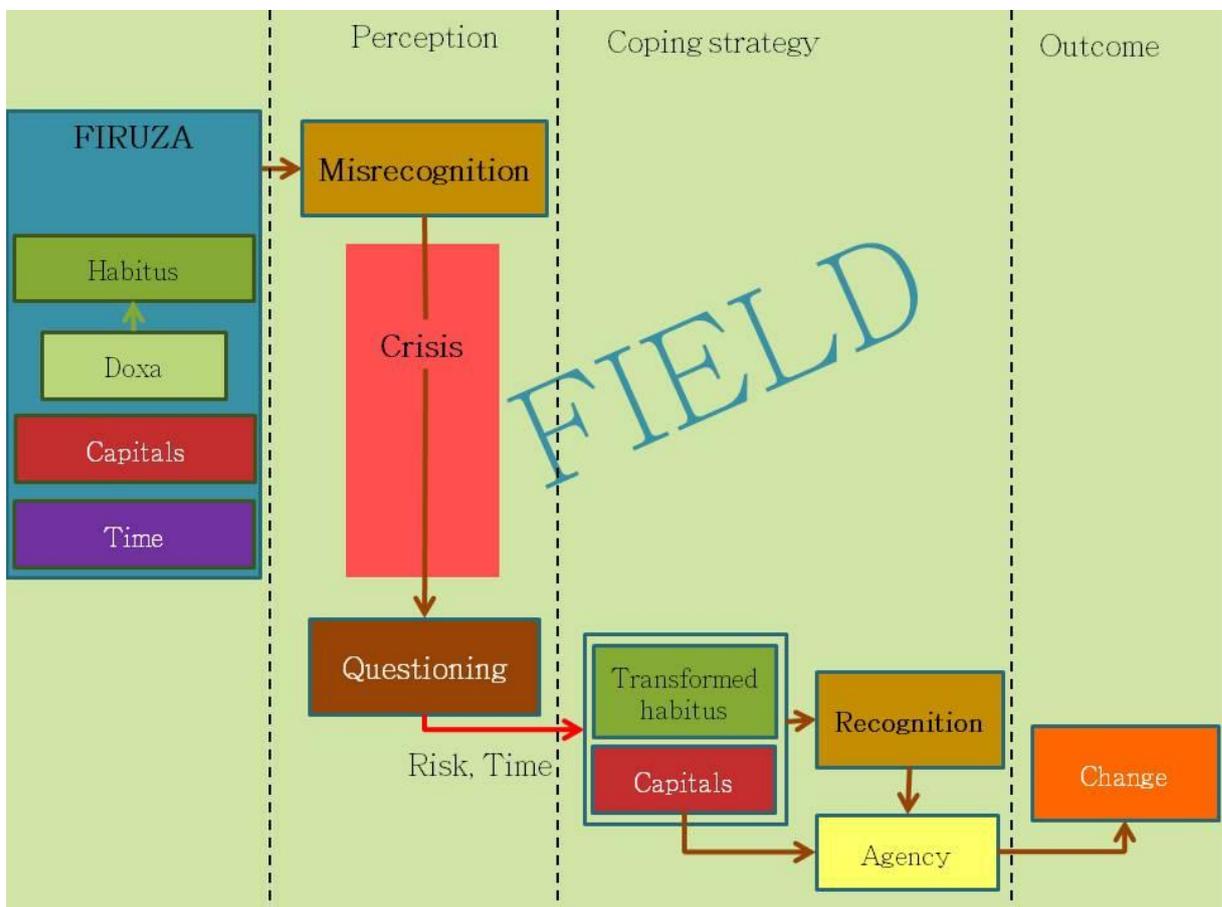
*The family code of Tajikistan does not give any voice to women. We speak of the gender equality but these are meaningless legal formulas. Exact tools for the implementation of our rights have not been ensured.*

*I went so far in my requirements since I had an access to information. Our family is modern thinking and we are all educated. I work in an international agency where I can find information. I am interested myself. I managed everything because my family supported me. My father advised me a lot on life. He persuaded me to study at university*

*even if first I did not want. He was always with me in the court. If I were alone, I would be ashamed and feel abandoned.*

Firuza's path is represented by the causal line leading to the change in the very bottom of our model (Figure 4). The crisis made her question her position similarly to Zeba. But she was more persistent in that since she could employ a combination of her specific habitus, richer capitals and, through those two, a stronger agency potential. This combination contributed with a sort of qualitative breakthrough which opened a path to the change through the true recognition.

**Figure 4: Firuza's path**



Source: Own Elaboration

***Habitus***

Firuza's family was modern thinking which influenced her upbringing. Her father supported her but always left a choice with her. When he tried to convince her to study at university he expressed his views but let her decide independently. We assume that this

habit to decide actively became an important factor in her further life. It manifested in the way she went against her mother-in-law, especially in matters of her work and finances. She explicitly refused to be dependent, in this way rivalling the existing subordination structure. She went on questioning prevailing practices more and more. This capacity to have a critical view, we argue, comes from her habitus which although in many aspects was common to other migrant wives, anyhow, distinctly differed in a way she was educated and brought up.

### *Capitals*

Firuz managed to advance her position thanks to her capitals which contributed to the unique life trajectory. She wisely used her economic capital to secure her position and managed to cope with gossiping. She not only knew her rights but also actively defended them. She utilized her cultural capital - information, education and qualifications - to stand for her rights. She had a support from her family which served her as social capital. She herself admitted that without her father she would not have been able to achieve anything. These are evidences that she managed to attach symbolic meaning to all her capitals so they served to improve her position. The only capital she could not benefit from was her femininity which is perceived in Tajikistan as inferior almost by definition. We can even suggest that she had to overcome so many obstacles exactly because she was a woman.

### *Outcome*

Firuz achieved changes in her life. When she initiated them she was not sure about the results. But she took the risk - responded to challenges arising from the critical conditions. Why? Indeed, because she felt herself capable to manage the situation based on her habitus and applying available resources. Sufficient in their combination and utilized appropriately, her habitus and capitals triggered her active attitude that made changes possible. She subconsciously identified this when compared herself to other women. She saw them not defending their rights due to multiple fears and pointed out to the lack of initiative from their side. Anyhow, her success encouraged some other women to critically reflect and start acting upon their positions.

Lastly, we see that in challenging the existing order, Firuz stepped out from the field of traditions which mostly ruled lives of Zeba and Zarina, into a legal field. This helped her to reinforce her position adding legitimacy to her demands even back in the traditional field.

She in a way rediscovered the potential of legislation which had been for years unrecognized by many Tajiks. Governmental officials did not welcome her rightful claims at all. Moreover, initially they attempted to push her, as many other women, back into the domain of traditions to settle her problems with relatives on informal terms. Anyhow, she managed to use this opportunity to satisfy all her claims which proved she could see more available options when considering her strategy. That differed her from many other women in Tajikistan.

## 5.4 Summary of results: A way out of domination

What can be discovered if we compare all three stories?

We see that traditional norms are strongly inscribed in women's habituses and determine their perceptions and behaviour. Zarina is an example of a woman who misrecognizes and justifies all the oppression. Due to her traditional habitus and insufficient capitals she sees the inevitability of the present the only option. Zeba initially possesses a similar habitus but adjusts it as the crisis occurs. Unlike Zarina, she does not reconcile with her husband's behaviour going into tension with the surrounding. But, although questioning her position, she does not change it ending up in a different form of misrecognition, thus reproducing the order. This is because the given combination of her habitus and capitals urges her to choose security of the existing structures over the unpredictable outcome of challenging the order.

In comparison, Firusa took the risk and her story reveals factors that influenced her choice of challenging the structure. She already had a different habitus - critical and in a way rebellious - which she succeeded to further transform; and a greater combination of all three types of capitals at hand. This helped her to recognize that she was dominated. At the same time it dramatically contributed to her agency leading her to changes.

The concept of capitals requires a special attention. First, as the theory points out, capitals require appropriation - they need to gain symbolic value - to serve to advance an agent's position. Second, and this is our own conclusion, not all types of networking can be used as a beneficial social capital. In Tajikistan with its honour-and-shame culture women fear gossips and cannot rely on their neighbours although this network is directly available to them. And third, neither of our respondents managed to benefit from their femininity as it remains completely unrecognized in Tajikistan, at least for the women we interviewed.

Both our data and the model suggest that a combination of the transformed habitus and appropriated and sufficient - symbolically valued - capitals leads to the agency and true recognition. Through agency Firuza brought changes into life. Yet there cannot be a single answer how these two shall be combined. Obviously, this would differ among individuals, circumstances and moments in time. Crisis can offer extra opportunities to test this combination. So, this interrelation can be captured only through sociological discourses.

To make our discussion complete we would like to make an additional observation. As our data suggest the state often refuses to protect its citizens. Such an approach particularly forces women to submit to oppression. As a result, they lose their trust in the civil law and prefer to act within the traditional customs. This trend is common to the overwhelming majority of Tajik citizens lagging the country away from the recent accomplishments in the international legal domain. Anyhow, this is a topic for a further research which would explore yet another dimension of the Tajik context opening it for the development interventions.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In this thesis we analyzed perceptions of migrants' wives in Tajikistan, identified factors influencing their decisions and explained how the interaction of these factors results in different outcomes of women's life strategies. Our goal, as the research question suggests, was to explore how women negotiate their positions and how their actions impact the structures of domination - either reproduce or change them. We analyzed the problem at the grassroots level, drawing mostly on the interviews and observations. Anyhow, the findings of this research cannot be generalized to all migrants' wives.

We conceptualized the problem within the Theory of Practice by Pierre Bourdieu to incorporate both objective and subjective dimensions. Through the lens of this theory we explained how the domination over women, naturally perpetuated by the outside structures, is being reproduced by women themselves. This theory allowed us to understand the nature of the domination even if as in the majority of cases it was not truly admitted by our respondents. This phenomenon represents a sound challenge for the development as favours situations when women's rights are being violated intangibly and subtly which is oftentimes much harder to identify than direct physical oppression. Since women do not realize it they become even more vulnerable unconsciously exposing themselves to power. This shall not be acceptable in any society. To break the vicious circle and assist the development practices in their dialog with local people we conceptualized the notion of misrecognition. Interpreting it through sociological discourses can, in our view, successfully contribute to the understanding of specific development needs of migrants' wives in Tajikistan, both by development specialists and local people.

Based on Bourdieu's theorization we elaborated our own model. The model identifies causal relationships between factors that contribute to the change or reproduction of the existing order. Our model and composite narratives served to answer our research question to its best. The three protagonists - Zarina, Zeba and Firuza - represent three different paths according to our model.

Our data analysis allows us to answer our research question:

*How do wives of Tajik out-migrants perceive their positions within the local family context?*

The great majority of our respondents are trapped within the uncertainty and submissiveness. The Tajik context, where factors such as weak economic opportunities, troubled values and identities, weak legislative system rivalled by strong traditional norms, and especially families split for years due to migration, contribute to this. Due to this they rather tend to misrecognize power structures in the family and their exposure to domination.

» *How do migrant wives negotiate their positions within the prevalent order?*

Often not feeling secure in their marriages or not knowing their legal rights and mechanisms of legal coverage women operate only in the field of traditions with a limited space to negotiate their positions. Their often traditional habitus and scarce capitals do not suffice to improve their situation. The dependence on husband and his relatives grows with time, often preventing women from assessing the existing power structures critically. Only very few manage to act across a number of fields and employ sufficient symbolic capitals to advance their positions. Otherwise, the majority ends up reconciling with their inferiority.

» *How do their attitudes contribute to the schemes of domination?*

Women's misrecognition of power allows other members of the family to dominate them. The extent of the domination differs from family to family as does the limit to which women can bear it. When the dependence is too high, stemming from both habitus and lack of capitals, women fail to admit that they are dominated. Not seeing alternative options they reproduce the prevalent order. Even if they start questioning their positions, they are often hindered by both their own habitus and outer structures and choose rather to reconcile with the current situation perpetuating the power structure.

» *How can a space for change be discovered, if any?*

A potential for changes opens to women when they undergo a crisis and if they use opportunities offered by it. The necessity to cope with the new conditions results in a need to adjust habitus which might lead to questioning their positions.

Changes can be achieved through individual agency which is often triggered by the combination of transformed habitus and appropriated capitals leading to the recognition of the domination. Migrant wives may correct their views according to the new circumstances and start applying their savings, education or social contacts to improve their lives. Successful examples of those advanced their positions might motivate others. Anyhow, women themselves have to be willing to change and undertake associated risks.

Although going beyond the scope of our research we want to close it drawing the reader's attention to the role the state plays in the whole process. On the macro level the government favours migration seeing it as the easiest way out from multiple social and economic problems. Yet migration does not represent a sustainable solution as its financial benefits do not counter-balance its negative consequences, leaving the social situation to further deteriorate. On the micro level, the approach of local officials neglecting their duties further contributes to the perpetuation of the traditional order. We hope this topic will receive a proper attention in the future and be elaborated into a full-scale research.

Based on our conclusions we come up with a set of recommendations we believe may add value and quality to the development practices in Tajikistan.

## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

Development agencies in Tajikistan have been addressing migration associated problems through different funding and training activities. They already focus on the access to resource which brings important countable results yet fail to address the recognition of resources - a less measurable aspect. The practitioners need to be aware that unless people recognize the value of a resource it will not give them any special advantage.

Simultaneously long lasting perceptions of locals need to be addressed. Traditional behaviour is deeply inscribed in the consciousness of people and a well elaborated, long term strategy covering social, economic and political grounds of the society is required. Such a complex set of recommendations is beyond our scope. We focus on the immediate and operational actions which can directly address women's agency and attitudes through the development of their social and cultural capitals.

» *Socially beneficial women's networking.* Systematic workshops and focus groups at a very grassroots level can help demolishing the wall of silence, offer women psychological support and soften the shame complex. Personal involvement would break passive attitudes and mobilize efforts. Proper psychological support can create trust and favourable interpersonal climate. The issue has to be handled with tact to avoid gossiping. An educated modern thinking local woman holding a degree in social sciences, law or psychology can facilitate sessions. This would minimize feeling of intrusion from outside. A habit to summon and discuss would promote free thinking and exchange of opinions. A spirit of competition present in any group can be fruitful for achieving success.

» *Islamic education for women.* A well elaborated Islamic education may contribute to the successful process of change and boost individual agency since Islam is deeply inculcated in the local system of values. There should be at least alternative opportunities in this sphere. The goal should be to separate religious values from the cultural and ensure women understand their rights as anchored in the Qur'an (e.g. see Afkhami Mahnaz et. al.).

» *Relatives Involvement.* A value can be added if women's problems are sociologically explained to their relatives especially in their marital families. Seasonal activities need to be particularly considered in the planning to reduce a risk of non-participation.

» *Targeting vulnerable.* Following recommendations are based rather on our experience in the field and supplement those resulting from the research analysis. (a) Areas, focus audiences and tools of development interventions shall be thoroughly considered. For instance, TV and radio campaigns might not bring expected results in a country where frequent electricity cuts and poverty hinder people from watching or listening them. (b) Massive outreach might not function well since people are shy to discuss sensitive topics in public. (c) Remote parts of the country shall be reached by development experts since poor infrastructure and restrictive traditional norms prevent women from coming to bigger centres. (d) Educational and training materials need to be printed in small formats and simple language to be easily read in privacy.

We built our recommendations so that they are effective and operational. They were brought up already back in the field yet we could not see their actual implementation. Some of them require considerable funding or preparations, some - slight adjustments of approaches. If implemented, they have all the potential to improve the quality of development interventions in the country.

## FINAL WORD

Maurice Godelier was like Bourdieu a French anthropologist. He worked in a different part of the world but came to similar conclusions regarding power. Once he said:

*“The strongest and most effective force in guaranteeing the long-term maintenance of power is not violence in all the forms deployed by the dominant to control the dominated, but consent in all the forms in which the dominated acquiesce in their own domination.”<sup>1</sup>*

Unfortunately, a phenomenon of accepting injustice and domination obediently is not something limited to our context. That is why it is surprising it has not received an appropriate attention within the development so far. We believe our paper can encourage new advances on this path.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://email.wordquote.com/quote/13360-the-strongest-and-most-effective-force-in-guarante.html>, Accessed 21-05-2013

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# APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Our introduction and obtaining consent:

Thank you for agreeing to speak to us. I am Julia, this is Natasa. I come from Ukraine and she is from Slovakia. We are researchers from the university in Sweden and we are interested in lives of migrant's wives in Tajikistan. It would be very helpful to us if you could tell us your story and answer our questions. We ensure you that no personal data will ever be exposed to third persons. We only collect them to help us better work with the data. In that regard, we would also like to ask your permission to audio-record the interview.

List of prompts:

1. Household profile: type of living, members
2. Husband – his work, years in migration, his living conditions, visits home, remittances
3. Relationships – in family, with mother-in-law, with neighbors, with parents
4. Occupation – housewife, work
5. Daily life – tasks, routine, responsibilities
6. Problems

Thank you very much for sharing your story with us.