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Left Behind? Russia's Entry Bars and Gender Relations in Tajikistan

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Abstract

Russia remains the destination of choice for Tajik migrants. Its migration policies have profound implications for migrants' legal status and capacity to remit and return home. This article draws on ethnographic research in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and explores how the enforcement of Russia's immigration laws affects Tajik migrants and their families. By 2016, over 300,000 Tajik migrants were issued entry bars (*zapret na v'ezd*) for three or more years for two or more administrative offenses, including the lack of a work permit or a residential registration and a traffic violation. Migration and the transnational lifestyle increase agency among Tajik men and women, informing gender transformations. Entry bars produce temporary constraints to spatial and social mobility as migrants readjust to well-defined gender roles in their home country. We note how immigration laws affect men and women in different ways, contextualizing the gendered effects of entry bars through the lens of gender relations and understandings of masculinity and femininity in Tajikistan. We argue that the constraints to migrants' mobility developed by Russian migration policies inform the reconstitution of gender relations in Tajikistan.

Keywords: migration; immigration laws; gender; Central Asia; Tajikistan; Russia

Introduction

Migration scholarship has long emphasized the importance of gender (Hoffman 2017; Agadjanian, Menjivar, and Zotova 2017; Mahler and Pessar 2008; King and Dudina 2019; Reeves 2013a; Rocheva and Varshaver 2017; Zotova and Agadjanian 2017). Gender—a set of social practices, attitudes, and identities—shapes migration and is itself shaped by migration (Hondagneo-Sotelo 2003). In migrants' home and destination countries, engendered power hierarchies within families and ethnic communities define opportunities for access to work, education, leisure, and different types of resources through social networks (Brettell and Hollifield 2015; Hondagneo-Sotelo 1994; Menjivar 2000). The understandings of gender roles and culturally appropriate behaviors for men and women are the essential components of migration-related decisions and can support or constrain the mobility of individuals. Gender is also an essential part of multi-directional connections between countries of origin and destination as men and women send and receive remittances, provide support and care, and engage in other transnational practices that maintain links between multiple localities (Yeoh and Ramdas 2014; Erel and Lutz 2012; Itzighson and Georguli-Saucedo 2005). Although labor migration informs the reconfiguration of gender relations in the countries of origin, these effects can be short-lived and lead to reinforcement of gender hierarchies (Bastia and Busse 2011; Bazin 2008). By introducing Tajikistan's case to migration and gender scholarship, we seek a better understanding of how migration affects gender relations and transformations. This paper draws on ethnographic research in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and explores how Russia's changing migration policies—particularly entry bars—impact migrants and their families back in their home

country. We contextualize the gendered effects of migration laws through the lens of tradition and the understandings of masculinity and femininity. We argue that constraints to migrants' mobility created by Russia's migration policies cause the reconstitution of gender relations in Tajikistan.

The development of significant international migration from Tajikistan since the collapse of the Soviet Union has produced macro-economic effects, as well as changes in households' material conditions. Migration allows for the accumulation of different types of capital—economic, social, cultural, and symbolic—which creates opportunities for socio-economic mobility for Tajikistan's citizens and supports the growth of the urban middle class (Zotova and Cohen 2019). Gender transformations are part of the social change linked to migration. Although migration from Tajikistan remains primarily male, women travel overseas with their husbands and relatives, join the labor force, and gain experiences and skills (Agadjanian and Zotova 2019; Rocheva and Varshaver 2017). The elders and men continue to have authority over youth and women in Tajikistan; however, large male out-migration and matrimonial separations cause diversification of gender roles and the growth of matrifocal families, in which women who are heads of households have increased power (Cleuziou 2017).

The movement across borders provides individuals with significant autonomy but mobility is not necessarily empowering (Yeoh and Ramdas 2014). Moral obligations toward their families and gender identities create powerful constraints for migrants' agency (Bastia 2013; Ehrkamp 2013; Reeves 2013a). The gendered power relations in the countries of origin inform public discourses and attitudes toward migrants that are often framed through traditional understandings of masculinity and femininity (Parrenas 2015; Rodrigues 2002, 2008). This holds for Central Asia, in which emergent nationalisms since the collapse of the Soviet Union have reinforced hierarchical gender roles to foster their regimes' legitimacy. By appealing to the authority of tradition, the newly independent states—including Tajikistan—seek to emancipate from the Soviet legacy and reaffirm culturally acceptable masculine and feminine behaviors (Bazin 2008; Cleuziou and Direnberger 2016). Gender relations are reproduced and contested through migration; however, structural factors —such as economics and politics—are known to define a large set of social practices, including gender (Erdal and Pawlak 2018). In this paper we focus on one structural force that defines gender relations—immigration laws in Russia, the destination of choice for Tajik labor migrants.

We explore how changing migration policies affect Tajik migrants and their families, highlighting interdependency between re-entry bans and the reconstitution of traditional gender relations. First, we provide the context for a better understanding of Tajikistan-Russia migration and the recent developments of restrictive migration policies in Russia. Subsequently, we use excerpts from ethnographic interviews and focus groups to illustrate gendered responses to entry bars implemented by Russia. We demonstrate that changing migration policies constrain women's agency and reinforce gender hierarchies in Tajikistan. We proceed to discuss how entry bars undermine Tajik men's ability to provide as they struggle to reaffirm their masculine roles. We then incorporate our findings to broader frameworks of gender relations in migration and conclude with the policy implications for Tajikistan.

Migration from Tajikistan and Russia's Immigration Laws

Tajikistan has a population of almost nine million people. It is a low-income country, in which GDP per capita equals $800 (World Bank 2018b). Large out-migration from Tajikistan has developed since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and was caused by political and economic turmoil and the civil war of 1992–1997. Tajikistan's citizens fled insecurity and sought opportunities to provide for their families. People started crossing the newly defined international borders and migration has grown over the past twenty years (Cleuziou 2017; Marat 2009; Zotova and Cohen 2016). Russia attracts most Tajik labor migrants (Agadjanian, Menjivar, and Zotova 2017). In 2016, almost 800 thousand of Tajikistan's nationals entering Russia indicated that they arrived for business purposes (*delovaya poezdka*), such as labor migrants (Gosstat 2016).[1] Migrants must

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navigate their way in Russian legal space and comply with immigration laws to obtain work authorization, residence registration, and maintain an authorized status. Russian migration legislation is complex and Central Asian migrants often remain undocumented because it is difficult to follow all norms of the frequently changing legislation (Abashin 2017; Gorina, Agadjanian, and Zotova 2018; Reeves 2015, 2016; Schenk 2018) and due to the costs involved in obtaining the required documents (Agadjanian, Menjívar, and Zotova 2017; Gorina, Agadjanian, and Zotova 2018; Reeves 2016a, 2015).

Russia's immigration laws have become more restrictive over the past decade (Abashin 2017). Three-year entry bars (*zapret na v'ezd*) were issued in Russia for migrants with a record of two or more administrative offenses, including an overstay of their time in the country, lack of residential registration or other documents, and traffic offenses (for an overview of the entry bars' gradual implementation and a legal analysis, see Bahovadinova 2016 and Kubal 2017). The names of individuals banned from re-entry are added to Russia's Federal Migration Service (FMS) electronic database, which "became an issue for Tajik migrants in 2012" (Bahovadinova 2016).[2] By 2016, this database included the names of 330,000 Tajik citizens who had been denied entry to Russia (Ulmasov 2016, 101; Bahovadinova 2016). Much scholarship focuses on the profound implications of immigration laws in destination countries—including Russia—and tells how laws produce the illegality and deportability of migrants (De Genova 2002, 2005, 2010, 2011, 2013; Fassin 2011; Gonzales and Sigona 2017; Gonzales 2013; Kubal 2017; Schenck 2018). We argue that gendered racial removal programs (Golash-Boza and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2013) are likely to have similar importance for individuals and families in sending communities. Entry bars issued for Tajik nationals affect circular migrants and many families by limiting their physical and socio-economic mobility. There is yet little research on the repercussions of entry bars in Tajikistan (Bahovadinova 2016).

Notwithstanding the nation's economic growth supported by remittances, poverty rates remain high and one-third of the country's population lives below the national poverty level (World Bank 2018b). Ten percent of the population is unemployed. Yet, the available statistics may not include a substantial part of the workforce not officially registered as unemployed (Strokova and Ajvad 2017; World Bank 2018a). Poverty, high unemployment rates, corruption, and nepotism make it hard for most people to advance their economic and social standing. As such, migration continues to play an essential role in livelihood strategies of Tajikistan's population (Cooley and Heathershaw 2017; Heathershaw 2009; Whitsel 2011). Remittances are known to transmit volatility from host to home countries (Rougier and Yol 2019). Russia's economic recession from 2014–2016 followed with the shrinking of many areas where Tajik migrants used to work, causing a decrease of the remittances' flow to Tajikistan (Grigoriev, Golyashev, Buryak, Lobanova, and Kulpina 2016). Similarly, changing migration policies—particularly the emerging racial deportation regime—transmit insecurity to the countries of migrants' origin (Kubal 2017). Re-entry bans produce "shock waves" among Tajikistan's natives, constraining the capacity to migrate and affecting many households.

Methods and the Demographic Profile of the Study Participants

The ethnographic data presented in this paper was collected in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, from June–August 2016, as a part of a larger project on Central Asian migration. Dushanbe was selected as a research site due to its location at the intersection of internal and international population movements in Tajikistan. We hypothesized that as a migration hub, Dushanbe would present more opportunities to observe continuity and change in gender relations. Natalia Zotova conducted two focus groups and 43 semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Our contacts among the experts and one Dushanbe-based NGO helped us to recruit participants for the two focus groups (one male and one female group, including six to nine participants in each group). Focus groups allowed us to establish rapport and provided insights into Tajik migrants' experiences. The focus groups' participants suggested peers of the same sex for one-on-one interviews. That gave a start to two separate recruitment chains—one among men and one among women.

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The eligibility criteria were that participants were over 18 years of age and had previously migrated to another country. Participants were screened for eligibility and gave written consent before the focus groups and one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted at the place of the respondent's choice and administered in Russian. The interviews lasted 45–90 minutes, were audio recorded, and transcribed. The study protocol was approved by the Institutional Review Board of the Ohio State University. Data analysis included identifying themes in the interviews (Ryan and Bernard 2003) and developing a codebook and coding the transcripts for emergent themes (Bernard 2011; DeCuir-Gunby, Marshall, and Mcculloch 2011). In this paper, we use excerpts from the focus groups and interviews, translated into English by Natalia Zotova. All names are pseudonyms to protect confidentiality.

Though all informants have been interviewed in Dushanbe, Tajikistan's capital, they originate from a range of rural and urban settings. Aged from 23 to 68 years, most men and women are in their thirties or early forties. Most interviewees have prior experience of migrating to Russia or elsewhere; four people are the immediate family of migrants. Informants' socio-economic status, education, work experience, and marital status vary. Although almost half of men and women have college degrees, over half of them are unemployed or hold low-paid positions with no job security, such as day laborers, janitors, or security guards. Most study participants earn less than $100 a month. A quarter of our participants earn $100 to 150 a month, close to the average monthly wage of $120 in Tajikistan at the time of research (TSA 2017). Entry bars have affected a significant share of Tajik men and women: one-third of the study participants were banned from re-entry for three years or have family members (mostly spouses) who were issued entry bars.

Zeinab's Agency and the Power of Tradition

In the next sections, we use excerpts from our ethnographic interviews to illustrate how Tajik men and women respond to Russia's immigration laws. These narratives provide insights into ways entry bars affect migrants' wellbeing and gender relations. Migration policies disrupt transnational livelihood strategies. Men and women respond to the power of law differently. Our analysis of their narratives suggests that changing migration policies inform the reconstitution of gender relations. By limiting the physical mobility of individuals who are forced to stay in Tajikistan or who fear deportation from Russia, entry bars reinforce the role of structural factors that define opportunities for Tajik men and women at home and influence their perceptions of masculinity and femininity.

Zeinab, a 35-year-old woman, had spent over seven years with her husband and son in the Russian capital. Zeinab had a job, raised her only son, and aspired to Russian citizenship. Having spent five years in Russia, Zeinab did not renew her residence permit and work authorization. When she flew to Tajikistan due to a family emergency in 2015, she learned that she was issued a three-year re-entry ban for the breach of immigration laws. An unforeseen *zapret na v'ezd* (entry bar) became a stressful experience. Zeinab explained:

> I was issued *zapret na v'ezd* when I came to visit my sick mom. In August 2015, I took a loan to buy the plane tickets back to Russia. The officers in Kulyab airport would not allow me to board the plane and said that I could not fly to Moscow. I was astounded and tried to explain to them: "How is that even possible? My son is in Moscow, his classes start soon! I need to be in Moscow in advance to get ready for the school year like everyone does in Russia and to have the required medical checkups for my son". […] You know, people are different and I would hear the slurs in Russia like *ponayekhali tut* (people have poured in from everywhere!) or *churka* (originally meaning a piece of wood, churka is a derogatory term used in reference to someone from the Caucasus and Central Asia and whose phenotype—a darker skin and/or more pronounced Asiatic facial features—differs from ethnic Russians). So my dearest wish was that my son could graduate from high school in Russia, [not to be considered an undesirable migrant any more]. I wanted that so much but I failed. We wanted to have the

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> residential registration in Moscow but lots of people ended up having fake registrations, migrants and ethnic Russians alike. I was saving to apply for citizenship, but the intermediaries fooled me. They found me a house in Tver' oblast for RUB100,00 (USD3,500 in 2013) [property ownership provides a permanent address needed to apply for residency] but that was in the middle of nowhere—I did not want my son to grow up in those conditions.

Zeinab's story notes the complexities of managing Russia's immigration laws. Migrants' pathways to a regularized legal status include dealing with intermediaries, uncertainty about the documents that migrants can procure—fake, "clean fake," or official—and formal and informal payments (Reeves 2013). The time and cost involved make it hard for Central Asian migrants to comply with all the regulations. Legal barriers to an authorized status in Russia subject migrants to deportability (Kubal 2017; Reeves 2015). The entry bars issued for two or more administrative offenses reinforce indeterminacy among Central Asians. Kubal contextualizes entry bars as "surreptitious deportation" (2017) that allows Russian authorities to reduce expenses associated with the enforcement of immigration laws. The emerging deportation regime draws on punitive policies and increases migrants' vulnerability in Russia. Tajik migrants can learn about their entry bars in different ways. Some migrants are detained by the police during routine document check-ups and sent to the courts that issue migrants an order to leave (Kubal 2017; Reeves 2016b; see also an excerpt in the next section). Many others learn about their entry bars in airports, ticket offices, travel agencies, or by calling the IOM hotline (International Organization for Migration) in Tajikistan (Bahovadinova 2016). Zeinab continued:

> My son is nine-years-old now. He went to the second grade in Dushanbe because I got the entry bar. I had not crossed Russia's border for five years, I understand, but I could not travel to the border because of the war [in east Ukraine]. My husband would not let me go. The Ukrainian border is the closest to Moscow. If you go to Tajikistan to cross the border [to renew one's migration status according to the 90-day of stay rule] that would be RUB 15,000 (USD 500 in 2013) airfare but it only cost RUB 3,000 (USD 100 in 2013) to travel to Ukraine. That was convenient—you cross the border, return to Moscow, and get a new residential registration. But I could not go to Ukraine because my husband would not allow me.

Zeinab had little power to negotiate her travel-related decisions with her husband Anzor, who was not issued an entry bar. After Zeinab learned about her entry bar, Anzor brought their son to Tajikistan and returned to Moscow. In 2016, Zeinab had spent one year in Dushanbe. The woman resided with her in-laws, worked part-time as a schoolteacher and handed over her tiny monthly wages (TS 300 or USD 45) to her mother-in-law, who strictly controlled her. Zeinab could not move around the city without asking permission and providing details of why and where she needed to go. Zeinab's mother-in-law often called to check on her whereabouts and discussed her behavior with Anzor over the phone. During the interview, Zeinab broke in tears as she was repeating: "I will leave by any means. I will not stay in Tajikistan, I will leave the very day my entry bar expires." Reconstituted gender hierarchies, to which Zeinab was subjected in the family, had a profound effect on her emotional wellbeing:

> I cannot judge my family, but I admit that my situation is very hard. I get up in the morning and my mother-in-law asks: "How many classes do you have today?" I tell her that my fourth class ends at 11:15 am, for instance. She tells me: "I expect you to be home right away after your classes. You will cook this and that, bake bread, and so on." So, I run home fast. I have turned into a robot, you know. I get up at 4:30 am every morning [to do the household chores]. Honestly, my in-laws are harsh to me but I need to obey because these are my parents. […] God, it is so hard. It has been one year in Tajikistan already. My son went to school in Russia so he is so different from everyone in Tajikistan. He knows incredible things. […] My son asks

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> me every day: "Mom, when will they lift your entry bar?"—and I tell him: "Honey, it has been one year. We need to wait for two more years."

Zeinab spoke about the things she valued in Moscow and shared that she felt empowered through migration as she celebrated a good job, income, and emerging social connections with Muscovites. Zeinab's increased agency linked to a sense of fulfillment and self-efficacy. During her involuntary stay in Tajikistan, Zeinab suffered from the loss of resources and support networks. Zeinab was strictly controlled by her in-laws, guided by a traditional understanding of gender and age hierarchies. Her mental health was challenged as she felt unhappy and desperate to lead a more independent life in Moscow. This story, although illustrating the ways entry bars operate, is not typical for Tajik women because migration policies mostly affect men who travel to Russia in larger numbers. Yet, Tajik women who stay behind suffer from indirect effects of immigration laws. These are the wives of Tajik male migrants who engaged in circular migration for many years.

The women whom we interviewed spoke about the overlap between Russia's economic downturn since 2014 and men's opportunities to provide for the family. The threats of deportation and entry bars increase the economic and legal insecurities of Tajik male migrants in Russia. Recognizing that they may be unable to return, many men chose to stay in Russia and put off their visits home. Our female participants shared that their husbands aspired to well-paying jobs but were often underpaid and subject to fraud, forcing men to frequently change workplaces due to job insecurity. Tajik migrants had a hard time balancing the growing cost of living in Russia with their moral obligations to support their non-migrating family. Remittances became irregular and strain between spouses mounted. Although there are no statistics available on the share of returned Tajik migrants with entry bans and those still residing in Russia, cross-national research suggests that the enforcement of stricter immigration laws can cause more irregular migrants to stay in destination countries (see Massey and Pren 2012 for the surge of Latin American immigration to the USA after 1965).

Women worry about their husbands delaying their return; yet, gender hierarchies prevent them from asking direct questions. Mavlyuda, 44-years-old, voiced her concerns over a prolonged stay of her husband, Sharif, in Moscow. Her account includes Sharif's legal status and gossip about his extra-marital relationships. Indeterminacy informs intense stress as Mavlyuda manages her low-paying bookkeeper's job, children, household expenses, and the rumors about her marriage:

> Sharif traveled to Moscow two years ago and has not visited since then. He does not tell me why he does not return. I guess that could be because of his documents in Russia? Or maybe he got angry that our fourth child was a daughter again? […] There is an [economic] crisis now. So, previously Sharif used to remit USD 300–400 monthly but now he remits $60–70 at the very best. He cannot send us more money due to the crisis. Sharif says he works for two or three months at one construction site. Then, the contract ends and their brigade has to search for new work for a long time. My husband spends the money he earns on rent and food and can only remit a small amount. I trust him. He talks nicely to me over the phone. But people start talking, you know? All our acquaintances in Dushanbe believe Sharif got married in Moscow. They are pretty sure Sharif has another woman because it has been two years since he last came home.

Sayora, 56, was more certain about entanglements of the economic hardships and immigration laws:

> My husband Daler lives and works at someone's *dacha* [summer house], not far from Saint-Petersburg, Russia. The *dacha*'s owners and neighbors like him, yet he works without any documents. I do not even remember when he started working there but he has not come back to Tajikistan for almost three years. He will not be able to find a job here in Dushanbe and we have teenage children to raise and pay for their future weddings…So Daler cannot come to visit because God knows if he would be able to return to Russia. His host paid him RUB 30,000

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(USD 1,000) before the crisis, but currently he is paid much less. In summer, Daler does odd jobs for other *dacha* residents. He remits us a little every month.

Most interviewed women had migrated to Russia more than once. Enhancing women's agency, migration contributes to greater wellbeing and perceived self-efficacy. However, Tajik women manage gendered constraints in their decision-making. Migration to Russia involves negotiations about personal finance and the provision of care for children. Tajik families can hardly afford to stay together in Russia due to the high cost of living. Gender relations embedded in culture, religion, and the nationalist discourses assign Tajik women the roles of mothers and caregivers (Cleuziou and Direnberger 2016). The normative expectations of femininity and economic barriers to family migration force women to stay behind while their husbands engage in circular migration. The changing immigration laws in Russia increase the gendered social and economic vulnerability of women who migrate—like Zeinab—or stay behind—like many other respondents. Women's narratives suggest that although they feel empowered through migration, they struggle to balance traditional understandings of gender roles (mothers and caregivers), household economics, and social pressures related to their marriages. These women's struggle becomes particularly hard when their husbands stay in Russia for a long time due to the legal insecurity and fear of entry bars. Talking about their understanding of the family dynamics, Tajik women stressed they would rather remain married because the "divorce is scary," namely the social exclusion which divorced women face. In Tajikistan, the cultural value of marriage remains high. Women are subject to stringent moral judgment in the absence of husbands (Cleuziou 2017). Migration policies in the form of entry bars produce direct and indirect effects on women's positions in gender hierarchies in Tajikistan's families and local communities. We argue that entry bars create additional pressure on women and support the reconstitution of traditional gender relations and inequalities.

Omar, Masculinity, and Control

Omar, 38-years-old, had spent almost 20 years working in different places in Russia before he was issued an entry bar in early 2016 for staying in the country for more than 90 days without a work contract and residential registration. Omar's story speaks about his suffering from unemployment and limited ability to secure an adequate income in Tajikistan. Omar said:

> There are no jobs. You can see those men come to *mardikor* bazaar, [a place where the day laborers offer their services], every day seeking work and waiting in the street for the whole day. If nothing comes up [no patrons offer work], we go home with empty hands. You can hardly provide for the family in these circumstances. There was a civil war in Tajikistan in the 1990s. So, I could not go to college and spent many years working in Russia. Back in Dushanbe, I look for work every day. When I earn nothing, I have arguments with my wife. She says that we have no money to live on. I know that myself! We start fighting. I want to provide for my family but I have no place to earn [money] and cannot return to Russia because of my entry bar.

Across Tajik men's narratives, the gendered expectations of masculinity are among the central themes. Young and old, men emphasized that their normative gender roles are those of the providers: our participants repeated that "A man should bring into the family." As providers, Tajik men engage with circular migration as a means of livelihood. While in Russia, Omar and other study participants were able to earn $700–1000 a month before the start of Russia's economic recession in 2014. High income—compared to average monthly wages in Tajikistan—allows migrants' families to meet their short-term and long-term goals. Similar to other major sending countries of the world, Tajik families use remittances on daily expenses, to buy home appliances and cars, purchase land, build and furnish new houses, and support education of children and family members (Gupta, Pattillo, and Wagh 2009; López Córdova, Tokman, and Verhoogen 2005; Olimova 2006;

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Olimova and Bosc 2003; Orozko 2002; Rubinov 2014; Umarov 2010; Zotova and Cohen 2019, 2016). Tajik male migrants also spend their migration earnings on lifecycle rituals, such as circumcision, weddings, and funerals, that have major importance in Central Asian culture and are costly. The participation in ritual economies creates the obligations of reciprocity and expectations around normative behavior (Aitieva 2015; Ilkhamov 2013; Reeves 2013a; Rubinov 2014). As rituals are funded through remittances, migration becomes a site of moral debate (Reeves 2009) in which one's capacity to provide and to perform the appropriate gender and social roles are judged by the participation in ritual economies.

Migration allows Tajik men to fulfill the moral obligation and the gender role of providers that is embedded in culture and family values. Entry bars disrupt the transnational lifestyle celebrated for many years and undermine masculine roles performed through remittances and long-distance connections with the family in Tajikistan. Aziz, a 36-year-old man, remembered:

> I am my mother's only son. My parents were divorced. During the civil war, life was hard in Tajikistan and my uncle took me to Russia with him in 1993 when I was 14-years-old. I was the only provider in my family and used to remit my mom $200–300 every month. […] I visited my family in Tajikistan every year but the last time I stayed in Russia for ten years until I was deported in 2012. I did not want to return because my family made me marry our relative and my wife had a relationship with another man when I was in Russia. That is unacceptable in our tradition. That is a shame. So, I swore I would not come back. If not for the deportation, I would not be in Dushanbe now. […] I lived in Novosibirsk for ten years, but when I lost my passport I stayed without any documents. Once, the police stopped me and put me in a *spetspriemnik* (detainment center) for three months. I was deported and banned from re-entry for five years. I will go to Russia as soon as my ban expires, and I will make sure to buy the patent and have the necessary documents.

Aziz's story suggests that Tajik men are aware of the difficulties and costs involved in maintaining an authorized status in Russia. Planning their future trips overseas, Tajik migrants consider the potential dangers of *zapret na v'ezd* (entry bar). The complexity of Russia's immigration laws develops structural barriers to an authorized status. Russian authorities engage in strategic management of migration policies to maintain the status quo of migrants as undesirable subjects. This helps to manipulate the public opinion and extract the revenues (Schenk 2018). Migration policies also endanger the gender roles of providers among Tajik men. At a focus group, Tajik men shared their concerns over their legal status and skyrocketing prices for required documents in Russia:

> We wish the patents [for work authorization] were less expensive. We need to pay our rent in Russia and pay for the patent, but we do not earn enough for that. We need money, our families need the money in Tajikistan! Also, we need to shop for groceries. Previously, the patent cost RUB 1,000 [USD 35] a month so we could remit RUB 10,000–20,000 [USD 350–650]. Currently, our monthly expenses on patent and other documents exceed RUB 6,000 [USD 100]. In Russia, you should have all official documents—the residential registration and a patent. When the police stop you, they check your registration on their computers right away to see if it is "clean" or fake. The patent allows you to apply for a residential registration. Without a patent, you cannot have the registration. The patents are costly, but it is dangerous not to have them—if you get caught by the police without documents, you will get a *zapret na v'ezd* and will not be able to return to Russia for a long time.

Among Tajik men who were issued entry bars, the limited ability to provide affects households' economics and undermines elevated social status that migrants' families previously enjoyed. Cross-national scholarship links migration, masculinity, and status (see Ali 2007; Choi 2019; Kandel and Massey 2002; Lambert 2002; Osella and Osella 2000; Prothmann 2018). Migration as a way of "life-making" (Carling 2001, 134) is seen as a path toward a more fulfilled life and a recognized

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position in the society when someone becomes a "person of status and respect" (Akesson 2004; Jonsson 2007; Langevang 2008, 2046). Migration is intertwined with masculinity in Central Asia and allows for the reproduction of gender identity (Reeves 2013a; Zotova 2012). The position of Tajik men among the emerging urban middle class is fragile due to structural unemployment, limited economic opportunities, corruption in Tajikistan, and the enforcement of entry bars by Russia (Cooley and Heathershaw 2017; Heathershaw 2009; Strokova and Ajwad 2017; Whitsel 2011; Zotova and Cohen 2019). In a similar vein, return migrants have a hard time as they struggle to comply with the social expectations of masculinity. Return migrants like Omar and Aziz are left with marginal, low-paying jobs, such as security guards, day laborers at construction sites and the markets, and the like.

The power of migration policies along with the economic underdevelopment of Tajikistan challenge men's ability to provide, which is central to their perceived masculinity. Social and family pressures increase stress and frustration among Tajik male migrants. Economic precarity affects men's mental health because it informs disagreements between spouses who aspire to better futures for themselves and their children. Migrants who extend their stay in Russia for fear of being issued entry bars are forced to manage conflicting expectations of family members staying behind, structural factors of Russia's volatile economics, and migration policies which affect their opportunities to earn, remit, and return home. Return migrants who are forced to stay in Tajikistan spoke about the perceived pressures from elders and local communities that expect men to attend to traditional gender relations. Subject to social pressures, men are likely to increase control over their wives in line with the broader set of gender hierarchies that assign men the power to control women's bodies and sexuality in Tajikistan (Harris 2008). Women whose husbands and male relatives were banned from re-entry or delayed their return home for the fear of entry bars shared that men frequently check on them or call by phone. Men ask about their wives' whereabouts and expenses, question if women treat their in-laws well, and give many orders and instructions. We suggest that a limited ability to provide due to entry bars invites Tajik men to rely on another aspect of masculinity, namely control over women, which is an essential part of the traditional model of gender relations.

Migration Policies and the Reconstitution of Gender Relations

In the ethnographic sections, we have explored the ways migrants respond to Russia's migration policies, which disrupt their transnational lifestyle and negatively affect the perceived quality of life. Our discussion contributes to broader debates on gender transformations linked to migration, which address continuity and change of gender relations (Erdal and Pawlak 2018). Gender transformations are often framed through the empowerment of women who access the new resources, networks, and opportunities as they travel to destination countries and enter the labor market. Women celebrate their skills, knowledge, and increased income, all of which provide them with more control over their lives (Menjivar 2000; Oishi 2005; Wolfe 1992; Yu 2007). An empowerment framework is useful for an understanding of female migrants' experiences and their increased agency (Bastia 2013; Castellani and Martín-Díaz 2019; Encinas-Franco, Ang, Opiniano, and Sescon 2015; Segura and Facio 2008; Zentgraf 2002). Tajik women migrants value more egalitarian gender norms in Russia's urban areas compared to Tajikistan and appreciate less social control (Agadjanian and Zotova 2014, 2019). Migration allows migrating and non-migrating women to renegotiate traditional gender roles as women who stay behind also enjoy increased decision-making power as heads of households, greater mobility, and less social restrictions in local communities (Castellani and Martín-Díaz 2019; Cleuziou 2017, Cleuziou and Direnberger 2016; Erdal and Pawlak 2017; Kikuta 2016; Sinha, Jha, and Negi 2011; Ullah 2017).

Cross-cultural research has shown that gender transformations informed by migration are likely to be short-term (Bastia and Basse 2011). Internal conflicts in families accompany women's empowerment as gender hierarchies involve moral judgments (Reeves 2013; Rodriguez 2008).

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Traditional gender roles define Tajik women as caregivers and mothers who are subject to control by men and elders in the families (Harris 2008; Zotova 2012). Well-defined gender norms in Tajikistan—embedded in culture and religion—come into conflict with the increased agency of women achieved through migration, informing disagreements between spouses and negatively affecting women's wellbeing (King, Maksymenko, Almodovar-Diaz, and Johnson 2016). Men and women who are temporarily immobile due to entry bars need to re-acclimate to the norms in Tajikistan's local communities. Return migrants are also subject to increased socio-economic vulnerabilities. Suffering from indeterminacy and stress, they seek to reaffirm their social status and gender identities. Traditional gender relations provide migrants with the means for reverse acculturation, as men comply with the roles of the family heads and women with that of the caregivers and controlled subjects.

Male migrants constitute over three-quarters of migration flow to Russia and are, therefore, most affected by entry bars (MIARF 2016). In line with other research conducted in Central Asia, our findings have illustrated that migration allows for the reproduction of masculinity through increased capacity to provide (Reeves 2013a). Migration contributes to men's greater wellbeing through perceived fulfillment and accomplishment. Tajik men emphasize the positive effects migration produces on their daily lives because remittances help their families meet their daily needs, problem-solve, and invest in the future. Migration helps to maintain social connections through investments in life-cycle rituals. Economic insecurity and structural barriers to well-paid jobs in Tajikistan influence both men and women, yet entry bars constrain the performance of masculine roles through provision (Strokova and Ajwad 2017). Shifting migration policies in Russia undermine the economic security of migrant households, strain relationships, and inform the reconstitution of more traditional gender roles.

Gender transformations informed by migration from Tajikistan are mostly linked to increased decision-making power among men and women and the removal of social restrictions which they enjoy in Russia. Gender roles are renegotiated, but these transformations are not unidirectional. The cultural understandings of masculinity and femininity can support or constrain the mobility of individuals. Yet, among Tajik return migrants, traditional hierarchies have more weight compared to the emerging shifts in gender relations (Bastia 2013; Erdal and Pawlak 2018). Migration empowers women who are migrating and staying behind, but entry bars enhance their vulnerability and make them subject to increased control. Migration policies do not directly affect the social standing of Tajik men in local communities, but entry bars have profound implications for perceived masculinity and one's position in gender hierarchies.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

International migration supports upward social mobility among Tajikistan's families (Azevedo, Atamanov, and Rajabov 2014; Jones, Black, and Skeldon 2007; World Bank 2018b; Zotova and Cohen 2019). Yet, structural unemployment and economic difficulties in Tajikistan, along with Russia's immigration laws, undermine fragile economic security achieved by migrant households. Entry bans negatively affect household economies, pushing them back into precarity and challenging the wellbeing of Tajik migrants. Immigration laws enforced by Russia also undermine fragile gender transformations informed by experiences of international migration. We argue that constraints on physical mobility reconstitute traditional gender relations in Tajikistan. Return migrants readjust to gendered power configurations in their home country and comply with the well-defined norms of masculinity and femininity. Subject to moral judgment and social pressures, men and women accept conventional gender norms. Migration policies de facto reinforce binary gender models and enhance gender inequalities in Tajikistan.

As more than 300,000 Tajiks were banned from entry to Russia for three or more years, a large share of international migrants have become temporarily immobile. Notwithstanding the continuous growth of Tajikistan's GDP and declining poverty rates mainly fueled by remittances, the

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country has failed to create enough jobs for the growing workforce (Strokova and Ajwad 2017). Restrictions on cross-border movement can further limit economic opportunities for Tajikistan's population, particularly for women. Tajikistan's government and international donors need to consider developing a range of short- and long-term policies to create more jobs and increase employment in the domestic labor market. These policies can help to reduce the households' economic dependency on migration to Russia and elsewhere. These measures can include investments in technical schools, vocational education, and professional certification courses, particularly for youth and women, which will help Tajikistan's natives master new skills applicable in the job market.

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Notes

1 This figure may not represent the actual number of labor migrants from Tajikistan, yet it provides the most accurate estimate based on the purpose of entry. By Russia's immigration laws, migrants must fill in migration cards at the ports of entry and indicate their purpose of visit. To apply for temporary work authorization in Russia (*patent)*, migrants should note that they arrive for "business" purposes (*delovaya poezdka*).

2 Although the use of the re-entry bars' database became a concern for Tajik migrants in 2012, the existence of the database "was predicated on the 1996 Russian Federal Law No.114, "On the Rules of Entry and Exit from the Territory of the Russian Federation," which initially outlined the violations and requirements for banning individuals from re-entry" (Bahovadinova 2016, 231).

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