Methodological Gravitism

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In this paper the author presents the case of the exchange marriage system to delineate a model of methodological gravitism. Such a model is not a deviation from or alteration to the existing qualitative research approaches. I have adopted culturally specific methodology to investigate spouse selection in line with the Grounded Theory Method. This approach, indeed, suggests the unification of methodological individualism, collectivism, and the social positioning of the actor to study the complex and intricately intertwined networks of relatedness. Key Words: Methodological Grativism, Qualitative Research, Pakistan, Exchange Marriages.

Methodological individualism, collectivism, and the social position of an actor have been dominant methodological perspectives for decades, but they are not sufficient to fully understand an issue within the pluralistic social environment. This paper explores methodological approaches in social sciences and extends them to the analysis of a social phenomenon in a pluralistic social setting within existing social conditions. It does not propose to utilize previous methods; rather it is an extension of previous methodological approaches. Theoretical literature shed light on the issue (Hodgson, 2007). Methodological individualism is based on the notion of individual identity plus an individual's social relationship within the social world (Hodgson, 2007, p. 211; Lindholm, 1982). The method is used to identify an individual's position in the social universe and defines the phenomenon from the perspective of an actor (Bourdieu, 1984; 1998). It is embedded in the interaction perspectives of sociological theory. Methodological individualism examines the patterns of interaction of an actor. It gives minimum space to social conditions and collective choices.

However, methodological collectivism is used to understand a social phenomenon from the perspective of collective interests (Levi-Strauss, 1969; Becker, 1974; Merton, 1968; Qadeer, 2006) rather than an individual's interest or his/her definition of the social world. In this perspective, the actor is perceived as an appendix of collective reality. This perspective gives more importance to the collective reality and overlooks an individual's uniqueness. It is based on the structural functionalism and conflict paradigm of sociology. Functionalist and conflict paradigms take into account the collective choices of a society and discuss the social change as a "built-in" phenomenon. Nonetheless, they are unable to provide an understanding of social position, given social conditions, and actors' responses to it.

Regarding the methodological individual and collective perspectives, among many others, one of the dominant perspectives to have received recognition is the social position of an actor (Bourdieu, 1998). This perspective gives importance to the position of an actor within the social structure and argues that it is the position of an actor that defines his/ her social world. It is neither the actor, nor the structure that defines their social world. Rather, it is the power, role and relationship of an actor that defines social

phenomenon. In other words, an actor can influence actions of others as a result of his/ her social position. Bourdieu (1998) gave examples of the position of a person among his/her kinship network. He highlighted the symbolic importance of a person in his social universe (kinship) in his study in Algeria. For him, a person can influence others, or he/she can be influenced by others as a result of his/her position within their social network. He gives importance to the structural roles, symbolic culture, habitus and power, but emphasizes the social position of an actor. However, this approach does not take into account pluralistic social conditions. A pluralistic society needs a grounded approach to analyse a social phenomenon.

Literature Review

Although, sociological literature (empirical studies) on the subject is rare (Anwar, 1979; Zaman, 2008), the need for such studies has been recognized. However, some anthropological studies have been faced with similar issues. Tapper's (1991) study in Afghanistan found gender and generation differences were strong in the exchange marriage system. People were divided according to different ethnicities and socio-political status in order to arrange exchange marriages. Tapper, however, did not take into account the social positioning of an actor in his/her network of relations. She also did not realize that there was a need to identify relationship, nor did she focus on the given conditions of the people.

Lindholm (1982) found the need for a culture cantered research approach in Sawat, Northern Pakistan. He investigated the individual perspectives. He realized that a male researcher only had access to half of society (males). Furthermore, complications with regard to data collection and its reliability was visible in the study. He documented individual perspectives and overlooked collective perspectives and the position of an actor within the social network. Although he emphasized the individual's psychological trends of emancipation, he neglected the processes of achieving emancipation involved in the network of relationship.

Methodological problems are not only limited to within Pakistan, but are also part of the Diaspora communities in Europe. Butt (1998) found identical problems of methodological approaches in his study of the Diaspora in Netherlands. Owing to the segregation of women, he had to use culturally specific techniques for data collection. He also suggested a technique be developed for future research (Butt, 1998, p. XI). Similarly, Anwar (1979) and Papanek and Gail (1982) faced a methodological problem while researching with the issue of women in South Asia.

Lyon (2004) provided an anthropological account of the male in his study of a Pakistani village. He did not consider the perspectives of women regarding power and patronage due to cultural problems of methodology. In his study, half of the population (women) was overlooked, by not taking their perspectives into account. A woman in some situations is dependent. This is the case of a daughter or sister. However, in the condition of a mother, she enjoys more power when compares to her son, or in some cases her husband, in villages in Pakistan. Patriarchal power is not only an indicator which determines the individual or collective perspectives and social position of a person. There is space to develop a point of convergence among theoretical approaches of individualism, collectivism and social position of an actor in the network. Above

mentioned researchers suggested a cultural as well as religious centered approach in data collection and its analysis. These studies indicate that data reliability and validity was also a serious issue due to one gender (mainly men) specific approach. Female segregation, hierarchical order according to gender, age and kinship network was visible in some studies, but not highlighted sufficiently in these studies.

There was not a clear-cut distinction between the individual perspectives, rules of the game or social position of an actor. None of the studies highlighted the individual's passive or active role in the interpretation of the data. A serious gap exists between the actor and collective perspectives. There is a need to explore the social position of individual within the universe. Additionally, socio-economic conditions are neglected in these studies. It is obvious that a serious gap exists in methodological approaches with reference to complex social conditions. None of the prevailing western centered methodological approaches is able to give a comprehensive perspective.

As a doctoral student at the University of Leipzig, I started my qualitative investigation on the "exchange marriage system" in order to understand the exchange mechanism, role of actor and collective perspective. I realized that previous research approaches, when taken individually, were least able to guide me to collect the data in a complex social setting, like Pakistan, where various groups live together but follow different systems of spouse selection. They share common points in terms of lifestyle, but variations exist in the marriage systems. To understand an individual actor and his/her actions, in the context of such intricate layers of relationship networks, from any one of the previously established research approaches would have created an inherent research bias. Thus, a tripartite methodological approach, named methodological gravitism, was developed and employed to meet the desired objectives of the research. I do not claim that this is an innovation in terms of qualitative research, as it is just a unification of existing research models. Rather, it should be treated as novice for being limited in its scope of applicability. Below, I present my research as a case of partial applicability of available research models, followed by their unification to achieve the desired level of objectivity while observing and interpreting the actions of individual actors.

There is a need to understand the diverse social conditions, social structure, and role of an individual within the social structure and given conditions. This study may be useful to social researchers, policy-makers, and academicians working in developing pluralized societies who might be facing similar problems. The study highlights the complex social conditions, gender differences and given social condition of a pluralistic society.

Problems with Methodological Individualism

During my fieldwork on the "exchange marriage system" in a rural community of Kabirwala, South Punjab, Pakistan in 2005 and 2006, I interviewed several spouses who were married on the basis of exchange: a sister/ daughter exchange as mean of spouse selection. I investigated the system with the exchanged couples, inquiring about the decision regarding their marriage. They reported that their marriages were determined by their grandparents or parents. Some of them were happy with their "control mate selection," while others were dissatisfied. Their parents and elders chose their spouses for marriage, often without the consent of the concerned parties, who are required to spend

their lives with the spouse regardless of the situation "according to the rules of the game". This is similar to Tapper's (1991) findings in Afghanistan, where a father decides upon the marriage of his daughter, a decision which children are then supposed to accept.

Being a male, I was not allowed to speak with females, due to the segregation of males and females, a problem similar to that faced by Butt (1998), who was unable to collect data for his study from females. However, I requested a female sociologist to assist me in collecting data from the female population. If this technique had not been adopted, 50% of the population (women) would not have been taken into consideration. This "gender-specific" technique was productive and helpful to speak with the respondents to minimize this error. We got familiarity, friendship, and close cooperation with reference to our research to talk about intimate relationship which otherwise were not possible. I found varying differences among spousal responses regarding their controlled mate selection. In this way, it became stagnant to investigate the individual perspective and so I decided to use the structural methodology. I began to document the "rules of the game".

Problems with Methodological Collectivism

In order to investigate the issue of arranged marriages, I first sought to understand the points of view of the parents on the exchange of their children. Some parents reported that they determined the marriage of their children in accordance with the "purity of their family," a significant "rule" in this community. However, the majority of the parents reported that the grandparents were responsible for the exchange marriages of their grandchildren because they are seen as "wise" and ultimately able to decide upon marriage according to the code of the conduct. I decided to interview the grandparents to understand their perspectives. I found that they too were divided in their views. Some of them accepted the responsibility to exchange the grandchildren. However, the majority of the respondents reported that mothers of the children were responsible for marriage exchanges.

A number of cases were found where the children acted as lobbyists for their marriage of choice. It became further difficult to understand the "structural rules and relationship" because every actor justified their actions. I found a number of conflicts, violence, forced marriages, child marriages/engagement, and emotional problems resulting from the system of the exchange. Some of the respondents mentioned their father or other family members (grandfather/other relative) as influential within the family in terms of determining marriages. This led to violence between spouses or even among other family members. The position of an actor within his universe was significant in the above strategy, but I also found some problems.

Problems with the Social Positioning of an Actor

In order to obtain a neutral perception on reality, I decided to find a neutral person or organization familiar with the issues related to exchange marriages. I found a lawyer and local jury members who had witnessed the conflict and violence often associated with this type of system. The lawyer told me that such marriages are rarely reported in courts, but such disputes are common. One can face problems at every stage of the

marriage. It is a "tit for tat" system. There are violence, killings, and other tensions, but the marriages must be arranged among cousins despite these problems. Every person in the marriage system tries to maximize his/her family's interests rather than considering those of the couple. A lawyer or court system can rarely interfere in family affairs. So it is the head of a family or the relatives who interfere. Similarly, the local jury (*Punjait*) plays a limited role. A family and household head make decisions with the help of relatives. An individual cannot escape from this system due to social pressures from relatives, friends, and unavailability of a substitute. However, some level of emancipation from the system can be achieved through socio-economic mobility.

Meanwhile, I selected a group of people who have abandoned the tradition of the exchange marriage but have still followed that of the arranged-marriage. They were a migrant group, who migrated during the independence of Pakistan from India to the newly established state of Pakistan in 1947. This group organized marriages on the basis of arranged marriages rather than exchange marriages. For them, migration and socio-economic mobility was the essential factor forcing them to abandon the tradition of exchanged marriage.

My strategy was again limited, because according to state legislation a person can marry the partner of his/her choice, but he has to seek consent from his guardians. Parents have to allow their children to marry. A number of factors were identified in order to fully understand the reality of the issue. However, the three perspectives (methodological individualism, collectivism and social positioning of an actor) are unable to define the social phenomenon in a pluralistic social universe based on the following three grounds:

> (1) They neglect an individual, his/her structure or social position, and the importance of the role of legal norms. They give nominal or no role to either of the other perspectives, and are unable to effectively grasp social reality in diverse social settings. They either overemphasize individual aspects of social life or neglect them completely.

> (2) They collectively negate social stratum (gender, class, caste, religion or ethnicity) and neither work independently, nor integrate all aspects. For instance, a dichotomy of relationship exists between an individual and his/her social network, which determine social position. On the one hand, a person may select a spouse of his choice, with local religious laws accepting this approach. The person may not accept the imposed decision of the guardians, and may use this option to a certain degree in order to select a spouse. However, in the case of women, this is seen as a form of deviancy from the "rules of the game". On the other hand, an individual has a strong emotional attachment to his/her parents and belief that they should be obeyed to. An actor who neglects the parents' choice is deviating. The community pressurizes the individual to follow the rules of the game. A person is thus independent to a certain degree, as well as dependent upon others.

> (3) These three approaches collectively negate the social environment and how it defines social phenomenon. Therefore, these three approaches are

useful, but they need to be integrated in order to allow for better analysis of an issue within a pluralistic society.

Differing from the above theoretical approaches to methodology, this paper argues for a more central, but measureable approach able to grasp a given social reality within a pluralistic society, which is referred to as "methodological gravitism." The term refers to the gravitational tendency of an issue on a central point.

This paper recognizes some of the assumptions of the theoretical perspectives outlined above and combines them into a single fabric to provide a comprehensive understanding of an issue in diverse social conditions. This approach contains certain characteristics: (a) it addresses an individual and his/her social environment as does methodological individualism, but it adds the structural aspects of social issues as well. (b) It recognizes social structure, but gives importance to the social position of an actor. Actors are not mere appendices but act either passively or actively. They hold a unique position, but within the social structure. (c) Every actor is independent as well as connected with others, holding social positions that take into account a broader structural code of conduct.

Towards the Methodological Gravitism Model

What could combine methodological collectivism, individualism and the social position of a person in order to understand a phenomenon within given social conditions? The methodological gravitism model aims to understand more diverse social settings that share the central point of agreement of a phenomenon. It is designed to give a comprehensive understanding of a social issue. As mentioned earlier, this paper is based on the study of marriages, family, and kinship dependency in the community of Kabirwala, South Punjab Pakistan. The study dealt with the exchange marriage system. These marriages are limited to cousins. In this system, gender, caste, class, religion and ethnic boundaries are strict and the researcher must take them into account. It is not only a system of spousal selection, but also of basic institutional guarantees of social cohesion, welfare, and mutual security. A marriage system not based on exchange present in the same community is also investigated in order to find a central point of agreement as well as disagreement, which is labeled as "gravitism". Here is a short elaboration of the methodological procedure adopted for this study.

My research questions focused on investigating the relationship between individual and the collective perspectives and the problems that exist. I investigated the individual's position in a network and whether the individual is an active or passive actor within the social network, as well as how an individual influences his social network and vice versa. Do agents have any significant social position in the network?

Data Collection

Grounded Theory Method (GTM) guidelines were adopted to collect and analyze the data in this study, because in cultural studies, a qualitative method is an appropriate research technique (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1965; Neumann, 1997; Strauss, 1987). Data were complex as well as diverse in nature. GTM

guided me in providing a rich insight into the collectives and individual perspectives. This method helps to understand the social structure, given conditions, and social position of the actor.

I adopted a network of relationship strategy in order to enter into the field (similarly to Butt's, 1998 study). I requested a friend to introduce me to a person in the community of Kabirwala. I developed my friendship with the person by adopting the community dress code, using the local language and becoming a close friend to the individual, his family, relatives, and his friends. In this culture, the friend of a person is also considered a friend of the relatives and whole network. Slowly, but steadily, I gained access to every male member of the community through social ties with "snowball sampling". I started regular conversations with married males on the issue of marriage. However, having access to the female population was very difficult and was achieved through my female colleague. She played a significant role evening helping me integrate with elder women and children, but not with young ladies. She was an agent of the "confidence-building measure" in the community. If a person earns confidence of an individual, then he/ she have access to the relatives, enjoying full access to information and as a guest of the family of the host. My friend and his relatives provided me and my colleague with residence, food, and they looked after us. However, in the case of local norms being violated, the researcher will suffer serious consequences. I was conscious of this and followed the rules of the game for the fieldwork in order to avoid any problems.

As I developed rapport with the people, I moved from informal conversations to formal interviews. I introduced the objective of my research and got their permission to proceed with face-to-face interviews. The Punjabi (migrant and local) ethnicities were friendly, but the Saraiki were reluctant to conduct formal interviews. Two couples refused to take part in interviews, especially women due to the pressure of their families-in-law who were also present. They allowed my female colleague to interview the females in their presence, but the respondents were not willing to provide personal information. Privacy was limited in such interviews and we were unable to conduct interviews with these two ladies privately. However, the males were more open to the interviews.

Before interviews took place, I introduced my research an its objectives to the community members. I got consent and then started the interviews with the respondents. In Pakistan, one cannot speak haphazardly, when a stranger to the respondents. Therefore, it was necessary to introduce the research objectives and obtain consent prior to the interviews. The majority of my respondents were glad to talk about the exchange marriage system. However, some of them declined my request. The data were collected through snowball theoretical sampling as per GTM guidelines from spouses concerned (the married couples who were exchanged) individually, and in a few cases collectively, their parents who were responsible for their marriages (as structural agents), the children who were to marry on the basis of exchange in the near future. Informal conversations were based on mutual trust and friendship. My data constituted of face-to-face interviews, observations, informal conversation, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) with the respondents, and documentaries of wedding ceremonies.

A pluralistic model was adopted to collect and analyze data from different actors, structural agents, and individual concerns, while keeping in view the social positioning of different actors within the kinship with regard to the issue. The qualitative investigation

was important because it provides a holistic approach to a cultural phenomenon (Creswell, 2003).
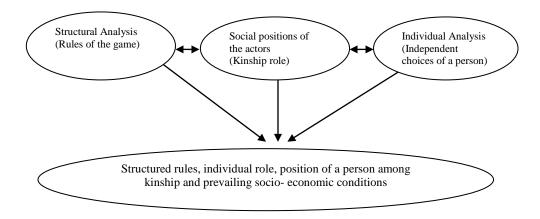
Figure 1. *Data Collection Model[1]*

Figure 1 shows the documentation of the rules of the game at an initial level. The second level shows the investigation of the social position of an individual within his network of relationships. I documented individual concerns at the third level. This guided to me to understand the structural rules, an individual's position and the emancipation from the rules of the game.

I also included different social (ethnic) groups (see Table 1) for the comprehensive understanding of the issue. Table 1 illustrates the share of case histories and individual interviews. I documented 24 family case histories based on 48 individual interviews with respondents mentioned above.

Table 1. *Details of family interviews*

Ethnicity	Individual partners	Young generation	Grand parents generation	Total
Local Punjabi	20	2	2	24
Saraiki	10	1	1	12
Migrants Punjabi	12			12
Total	42	3	3	48

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[1] Some of the material for this article (especially models and tables) has been taken from my PhD dissertation: "Exchange Marriages in the Community of Kabirwala, Pakistan: A Sociological Analysis of Kinship Structure, Agency, and Symbolic Culture" submitted to Der Fakultät für Sozialwissenschaften und Philosophie der Universität Leipzig.
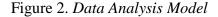
Individuals act within the social structure, but maintain a significant social position. To investigate this, data were also collected from external actors, who are also linked to the issue of the marriages. For example, family lawyers who were dealing with cases of exchange marriage disputes or family-related disputes registered in a local court, local journalists who reported different cases of marriage-related disputes in the local media, and local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) who were working on gender-related issues. The NGOs highlighted the plight women who have to face difficulties due to the exchange system. I discussed the issue with two media representatives, two NGOs representatives (one male and one female), one religious leader, two teachers (one male and one female) and a lawyer in order to further investigate the issue. I used pseudonyms to protect the personal identities of my respondents in my data (Creswell, 2003; Neumann, 1997). I completed my interviews with the repondents in their drawing rooms, and informal conversations took place during dinner and lunch time with the couples, separately whith each spouse, and in two cases both spouses together. We also arranged two special informal parties with younger generations (both male and female seprately) where participants revealed their stories. They discussed the exchange marriage process, problems, opportunities, and invidual choices informally with us. Interviews with professionals were formal and conducted in their respective offices.

Grounded Theory Method guidelines were followed for data collection as well for data analysis. In the beginning of my conversation with the respondents, I explained the objectives of my research and requested consent in order to speak with them. I informed my respondents that I was a student at the University of Leipzig and that my interest was to learn more about the marriage system in the community. After these steps had been completed, informal conversations took place and respondents were requested to tell their marriage story (Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999, p. 352) and then I found the term "*watta satta*" for the marriage by exchange system and the local definition of it. In order to evaluate differences in perception between spouses and different generations (Wohlrab-Sahr, Schmidt-Lux, & Karstein, 2008, p. 132; Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2008), I discussed the issue with the second spouse and then interviewed another respondent. The interviews were not only conducted with the individual spouses or different actors or agents of agency, but Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were also conducted in order to achieve objectivity. I conducted two FGDs separately with girls and boys from the migrant community, one FGD with local Punjabi lawyers and teachers, and one FGD with the Saraiki community.

My participation in four wedding ceremonies and in decision-making process as an active as well passive participants were additional to the collection of the above data. The data were composed of both audio and visual form. Being a citizen of a nearby district (Vehari) and fluent in the local language, I tried to remain as neutral as possible in my role as researcher. In order to avoid possible biases, my PhD supervisor (Moniak Wohalrab-Sahr) and colleagues in her research group at the University of Leipzig played the role of mentor(s). Besides serving as my colleagues in the fieldwork, they also highlighted the personal biases present in the study and critiqued my interviews. My supervisor provided regular feedback on my interviews and suggested possible directions for data collection and analysis. Furthermore, at the end of my initial report, I shared my findings with some of the respondents in order to validate the data.

Data Analysis

My research approach guided me in understanding the research questions. Individual interviews highlighted structural rules, individual emancipation, and conflict between them. Expert interviews highlighted the rules and an individual's position within the network, social pressure, and stigmatization. The model in figure 2 was designed to analyze the data and develop categories on the basis of open, axial, and selective coding (Larossa, 2005; Matthews, 2005; Neumann, 1997).

Figure 2. *Data Analysis Model*

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┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐      ┌─────────────────┐
│ Primary (Jot)   │      │ Kinship material│      │ Secondary       │
│ Notes (Verbal   │◄────►│ reciprocity and │◄────►│ (Descriptive)   │
│ Case Histories, │      │ control         │      │ Notes.          │
│ Observations)   │      │                 │      │ Transcription of│
│                 │      │                 │      │ the recorded    │
│                 │      │                 │      │ data            │
└─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘      └─────────────────┘
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Verbal analysis (Notes), designing of selected case histories
Similarities & differences among ethnicity, class, cast and links with exchange patterns

Open, axial and selective coding

Definition of the social issue (giving quotes and selected extracts of the interviews), categorize, sub categorize, theme and description
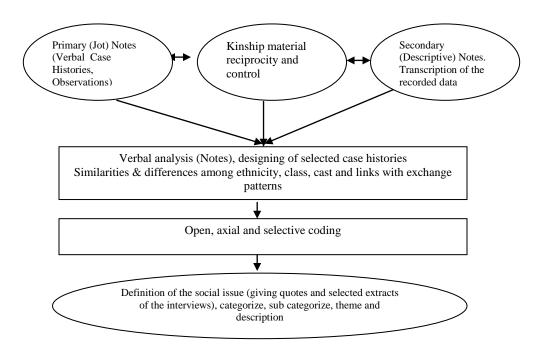
Figure 2 indicates my process of data analysis. I analyzed my jot notes and observation and developed categories. Based on these notes, I wrote descriptive notes and refined the categories. I also developed categories from the kinship-related material from my informal conversations in order to examine how they reciprocate with each other. This helped to code the data. From the coding, I obtained a local definition of issues like *watta satta* (exchange), welfare, social security and insecurity (revenge and enmity).

My female colleague and I collected the data throughout the fieldwork. However, in order to analyze the data, my research supervisor and colleague helped me to develop categories. At some point, I found a number of problems due to conflicting arguments of the respondents. However, my supervisor advised me on how to overcome this difficulty. I modified my technique as required by the fieldwork. However, there was not a significant change in this research approach.

I categorized the data into family structure, power structure within the family, bindings, and collective identity. I also used Microsoft Word track changes mode to highlight the categories of my data and sort them into codes. I categorized the data into

different phases such as marriage and family forming processes, marriage patterns, and wedding ceremonies. The data categories are the formation of symbolic, cultural, and social capital and individual and kinship role. The formation of social capital and its role in terms of social cohesion, welfare, and symbolic importance was categorized. The data found some trends and culturally specific social change within the given social conditions. I shared my findings with the respondents in 2007. They suggested some modifications to the findings. At this stage, I felt these findings were appropriate to share with my peer group.

Results

I will now give a short description of the prevailing social conditions in order to provide an understanding of the issue of the exchange marriage system.

Social Conditions

To understand a social phenomenon, it seems important to take a look at the broader conditions of a community or a society. The social conditions determine the behaviour of an actor and form a social structure. They provide a map for an actor to act accordingly. Every actor and agency is bound to abide to the "code of conduct" of a given society. The following social conditions have been documented in the community of Kabirwala.

The village of Murad[2] is situated near the town of Kabirwala, District Khanewal, South Punjab, Pakistan. It is constituted of various identities and social classes. This social stratum is based on genealogical links. A person determines his/her identity as an individual or as part of a kinship network. This stratum has strong effects on individuals. Disputes emerge even regarding minor issues that involve the whole kinship in order to be settled. Similarly, honour, prestige, and revenge are common and important social values. If a person is not willing to follow these social values, she/he (especially in the case of a male) is considered as *behaya* (dishonorable), and to be of low value. Consequently the person will experience pressure from his relatives and the community who reciprocate negatively. If a person receives any positive thing or relationship, he/she is expected to reciprocate in the same way. This leads social binding and acts as cement. A person is termed as a friend or an enemy. There is nominal space to act as a neutral person. None of the previous studies on the subject have taken into account these findings. Nevertheless, cultural notions of shame, respect and honour play a pivotal role in the formation of social relationships. Social conditions of Pakistan include:

Judicial system. The judicial system of Pakistan is divided into three main categories: (a) Traditional judiciary system that is based on the traditions. It consists of clan arbitration in which family-related issues are negotiated and settled. It expands to the community. The *Punjait* (literal meaning: "five persons") who are influential, resolve the issue. This jury maintains social control. Such arbitration has no or nominal role in the statutory laws of Pakistan. (b) Constitutional courts are established at the state level. They were established during the colonial era. These courts are costly, tedious, and little

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[2] A pseudonym is given to the village to protect the privacy of the respondents.

accessible to the common man or at least for a person who is without education, income or belongs to the lower social stratum. They take a long time to deliver a justice. Corruption further enhances problems for the common men. This system is not credible and lacks common legacy. To avoid such problems, one segment of society sees: (c) Sharia (Islamic laws) as a solution. This is perceived as a cheap and fast procedure involving little bureaucracy. However, this law does not exist in reality, but in theory it is a part of the statutory laws of Pakistan. Nevertheless, family-related problems are solved at the micro-level and a few cases are reported in the state run courts.

Communication system. The village under investigation is linked with the town of Kabirwala through a road made of mud (*kachi sarak*). It also has small paths (*rah*). People use their private vehicles: cart, bicycle, motor-bike, tractor, and car to travel to the town. Similarly, people have access to state-run television. Some people use satellite antenna for private and foreign TV channels. People are also using CD players to watch movies. Mobile phone technology is widespread, cheap and almost every family has access to this facility. It is spreading rapidly, but limited to the young population. As a result, the traditional system of exchange marriages is still dominant.

Health and hygiene. Health and hygiene conditions are deteriorating in the community under investigation. People are without clean water. They only use hand pumps, while rich persons use electric pumps to extract groundwater for drinking, washing, and daily use. Similarly, people are also without sanitation facilities. They have individual systems of sanitation at the household level. Whatever the water consumption is, it goes directly to the crops without treatment. Solid waste material is also thrown away regardless of the hazards it causes to the water. Water and sanitation problems affect the health of the people. Water-born diseases are common but people are unable to understand these diseases. They understand it as a matter of individual luck and destiny. Similarly, healthcare facilities are limited to the town and the people do not have access to them. People thus rely on local unqualified doctors and faith-healers. Some travel to the city for modern health facilities, if they can afford it. A majority of the people relies on the traditional healing system due to non-affordability and/or lack awareness. However, young people are more aware and seek treatment from the modern medical system. The older generations do not seriously take into account the modern system and rely on the traditional healing system. Thus, according to modern medical research, cousin-marriage brings genetic problem. However, this is not an issue for the people because they are not aware of it.

Education and literacy. The literacy rate of Pakistan is 56%, while the male literacy rate is of 69% and the female literacy rate of 44%. Furthermore, there is a low literacy rate in the village. Exact data on literacy rate is not available, but it may be safely argued that the majority of the population has not received a modern education. The literacy rate among women is even lower (Economic Survey of Pakistan, 2006-7. A number of children are out of schools, living on or off the street. Some of them study at the local *madrassahs* (religious schools), which follow a traditional method of teaching. Furthermore, there is a stratification of the educational system in Pakistan: (a) *Madrassahs* are for the marginalized, who are vulnerable and cannot afford modern

education which is costly. This produces so-called religious scholars. (b) Urdu medium schools are designed for middle class populations. These schools are without proper facilities for students and teachers. They produce the labor class. (c) English schooling is reserved for children of the elite classes. These schools are situated in the urban areas. They are commercial and produce the ruling class. This general trend of education of Pakistan also prevails in this village. Without literacy, the population remains much more traditional. Nevertheless, stratification and differences among various clans based on the class system can be observed.

The above social conditions indicate a variety of social classes having access to diverse basic facilities. These facilities vary according to the social status of a person. However, some common characteristics exist. Individual actors are affected by these social conditions. The categories found below further highlight economic conditions that directly affect the marriage system.

Economic conditions. A vast majority of the people in the community of Kabirwala is dependent on agro-economy. They are farmers, laborers, tenants, and dependent on agricultural products. They rely on traditional means of production rather than on modern technology. However, a sizeable population is also entering into the market-economy. They are building small shops, business, and some of them are employed in related professions as private employees. A number of people are dependent on government employment. They are working as clerks, school-teachers, and laborers in government departments. Some of the people are working as technicians or laborers in the private and government sector. There is a huge dependency rate. It would be easy to make the claim that Pakistani families have the highest dependency rate in the world in general, but particularly in this part of the country. Here an individual, mainly a male, will earn an income upon which a whole family (e.g., 7-8 persons) is dependent.

Environmental conditions. The village of Kabirwala has witnessed severe environmental conditions. Natural disasters are part and parcel of life in this region. Weather is hot in summer. Normally, temperatures are about 42 to 48 centigrade in summer, rising to 50 and sometimes to 52 centigrade. In winter, temperatures may drop below zero on some days. Normally they remain at 5-20 centigrade in winter. There is nominal or no rain generally in the area, but sometimes too much rainfall destroys local crops and houses. The community is vulnerable to such harsh weather conditions. Such weather conditions probably also affect the behaviour of the people on a daily basis. Social support is provided among close relatives and friends to help the affected people, but the state plays no role in helping these people.Broader and more general categories are used for this paper in order to provide an understanding of the issue and its methodology.

Family structure, role, and relationship. A family is the basic and core institution which enjoys absolute authority over the individual. An overwhelming majority of the people have a joint or extended joint family. Relatives live together and enjoy a high level of dependency upon each other in every aspect of life. In the joint family system, a person receives economic, social and psychological support from his family. A father is responsible for the education, and health. As well as providing food

for his children, wife, parents and other relatives (i.e., brother/sister) who are not in employed.

However, an emerging trend is the nuclear family system. Three notions are important with reference to defining a family in Kabirwala. (a) People perceive the whole *biradari* (close relatives) as family in general. They are genealogical linked to one another. These relatives only have the option of marrying a cousin and exogamy is a negative value. Aslam, a male participant, reported that *apna, apna te ghair, ghair hai*, which means relatives are our own while non-relatives are not. In his point of view, relatives provide support in times of need. Rubi, a female, said that cousin marriages bring cooperation, unity and constitute the essence of a cousin network. A person is nothing without cousins according to local perceptions. An individual's marriage within the same caste and group is supported by the value of unity and solidarity. The joint marriage system protects common interests. Carsten (2000, 2004) refers to this as "biological kin" and Bourdieu (1998) as "official kin".

According to the second notion, (b) a family is limited to a few specific relatives that is up to a lineage including the grandparents (mainly from the father's side). The relative enjoy the status of brothers. (c) The third notion is that a family includes close friends. Carsten (2000, 2004) and Bourdieu (1998)refer to friends as "social kinship". However, according to the local notion, people give more importance to friends than to their relatives. Social kin includes friends, family friends, and professional colleagues who are not part of biological family. They enjoy a close relationship, but they are not allowed to marry. If anybody violates this rule that lead to serious consequences, leading to enmity.

A family assists an individual in every aspects of everyday life, such as: receiving education, arranging a spouse, organizing wedding ceremonies, and helping in finding employment. Marriage is a collective family choice (Edwards, 1969). Close relatives provide social support and help during a social crisis. Generally, close relatives share common land and are integrated with one another economically. A family looks after the spouses, their children until they achieve autonomy. An individual will take responsibility for his father or elder brother. Therefore, there is a strong networking and web of relationship among relatives, who are responsible for following the rules of the game.

The Watta Satta System: Structural Rules

The local term "*watta satta*" is used to represent exchange marriages. It literally means, "to throw something and return it back with equal force or more energetically than it was first thrown." It is used in everyday conversation. It refers to an equal, balanced and smooth relationship based on give and take. The term has also negative connotations. It refers to taking revenge on others if harm is done. Mehboob, a male respondent defined *watta satta* in the following way:

> It is equality and the egalitarian notion of giving and taking a woman. If one person harms a female from another family, it is reciprocated by the first family. This system was protecting both families, but this is not the case anymore. It is creating problems now and leading to miserable

situations. We find a girl as a *rishta* (marriage proposal), and in response we have to give a daughter/ sister. [Family have to] find a woman among cousins or within relatives for marriage in exchange. A woman has a very low status in the community if she has not been exchanged with another woman. If she has been exchanged, she enjoys complete status because of the mutual relationship, which acts as the balancing force in the exchange of women. This provides protection for both families and empowers the woman. The *watta satta* protects women. (Personal communication on February 20, Zaman, 2009)

Tasadaq, a male farmer, explains:

Exchange marriages ensure the stable family life and marriage of a person. They maintain the safety and stability of the marriage. A man definitely thinks about his exchanged sister if he tries to harm his wife. His sister also will be treated in the same way. So in the tradition of exchange marriages, many people willingly or unwillingly agree to a compromise, in order to lead a balanced life, so that the two families do not have to deal with disturbances. (Personal communication on March 3, 2006, Zaman, 2009)

A family prefers to arrange a marriage on the basis of exchange. Normally, according to current literature on the issue, a female is exchanged for her brother/father or any other male relative's marriage (Levi-Strauss, 1969; Bearman, 1997). However, in Kabirwala a male is expected to get married for the sake of his sister, who otherwise is ineligible to marry according to the "rules of the game". If she is not married with her cousin, the family "honour" is considered to have been violated. Honour is more important than personal choice. A brother/son is supposed to protect the family and his sister's honour. Waris Shah and his wife defend this notion of the honour:

A *syed zaadi* (daughter of a *syed* family) must be married within her close relatives. If my son wants an out-of-caste marriage, we shall deliberate, but our daughter must be married in exchange. After a careful evaluation of the genealogical table of the *syed* caste, we married our girls within our own *syed*. This is a symbol of unity and preservation of the respect and honour of the *syed* in society. (Personal communication on March 2, 2006, Zaman, 2009)

In order to marry, a genealogical link must prevail to protect the "purity of blood." In the case of a person and their family failing to maintain these structural rules, cousins will exert social pressure for a marriage among cousin on the basis of exchange to be arranged. An individual is obliged to follow the rules of the game otherwise he/she is vulnerable to isolation, exclusion, and victimization.

According to the rules of the game, if a person gives gifts, helps, or harm his/ her spouse, the second exchanged couple and/or his family must reciprocate. Any positive and negative action is reciprocated. A person might not be interested in his/her spouse

and want to divorce. If this happens, the second couple is also supposed to divorce, though the second couple might have a happy relationship. If any of the spouses resist the reciprocity, he/she is considered a coward (*buzdill*) and shameful person (*beyhaya*) behaving inappropriately. Pressure is put on the individual to act according to the "code of conduct". This kind of situation generates mismatched and forced marriages in the village. This brings unhappiness among some of the couples involved. They may get married but this then becomes a source of domestic conflict for their concerned families. Close relatives again step in to settle problems through negotiation or "traditional authority" (based on obedience, honour, and respect). Safia, a female respondent reported:

> In our family, a man keenly plays the role of brother or son properly, but not that of a father. He always defends his parents', sisters', and brothers' interests with his traditional authority. He doesn't care for his wife or children as he does for the rest of his family. If he does, he is accused of being *behaya* (shameless) or *runmureed* (servant to his wife). (Personal communication with Abida Sharif on March 6, 2006, Zaman, 2009)

However, young educated individuals are realizing the importance of personal choice or individual emancipation in terms of mate selection. They acknowledge the difficulties of this marriage system. They negotiate with their parents in cultural specific ways. Some of the parents realized the difficult situation in which their children find themselves. Other parents force their children to follow their own wishes under any circumstance or situation. Some children follow paternal orders without hesitation, others become ambivalent and some of them resist, becoming vulnerable. Change in their behaviour is perceived as "disobedience" and is considered as a criminal act. Kalsom, a female explains:

> If a girl has a love affair, it will remain an affair and not end in marriage. She will be stigmatized and sanctioned for her *na-farmani* (disobedience) and referred to as *na-farman* (disobedient). She will feel shame, guilt and become vulnerable in our village. The family will also start to ignore her. The rules are stricter for a girl than for a boy and the consequences for breaking them are severe. (Personal communication with Abida Sharif on March 10, 2006, Zaman, 2009)

The migrant population living in the same village does not follow the marriage by exchange system. They have somewhat similar social conditions, but have a better economic condition and are more educated than the previous group. They follow the system of arranged marriages, but do not exchange their women. They have new criteria for spouse selection, based on homogamy of education and earnings, but limited to the relatives. This group is more open and accepts the concerns of the future spouses. For this group, exchange marriage is not important, but arranged and homogamy marriages are more important. Nevertheless, I found individual roles were also important. Individuals were either active or passive in maintaining the system. Some of the individuals were critical of the system due to individual concerns.

Individual Role and Relationship: Individual Emancipation

Different actors within the same family play a crucial role in influencing others due to the social bonds that are established when exchanged marriages occur. This may create tensions between spouses or other family members at a certain level. For instance, a husband and wife will try to maintain their relationship with their respective families of origin. They will prefer to arrange a marriage for their son/ daughter with their nephew/ niece respectively so that they enjoy social support in future. In return, the niece/nephew would be looking after the interests of the mother/father in their old age, if they are from the family of origin. Aslam's case history highlights this phenomenon and the conflict it brings. Aslam, a male respondent reports that "my daughters take care of my brother properly, and better than any other woman from outside our *biradari*." Similarly, he feels that if his niece is married to his son on exchange, she will care for him better than anyone else. It is a common notion that people ask their own relatives for help, and that someone from another family would neglect the person who needs help in old-age. However, his wife (Sabi) was against arranging the marriage of her daughter within the patrilineage. She was rather interested in arranging her daughter's (Kalsom) marriage within her own lineage. Kalsom herself, however, was interested in marrying by choice without paternal consent and resisting her forced marriage.

The other spouse who is unable to maintain his social ties with his relatives will become angry. This anger will last for a long time. The individual will try to dominate his spouse in different ways, both directly and indirectly. In such a situation, the children may decide if they will support either their mother or father. This condition empowers the couples, who are otherwise totally dependent upon their parents. Mostly, either the mother or father accepts will the authority of their spouse in arraigning the marriage of their children. If a compromise is not reached, the children decide who they want to marry: with a maternal or paternal cousin.

In some cases, the future spouses themselves are able to decide upon their marriage. For instance, the parents want to arrange a marriage of a son/daughter who does not like his/her spouse. In the case of a female, there will be serious consequences if she disagrees with her marriage proposal. Her only chance of influencing her marriage decision is indirectly through her mother or cousin.

However, in some cases, a boy can resist parental decision. He will be expelled from the household. He becomes vulnerable. If he finds any shelter among any of his close relatives (cousins), he will live there and return after time has elapsed allowing for the settlement of the dispute. He will settle his issues with his parents or the parents will try to negotiate with him. A close relative may try to settle the issue of his marriage on his behalf. He will return to his home and the parents will try to address his concerns or he will accept the parental decision. If the person is educated and has sufficient social contacts outside his own kinship or is in employment and manages to live independently, he may enjoy relative autonomy in terms of spouse selection. He will able to select a spouse of his own choice but again limited to his cousins. If he manages to find employment in a metropolitan city, and has sufficient earnings and develops social capital in the city; he will find a spouse there.

In this case, he will need a lot of money to build a new house, give gifts to his future spouse, and spend a huge amount for wedding ceremony. Selecting a spouse

outside the kinship leads to doubts about a person, his family, his personal character, and non-conformist values. This marriage is not considered as a *khandani* (family) marriage and is thus not a pure marriage. The person involved will always be vulnerable to any kind of social crisis because of the non-availability of kinship support. There will always be a kind of trust deficit among his family of procreation. In case of difficulties, his family of origins will provide support, and rescue though they are angry with him. These findings are new and the previous literature has never focused on these issues. It only focuses on the structural or individual aspects of the phenomenon.

Figure 3. *Family and individual dependency*

Figure 3 indicates the relationship of a person within his universe. A person is an integral part of the family and kinship. The kinship has significant influence. This indicates reciprocal relationship and creates morality. The kinship network plays a key role in determining the position of a person.

Kinship Organization, Networking, Marriages: Social Position

After the family, the close relatives, also called the *biradari*, always keep an eye on the individual. The kinship is more sensitive regarding the affairs of a female than that of a male. A woman is considered as "honour". She must remain within the close relatives. She has little space "institutional escape", which is more feasible for a male. However, both girls and boys may lobby for their marriage. For instance, Tariq fell in love with his *malvair* (mother's brother's daughter: maternal cousin). He expressed his

preference to his mother who conveyed it to and discussed it with her husband. Both parents then went to Tariq's uncle family and discussed the possibility of a *rishta* for Tariq's marriage with his daughter. His uncle accepted the marriage proposal, and demanded a girl in exchange. His family agreed to his sister in exchange and the marriage was arranged. However, this lobbying model is limited to cousins. Nonetheless, the lobbying model is acceptable. It leaves space for an individual's position within the network. In this model, a boy fell in love with his cousin and wanted to marry her. Parents on both sides got involved in the negotiation. However, such cases involving a girl are rare. In this lobbying model an actor realizes the importance of his social position within the kinship network.

The kinship organization has different layers. At an initial stage, it is composed of brothers/ sisters, parents and grandparents as well as uncle, aunts. It might be divided into four levels: (a) immediate family (parents, brothers/ sisters, grandparents); (b) secondary family (uncle/ aunts and first cousins). (c) Close relatives like second and third cousins who are considered as the *biradari*. At the third level, a caste which is a socio-economic group based only genealogical relatedness is important for an individual. (d) A "social kinship" (close friends, peer group, and professional association) plays important role in the marriage and family formation of an actor, but this group only assists in finding a spouse from the same *biradari* or caste. In the kinship, a person has close biological or genealogical links with other actors. Marriages are arranged in the same order of kinship. Parallel-cross cousins (from both parents' lineage) are the most successful and stable marriages because both parents' interests are secured. Among a social kinship a marriage is literally prohibited. If anybody violates the rules of the game, he is considered as a *neech* (person of very low status) in the eyes of the people. Marriage perspectives are thus limited to close relatives. Kinship characteristics have been summarized here:

> (a) Kinship provides a marriage market for a person in the community of Kabirwala.
> (b) Kinship is social capital for a person. It provides social and economic support on every social occasion. For instance, for a wedding ceremony, the kinship contributes money, gives gifts, and arranges the wedding. They dance, cook, eat together at the wedding and contribute money for the expenditures. In the case of death within the family, the kinship provides the family with a sense of belonging.
> (c) Kinship provides physical strength which shows the community that the kin are united and they reinforce their social bond through social events. This strength and presence together symbolizes that no one from rivals can dare to damage the interest of the any of the person from the kinship.
> (d) Obviously kinship organizations share strong social bond with relatives. They are dependent upon each other.
> (e) Kinship shares most of the land, which is in the name of an elder. The kinship unites through this a land. If an individual wants to sell his land, the kinship will resist and make it a matter of honour. The kinship will try to address the economic issues of the individual, and then buy the land if

necessary. They will have first right to buy the property, and local laws accept this right. The marriages further strengthen this property bond.

(f) The kinship organization provides a ladder to success in a professional career. A person sitting in government offices generously supports his relatives. However, the notion of nepotism is a counter argument in this aspect and neglects the rights of other eligible person to succeed in the community.

(g) The kin is responsible for settling disputes within the family. They negotiate, try to incorporate the interest of a person and integrate him/ her in a web of relationships. Anybody who deviates or fails to accept the kinship demands will be met by social pressure on behalf of the kinship aimed at modifying individual behaviour. If the individual still resists, punishment and sanctions will follow. If a family resists and the negotiating parties are unable to reach a compromise, the *biradari* will divide in favour of either of the parties. This is the basis for a new *biradari*. The divided *biradari* will come together again if they feel a threat from any other outsider (mostly from another caste).

(h) Social kinship provides help in the short-term based on ensuring mutual interests. This help is not maintained in the long-term. Social kinship provides short-term shelter and assistance and look after each other on a reciprocal basis. They play the role of neutral negotiator between a person and his family. Nevertheless, the social kinship has a limited role and it is situation specific.

(i) An individual feels protected and safe as part of the kinship network, which looks after his/her interest and the individual become active supporter of the family and kinship organization.

(j) Groups within the kinship also compete with one another. All relatives see each other's positions and mobility in terms of social hierarchy. They manipulate, harass and exploit each other. However, other relatives settle their differences. A powerful kin (economically and physically) dominates the other cousins due to his social position. To avoid such problems and create balance, marriages are arranged among cousins because such marriages are a symbol of mutual strength. Findings regarding negative reciprocity are neglected in previous literature on the subject.
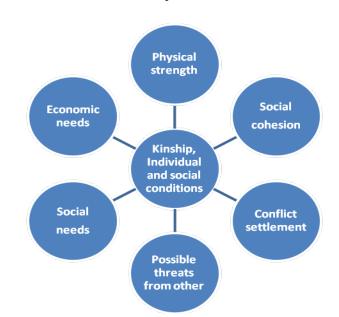
Figure 4. *Kinship and Individual Relationship and Social Condition*

Figure 4 illustrates that a person is dependent upon relatives. They provide support in different aspects of life as a result of given social conditions. The role of a family and the individual and his/ her relationships among cousins is important in the marriage by exchange system. Beside this, relatives exercise pressure on a person to adopt the roles as given by tradition. This forms the "moral economy" (Thompson, 1971, 1993) of the kinship, which insists to that marriages be arranged among cousin on the basis of exchange. Marriage by exchange is a result of the moral economy and the norms of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960).

In my findings, every actor has a role, prescribed by the social structure and given social conditions. An actor performs the role, but has the capacity to modify it. He has the ability to modify his/her role, and this may create tensions. To control the tensions, there is a self-regulating system of conflict management embedded in the moral economy. A person's role is subjected to the structural conditions, his social position, and opportunities which he/she creates or is given to him/her.
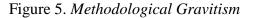
Discussion

These data have provided a complicated picture of the issue of exchange marriages, and it is unclear if the focus should be placed on the individual perspective to examine how individuals define the social phenomenon. If a scientist focuses on the individual perspective, he/she will know much about the individual and his social surroundings. The scientist will include compelling individual accounts. The interpretation of individual narration is entertaining, but it neglects structural forces, given social conditions and the social position of an individual. One must take into account the collective perspective.
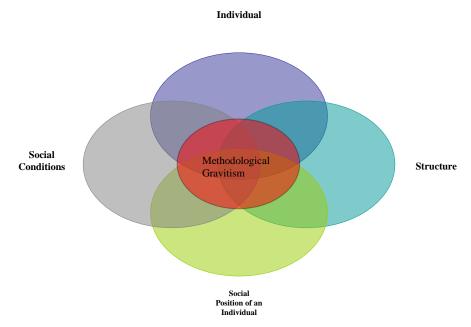
According to collective methodology, an individual is a puppet of collective identity. The structure addresses without doubt the actor, but his actions are seen as the

appendix of the structural forces. The structure dominates in this perspective. Social conditions and the position of an individual are overlooked and much generalized in this perspective.

The social position of person, in given circumstances is another sophisticated research approach. It addresses not only the actor, but his prevailing social conditions. However, in this approach structural forces are overlooked. So there is need to address all the above presuppositions in such as way as to understand the social phenomenon comprehensively.

Therefore, there is need to propose a strategy that combine the above approaches into a single fabric so that they may complement each other. This paper proposes "methodological gravitism" as a suitable approach, which was used in the study described in this paper. Such an approach addresses the multiple aspects of the above methodological problems and combines them into a single fabric. This approach looks a bit complex, but it overcomes methodological errors. It addresses the various aspects of a phenomenon. It combines gender, generation, kinship, and the different layers of pluralistic social settings. This strategy also discusses the social conditions, and individual role within these social conditions (Hildenbrand, 2007). It combines the role of social structure and the individual definition of the phenomenon in a given situation. In this approach, a researcher can find some common points as well as differences between actors, structural agents, prevailing social conditions, and the position and role of an individual. Despite these differences, there are central points that combine all of these realities into a single fabric. The task of the sociologist is to understand the phenomenon comprehensively. In this study, kinship and reciprocity are the central points responsible for the exchange spouse selection. Socio-economic conditions create a situation where an actor or group cannot deviate. If the socio-economic conditions change, this leads to social change. Nevertheless, every aspect (collective methodology, individual, social conditions, and social position) works independently, but is linked to the others through these central points.

Figure 5. *Methodological Gravitism*

In Figure 5, other aspects of a phenomenon are also significant. However, such an approach is not without error. It also involved a lot of complications. Data collection and analysis is challenging in this approach. Another problem is determining which dimension of the issue is more significant than others. Analyzing the data objectively is problematic. The gender issue is also a difficult task and is necessary to understand the issue in general.

The methodological gravitism approach combines a number of theoretical approaches and proposes a new approach based on micro-macro integration. It allows a researcher to understand pluralistic social settings. It combines methodological individualism, collectivism, and the social positioning of an actor within given social conditions.

This study contributes to the theoretical and empirical debate on research methods. It is an effort to generate a debate on this issue of a common point of convergence. However, such a strategy is not without problems, though it does minimize difficulties. Future research may bring further improvement in the data analysis technique with this approach in the context of complex societies.

This research was conducted in Pakistan. It may be replicated with Diaspora communities in different parts of the world who have somewhat similar traditions. Some of the societies also practice the segregation of women. This research is helpful in understanding societies who have variations in ethnicity, gender, generational gaps, as well as similar social conditions as Pakistan.

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Article Citation

Zaman, M. (2011). Methodological gravitism. *The Qualitative Report*, *16*(6), 1574-1598. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR16-6/zaman.pdf