Bride Abduction in Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy Through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition

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Outline

• Case Studies of Bride Abduction
  ~ Typical sequence
  ~ Variations

• The Historical Context

• Discourses of Shame and a Woman’s Decision to Stay

• Discourses of Tradition and Beliefs about the Historical Legitimacy of Bride Abduction
Case Studies of Bride Abduction

• Laura

• Zhanna

The Betashar Ceremony
What Happens When a Bride is Kidnapped?

- The Abduction
- The Scarf
- The Letter
- The Apology
- The In-Laws Arrive
- Betashar Ceremony

Opening a Dowry after the Marriage is Finalized
Some Motives for Bride Kidnapping

- Bride’s parents object
- Less expensive
- Less time
- The bride objects
- The groom is shy
- Somebody else might marry her
The Historical Context: The Pre-Soviet Period

- Arranged marriages - norm
- Kidnap marriages - rare
- Daughters-in-law had low status
- Women had no formal education
- Women did not work outside of home
The Historical Context: The Soviet Period

- Women in Soviet Central Asia were “liberated” by the Soviet state
  - 70 years of progressive policies, beginning in the mid-1920s
  - Laws on the “Crimes of Custom”
  - High Levels of Education
  - Many women worked outside the home
Post-Soviet Transformations

• New economic realities

• Nationalism and the “re-traditionalization” of gender ideals

• Simultaneous infiltration of “Western” fashions and lifestyles that are more sexually explicit
Shame and the Decision to Stay

• Family honor is linked to female modesty

• Public knowledge of immodest behavior (even if it is only a rumor) can be shameful

• Marriage restores the family’s honor
Female Agency and Acts of Resistance

- Escape
- Resisting Scarf and Letter

Photo Credit: Fatima Sartbaeva
Questioning the Historical Authenticity of Bride Abduction

- **Kazakhstan**
  - Views of Historical Origins of Bride Abduction
  - Moral judgments against kidnapping

- **Kyrgyzstan**
  - Popular belief that bride abduction is a national tradition
Conclusions
Questions?

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Publications on bride abduction available at:
www.cynthiawerner.com
Changing Values in Post-Soviet Society

• Rise of National Identity
  – Defining what it means to be Kazakh
  – Revival of National Traditions

SIMULTANEOUSLY:

• Desire to be Viewed as “Modern”

• Both processes affect women’s lives
Questions?