Mapping the Mismatch

Bride Abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and the Disconnect Between Local Realities and Aid Organization Framing

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Abstract

Bride abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan is a human rights and gender equality issue that continues to exist despite national and international efforts to end it. This bachelor thesis explores Kyrgyz bride abduction as a mismatch or disconnect between local realities and top-down aid practice. It pursues this aim in three steps using a qualitative mixed-methods approach. Firstly, the thesis conducts a literature review of key academic articles to identify and discuss local functions of bride abduction. Secondly, it uses a discourse analysis of website entries by international aid organizations to understand how these organizations frame bride abduction online. For these first two steps, local functions and framing build the theoretical framework. The third step compares the results of the literature review and the discourse analysis, using the theoretical concepts of complexity and decoupling to discuss them in relation to each other. During this final step, the thesis outlines in how far, if so, the observed mismatch between local realities and aid organization framing of bride abduction exists. The thesis finds that local functions of bride abduction are complex and that framing by international aid organizations fails to recognize this complexity. It establishes a disconnect between local realities of bride abduction and aid organization framing. However, this mismatch cannot be conceptualized as a decoupling as per Meyer's World Society Theory, as further research would be needed.

Keywords: bride abduction, Kyrgyzstan, international aid organizations, framing, complexity, decoupling

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

CSCE -   Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe

(I)NGO -   (International) Non-governmental Organization

UN -   United Nations

UNDP -   United Nations Development Programme

UNICEF -   United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

USSR -   Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

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For Aygul, my Kyrgyz mom, who took me in as one of her own.

Für Günther Geib, mein Opa, der mich in Allem unterstützt.

1. Introduction

Bride Abduction is and continues to be a common way to get married in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. According to Nedulzhko and Agadjanian (2015), approximately 37 percent of women and 29.6 percent of men in the Kyrgyz Republic (referred to hereafter as Kyrgyzstan) who participated in a national survey from 2011/2012 married through abduction. While the demographical data of this study cannot claim to be representative today, it does indicate that a significant number of women each year become "the abducted" and a significant number of men abduct to marry. Many abductions, while not all, are non-consensual, and men are able, often accepted, and sometimes expected to take a woman without prior knowledge and in some instances against her will to marry (Werner et al., 2018). Therefore, bride abduction is a social practice deemed a gender equality and a human rights concern.

International aid organizations and Western media have denounced bride abduction and called for action to end it. For example, a UN statement from May 2018 (UNICEF, 2018) addressed an instance of a man murdering the woman he abducted within a police station. This statement denounced bride abduction as "unlawful." It stated: "UN agencies in Kyrgyzstan are calling on Kyrgyzstani authorities to take all appropriate measures to stop such practices and fulfil its domestic legislation and international treaties that the country has joined." Moreover, during the last two decades, newspaper articles like Smiths (2005) "Abduction, Often Violent, a Kyrgyz Wedding Rite" in the *New York Times* or documentaries like Peter Lom's (2004) "Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan" have sparked outrage, interest, and disbelief among Western viewers and readers. The international aid organizations mentioned above state concern and campaign against the practice in Russian or Kyrgyz within the country and beyond, informing about bride abduction in English language website entries and YouTube clips that address an international audience (e.g., UN Women, 2018). The Kyrgyz government outlawed bride abduction in 1994, and in 2011 the penalty was increased from three to seven years in prison (Becker et al., 2017).

However, despite legal consequences and aid projects and campaigns trying to end the practice, bride abduction is still persistently practiced in Kyrgyzstan. This mismatch between local bride abduction practice and the framing of international aid organizations marks a gap in the bride abduction literature. It also has implications for the practice of development aid regarding bride abduction and other human rights and gender equality controversies. This

thesis attempts to explore and understand this observed mismatch between aid practice and local realities in the case of Kyrgyz bride abduction.

More specifically, this thesis aims to establish what functions bride abduction fulfills for those who reproduce it, how it is framed towards an English-speaking audience by international aid organizations, and to establish and explore the observed mismatch between local practice and aid strategy on a deeper level. *Local functions* and *framing* represent theoretical concepts that are defined in detail in the theory chapter (Chapter 5). Based on this, the following research question and its sub-questions guide the thesis:

In how far, if so, is there a mismatch between local functions of bride abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and framing by international aid organizations of the practice?
> a. What functions does bride abduction fulfill for those that practice it?
> b. How do international aid organizations frame bride abduction online?

1.1 Defining Bride abduction

1.1.1 Term

The Kyrgyz term "ala kachuu" literally means "to take and run away" (Kleinbach et al., 2005, p.191). Translations into English vary, with "bride kidnapping," "bride theft," "bride capture," and "bride abduction," being the most common terms used for "ala kachuu" in previous research (Borbieva, 2012). After considering the debate surrounding the accuracy and implication of each of these possible translations, the term "bride abduction" is used for the purpose of this thesis. "Bride abduction" captures the lack of consent, previous knowledge, and the script of "ala kachuu" without, like "bride theft," implying that the girl is a property that can be stolen. "Bride kidnapping" is, besides being used by some researchers, the term most commonly used in Western media articles (e.g., Smith, 2005; Mathews, 2010) and documentaries (e.g., Lom, 2004). It can be criticized for sensationalizing, dramatizing, and romanticizing what these articles describe as a "traditional Kyrgyz practice" (e.g., Mathews, 2010). This thesis, like Werner (2009), prefers "bride abduction" over "bride capture" because it better summarizes the process or script that "ala kachuu" usually follows. It also stresses the involuntary nature that many abductions have. Therefore, "ala kachuu" is used interchangeably with (Kyrgyz) bride abduction.

1.1.2 Process

While the circumstances of every individual abduction vary, the process of the actual abduction tends to follow a common script, as comparing key ethnographic studies shows (Borbieva, 2012; Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007; Werner, 2009; Kim and Karioris, 2020). When the groom decides to marry a specific girl, no matter their degree of familiarity beforehand or whether or not either she or her family is aware of the impending abduction, he usually gathers a group of his male friends to help him (Lom, 2004). The groom and his friends either wait until or arrange for the prospective bride to be isolated by herself or with only one or two female companions, usually friends or sisters (Handrahan, 2004). For example, when she is on a walk home from the store. In such an opportune moment, the men grab the girl, force her into a waiting car, and take her to the groom's parents' house (ibid.). It is common for the abducted woman to fight loudly, cry, and try to escape and continue to do so at the destination even if the abduction happens with her knowledge and consent (Werner, 2009). Werner (2009) claims this is because it is considered dishonorable for her to act too willing to be married. At the groom's parents' house, the groom's parents contact the women's family and his present female relatives like his mother, grandmother, aunts, and sisters, try to convince the girl to consent to the marriage (Kim and Karioris, 2020). The choice to be married is expressed by the bride willingly putting on a white headscarf offered by the other women (Bazarkulova and Compton, 2021). When the prospective bride's parents arrive, they usually ask her to agree to stay even though, in some cases, they might not make her or might offer her the choice to go home (Borbieva, 2012). However, Werner's (2009) study on local discourse regarding abduction shows that there is great emphasis on shame. A woman who refuses marriage, especially if she has been at the groom's home for a certain duration of time, is seen as "damaged goods" (ibid.). This tarnishes her reputation and diminishes her chance of being seen as a suitable candidate for marriage in the future (ibid). If the abducted woman signals her consent by singlehandedly putting on the white headscarf, an Imam (religious official) is called to officiate the marriage (Kim and Karioris, 2020). The couple is then recognized as married by society but not by a court of law (Werner et al., 2018). Many couples also marry legally later on. If they do not, either because the groom does not want to or because the woman is still under the legal marriage age of 18, it can prove problematic for the abducted woman (Human Rights Watch, 2019). As opposed to a legally married divorcee, she does not have the same rights concerning alimony and child support if she leaves her husband (ibid.).

While most Kyrgyz bride abductions roughly follow the structure this script outlines, vignettes of individual abductions show that the circumstances of bride abduction can differ significantly from case to case, particularly in terms of the degree of consent and motive. Some abductions are literally abductions with the woman and her family not knowing about the marriage and the groom being a stranger (Werner et al., 2018). Others more resemble an arranged marriage, and some abductions could be argued to be staged elopements with both the bride and the groom having planned and known about the process (Bazarkulova and Compton, 2021). Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015) use the categories "forced kidnapping" and "mock-kidnapping" to distinguish between types of bride abduction. However, this might run the danger of simplifying complex motives and circumstances, as the spectrum between forced marriage and staged elopement is broad. While some cases might easily fit into a category, others might be difficult to categorize. Raisa, one of Werner's (2009) respondents, for example, was washing clothes in front of her house while alone at home when she was grabbed by her future husband, whom she had never seen before, and his friends. She did not want to marry him, but under the social pressure of his female relatives and her parents' encouragement to consent agreed eventually (ibid.). Her case seems exemplary of a stereotypical forced abduction. On the other hand, Zura, one of Borbieva's (2012) respondents, was dating her future husband for a while before he abducted her. They had talked about marriage, but while she planned to marry him in the future, she wanted to finish her education first (ibid). He did not honor those wishes and abducted her. She loudly resisted her abduction but later seemed happy and calm while being married (ibid.). With her abduction is would be difficult to classify the abduction as belonging distinctly to one category.

1.2 Research Design

This bachelor thesis explores bride abduction as a case of a mismatch between local realities and aid practice. It consists of a literature review using secondary data in the form of academic articles on bride abduction to identify the local functions bride abduction fulfills for those that reproduce it and a discourse analysis of website entries of international aid organizations, including human rights organizations, on bride abduction to analyze the top-down framing by those organizations. These two steps use the concepts of complexity, local functions, and framing to guide the analysis. In a third step, the findings are discussed in

relation to each other to look at how local functions match and relate to the online framing by international aid organizations. The concepts of complexity and decoupling are used as a theoretical framework to map the mismatch.

1.3 Delimitations

While this thesis concentrates on exploring the observed mismatch between the local functions of bride abduction and aid organization framing, the underlying research problem it attempts to contribute to is why bride abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan continues to exist locally despite efforts by international aid organizations and the government to end it. However, to establish causality and answer these questions, collecting empirical data in the field would be necessary (De Vaus, 2001, pp.18-25), which exceeds the scope and the possibilities of this thesis. Therefore, describing and identifying the mismatch between local functions of bride abduction and online framing by international development organizations is a first step towards identifying factors relevant to this bigger research problem. The hope is that this thesis might have implications for further research.

Similarly, it would be useful to go beyond top-down framing by international aid organizations to top-down intervention and prevention efforts by the Kyrgyz government. However, language skills, knowledge of the legal system, and empirical data concerning the on-the-ground implementation of laws and policies would be needed for this, which also exceeds the possibilities of this thesis but would be an interesting starting point for further research. Insufficient language skills also limit the ability to include aid organization framing in Russian or Kyrgyz. Only using English website entries might mean that the entries are more geared towards gathering the support of an English-speaking, international audience. Frames targeting those practicing bride abduction, written in the locally spoken languages, Russian or Kyrgyz, might differ from those examined. Moreover, it needs to be acknowledged that local realities of bride abduction are more complex than discussing its functions - factors why it is practiced and accepted - suggests. There exists resistance and negative perceptions of abduction on the local level (Turman, 2018). When discussing complexity, these local attitudes against bride abduction should ideally be included. However, this exceeds the scope of this thesis. Moreover, there is insufficient data in the academic literature on local resistance against bride abduction, which further prevents it from being included in the research design.

After this introduction (Chapter 1), Chapter 2 explains the background of the issue and contextualizes bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan. Then a brief review of previous literature explains how this thesis fits into the landscape of the academic discourse on Kyrgyz bride abduction (Chapter 3). Chapters 4 and 5 explain the methodology and theoretical framework used to answer the research question. Following this is the analysis (Chapter 6) and a concluding discussion of the findings (Chapter 7).

2. Background

The Kyrgyz Republic (referred to as Kyrgyzstan in this thesis) is a small mountainous country that is part of post-Soviet Central Asia. It has a population of 6.45 million inhabitants, over 1 million of whom live in the capital of Bishkek (World Bank, 2019). The two official languages are Kyrgyz, a Turk language, and Russian, whereas Russian is more prevalent in the Northern Part of the country and Kyrgyz in the South (Hiro, 2009, pp.281-310). Kyrgyzstan is landlocked, mountainous, and borders Kazakhstan, China, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan (Engvall, 2015, pp.1-17). The country's borders were artificially drawn when the territory was formally seized by the Russian empire in 1876 (Hiro, 2009, pp.281-310). Prior to that, the "Kyrgyz" people were a group of nomadic tribes (ibid.). Under Soviet rule, the nomads living within the territory were forced to settle down (Engvall, 2015, pp.2-4). The Soviet Regime introduced the Cyrillic alphabet, the Russian language, and founded what they deemed the necessary institutions for a country (Hiro, 2009, pp.281-310). With the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kyrgyzstan became independent in 1991. The transition was accompanied by an economic crisis and political instability, including two revolutions in 2005 and 2010 (Engvall, 2015, pp.7-9). After the national election in 2020, there was significant unrest which some label as a third revolution (Sullivan, 2021). Gender-related issues, particularly those viewed as "archaic," "too traditional," and "uncivilized," like bride abduction by the Soviet Regime, were subject to top-down policies and intervention during the transitions to and from Soviet rule (Sahadeo and Zanca, 2007, pp.85-88; Beyer and Finke, 2019). When situating bride abduction within this larger context, it is important to consider demographics, ethnicity, Kyrgyz traditionality, and the role of gender within the post-Soviet context.

2.1 Demographics, Ethnicity, and Bride Abduction

The demographics for those married through bride abduction overall, regardless of the degree of consent, are difficult to determine. A number used by the press, for example, in news articles (e.g., Abdurasulov, 2012), is based on calculations by the Women Support Center, a local NGO in Bishkek that says that in 2010 bride abduction cases amounted to approximately 11.800 women per year, 2000 of whom were raped and abducted completely without consent (Women Support Center, n.d.). The most recent nationally representative data from 2011/ 2012 that Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015) use as a basis for their study on Kyrgyz marriage dynamics reveals, as stated in the introduction, that approximately 37 percent of married Kyrgyz women and 29.6 percent of married Kyrgyz men married through bride abduction. A study by Kleinbach et al. (2005) shows that for certain regions or villages like the one they looked into as a case of bride abduction, abduction occurs even more frequently. Overall, bride abduction seems to occur less often in urban areas, particularly the capital, Bishkek (Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian, 2015).

Kyrgyzstan is a country in which ethnicity defines customs like marriage practices, and ethnicity is a predictor of who is affected by bride abduction within Kyrgyzstan. Due to its Soviet history, Kyrgyzstan is an ethnically diverse country (Agadjanian and Oh, 2020). One reason for this is that its borders, both initially and after Independence, were drawn without regard for who lived within the territory; different nomadic tribes were encouraged to settle within these borders without necessarily sharing language and ethnicity (Hiro, 2009, pp.281-310). According to Agadjanian and Oh (2020), in 2017, 72 percent of Kyrgyz citizens identified as ethnically Kyrgyz. Other ethnic groups are Uzbek with 18 percent and European (the majority of which are Russian) with 8 percent (ibid.). Bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan, Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015) claim, is almost exclusively practiced by those of Kyrgyz ethnicity. Like bride abduction occurs in parts of Southern Kazakhstan, sometimes people of Kazakh ethnicity in Kyrgyzstan are involved in bride abduction cases (Koishigulova et al., 2014). Despite many bride abduction marriages being officiated by an Imam and Kyrgyzstan being a majority Muslim country, bride abduction has no religious background or affiliation (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

2.2 Bride Abduction as Perceived Tradition

The practice of bride abduction is instead often associated with traditionality and Kyrgyz culture. In public discourse, many perceive it as a practice that leads back to pre-Soviet times and was outlawed but still practiced during Soviet rule (Werner, 2004). Within this logic, its survival and, according to some resurgence, is legitimate because it is a Kyrgyz tradition (Bazarkulova and Compton, 2020). However, Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) found that when looking at its history that bride abduction, at least in the form in which it is practiced today, is not a tradition but instead a practice that developed relatively recently. They claim that non-consensual ala kachuu (forced abduction) was rare in pre-Soviet times, not accepted, and the few times it occurred heavily punished. Consensual ala kachuu (mock-abduction) to forgo arranged marriage and marry for love and/or to avoid the bride price a groom customarily pays occurred more frequently (ibid.). During the Soviet regime, non-consensual abduction developed, and it surged in the insecurities of the early years after Independence (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

2.3 Kyrgyzstan`s Soviet Past and the Role of Gender

During Soviet rule, bride abduction, like other gender-related cultural practices deemed "uncivilized," for example, bride price in Uzbekistan and polygyny in Tajikistan, was outlawed (Kandiyoti, 2007). In the Soviet Union, Central Asian women were urged by policy, law, and propaganda to model themselves after the ideal of a "good Soviet woman" (Beyer and Finke, 2019). These policies led to post-Soviet Central Asia having a unique profile when it comes to questions of gender equality. For example, education was mandatory, and joining the workforce was encouraged (Constantine, 2007; Silova and Magno, 2004). The result is that today patriarchal domestic structures and practices like bride abduction exist simultaneously with virtually equal numbers of girls and boys getting a primary education (ibid.). This makes gender one of the topics sociologists interested in Central Asia concentrate most frequently on (Cleuziou and Direnberger, 2016). Moreover, gender during Soviet rule, as the handling of practices like bride abduction and the attempt to produce "good Soviet women" suggests, was shaped top-down by the government. This is, according to Kandiyoti (2007), still the case in post-Soviet times. In the context of nation-state building after Independence, creating a collective and unifying national identity was prioritized by the Kyrgyz government, and it still is today (ibid.). This included defining what

a "good Kyrgyz woman" is, what she (traditionally) should dress like, be like, and what her overall role in society is (Beyer and Finke, 2020). Beyer and Finke (2019) argue that bride abduction as a tradition became romanticized as typically Kyrgyz and intertwined with the roles of a Kyrgyz man and a Kyrgyz woman and their relationship to each other. This is important to acknowledge when discussing bride abduction and its continued existence today because it shapes some of the nationwide discourse within Kyrgyzstan on both bride abduction specifically and broader issues of gender inequality.

3. Previous Literature

Previous studies on bride abduction can be categorized in several ways. On the one hand, it is possible to distinguish between ethnographic and other qualitative studies and demographic and other quantitative studies. On the other hand, previous literature can be categorized into studies on the causes of bride abduction, the process of bride abduction and how it is perceived locally, and the consequences of bride abduction. Kyrgyz bride abduction is also used as an example in the literature on gender and the discussion around (re-)traditionalization.

The body of ethnographic and qualitative literature primarily includes in-depth analysis of how bride abduction happens, i.e., the process and how it is perceived. It also addresses the causes of bride abduction. Consequences are, if so, only addressed on a micro or individual scale. Werner (2009), for example, uses ethnography in rural Kyrgyzstan and Southern Kazakhstan to explore local discourse around bride abduction and identifies themes of shame and tradition that mark what she labels a "shift towards patriarchy." Borbieva (2012) similarly explores discourses of emotion and social change surrounding those involved in bride abduction. Like Werner (2009), Borbieva (2012) uses ethnographic fieldwork in Kyrgyzstan as a basis for her research. Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) use ethnographic data and historical evidence to analyze how attitude and practice, including frequency of occurrence, changed between the pre-Soviet, the Soviet, and the post-Soviet period. Other ethnographic and qualitative articles on Kyrgyz bride abduction focus on bride abduction in relation to gender violence and socio-economic insecurity (Kim and Karioris, 2020), intersections of bride abduction with gender and ethnic identity (Handrahan, 2004), and public shaming (Sataeva, 2017). Moreover, literature on other Kyrgyz and Central Asian

marriage practices like the resurgence of religious weddings in Kyrgyzstan (McBrien, 2006, pp.60-78), polygyny in Tajikistan (Cleuziou, 2016), and bride price in Uzbekistan (Rasulova, 2011) are primarily ethnographic and portray some over-lapping themes in terms of history, the concept of shame within local discourse, social change, and traditionality.

In comparison, demographic and other quantitative studies on Kyrgyz bride abduction tend to focus on the consequences and effects of the practice on a larger scale. As opposed to the qualitative studies introduced above, they focus less on the process, perception, or causes of bride abduction. Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015), for example, use nationally representative survey data to analyze country-wide marriage dynamics both in the Soviet and the post-Soviet era. On a locally-focused scale, Kleinbach et al. (2005) analyze bride abduction dynamics in the case of a rural Kyrgyz village, including degree of consent, reason, frequency of marriage, and divorce after abduction, and changes between frequency and consent over time. Moreover, demographic literature includes research on differences in health outcomes, for example, Becker et al. (2017), who compare birth weight and health of infants between non-abduction and abduction households, and on rates of mental health issues in relation to bride abduction (Molchanova and Galako, 2017). Other issues that, like health, intersect with bride abduction and can give an indication of its consequences represented in the literature are education (Bazarkulova and Compton, 2021), domestic violence (Ryan, 2007), marital instability (Dommaraju and Agadjanian, 2018), and fertility (Agadjanian et al., 2013). Within almost all of the quantitative studies on bride abduction, its consequences are explored by comparing how abduction and non-abduction marriages differ. Steiner and Becker (2019) focus on these differences by looking at themes like degree of consent, differences in divorce rates, and education rates.

The bride abduction literature interrelates with studies on other issues like health (see above) and notably post-Soviet gender issues and discourse on traditionality and modernity in Central Asia. Both some ethnographic (Werner, 2009; Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007) and demographic (Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian, 2015) articles on Kyrgyz bride abduction specifically include the concepts of "tradition" and "modernity" in their analysis. Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) argue that bride abduction is most likely not a common tradition during pre-Soviet times despite often being portrayed as such. Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015, p.862) consider this hypothesis in their argument of how changes in Kyrgyz marriage dynamics between the Soviet and post-Soviet periods show that in terms of gender equality,

Kyrgyz society seems to be caught "between tradition and modernity." Beyer and Finke (2019; 2020) use bride abduction and its continued existence and alleged resurgence after Independence as an example for their argument that in terms of gender dynamics, a "re-traditionalization" can be observed in Kyrgyz society. Other authors on traditionality in Kyrgyzstan that reference bride abduction include articles by Kandiyoti (2007) and Phillips and James (2001).

When establishing an overview of the literature on bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan, it is also necessary to consider the literature on bride abduction in other geographical contexts. Despite the context-specificity of the practice, there are some overlapping themes and points of comparison. Evidence of some form of bride abduction, at least historically, can be found in many areas across the world, including Europe, Russia, and Sub-Saharan Africa (Muravyeva, 2016). However, in most cases, like Russia (Muravyeva, 2016) or Bosnia (Lockwood, 1974), it is no longer practiced. The most prominent example in the bride abduction literature of a geographical context other than the Central Asian Kyrgyzstan and Southern Kazakhstan, where abduction for marriage is practiced is South Africa, more specifically rural Xhosa communities in the Transkei (e.g., Mfono, 2000; Smit, 2016; Rice, 2018).

This review demonstrates that previous studies have explored some aspects of bride abduction extensively, both ethnographically and demographically. These aspects include research on the history, the process, the consequences, and the discourse surrounding bride abduction and analyses of its dynamics and differences in relation to other forms of marriage. The literature also intersects with aspects of other socially relevant topics like health and education and other fields of research on Central Asia and Kyrgyzstan like post-Soviet gender issues and traditionality. However, previous studies lack a focus on bride abduction as a development issue. As established in the previous chapters of this thesis and as evident when considering grey literature like newspaper articles, documentaries, or blogs, bride abduction is a social issue that is problematic. It is in need of attention, as Werner et al. (2018) recognize in their roundtable discussion on the topic. Moreover, it is an issue that is targeted by Western media, activists within the region of Central Asia, and aid organizations (e.g., Turman, 2018). Kyrgyz bride abduction is a development issue that continues despite attempts by international aid organizations to end it since the late 1990s (Werner, 2009). The lack of an aid-practice and development-centered view of bride abduction and asking why it

exists and continues to exist in relation to its status as a development issue marks a gap in the literature. This thesis aims to begin addressing this gap and identify areas for further research.

4. Method

The thesis uses a case study design to explore Kyrgyz bride abduction as a case of a (potential) mismatch between local realities and framing by international aid organizations. To answer the first sub-question, which asks what local functions bride abduction has for those that practice it, a literature review was conducted. This review of secondary sources specific to bride abduction in Kyrgyzstan aimed to identify, discuss and relate the local functions of bride abduction. The second sub-question asks how international aid organizations frame bride abduction online. For this question, a discourse analysis of website entries on Kyrgyz bride abduction by international aid organizations was conducted. To answer the main research question, which asks how the local functions of bride abduction match with the top-down framing of international aid organizations, the literature review and the discourse analysis conducted during the first two steps were compared and discussed in relation to each other.

4.1 Literature Review to Identify Local Functions

The first step of the analysis, guided by the first sub-question, reviewed existing academic literature to identify and discuss the different local functions of bride abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, the data for this step of the research is secondary and consists of a selection of academic articles on the topic. The selected articles deemed relevant were coded and analyzed using the factors of *local functions* identified in the theoretical framework (see Chapter 5.3).

From those articles identified in the previous literature review (Chapter 3), this literature review concentrates on eight articles on bride abduction that discuss reasons why bride abduction exists and how it is made sense of by those that practice it. These include six key articles that are part of the ethnographic/ qualitative body of bride abduction literature (Werner et al., 2018; Werner, 2009; Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007; Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004; Kim and Karioris, 2020). It also includes two demographic/ quantitative

articles (Kleinbach et al., 2005; Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian, 2015). Both of these demographic articles look at marriage dynamics. Kleinbach et al. (2005) create a profile of bride abduction in a local village. They like the key ethnographic/ qualitative data use locally collected data to look at Kyrgyz bride abduction, making them relevant to consider. Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015) use nationally collected data on marriage dynamics; they are considered to include possible factors like correlations between the level of education or income and bride abduction that are amplified on a larger comparative scale like they are considering in their work. All key ethnographic/ qualitative articles are chosen because they in some form discuss, mention, or look at why men abduct, why women stay or why refusal is so difficult, why families support the bride and groom in bride abduction, how local communities perceive bride abduction and why they accept it. The eight articles are the only ones found to match the outlined criteria.

The selected academic articles were coded (see Chapter 4.2) and analyzed by identifying themes and factors qualifying as local functions based on the theoretical framework. The goal was to identify all possible local functions, look at how frequently they appear in the material, and map how the different functions relate to each other.

4.2 Discourse Analysis of Website Entries – Framing

The second step of the analysis was guided by the second sub-question and consisted of a discourse analysis of website entries focusing on how international aid organizations frame bride abduction online. These website entries are primary data sources and are coded and analyzed using *framing* as a theoretical lens (see Chapter 5.4).

The data compromises ten website entries by eight different international aid organizations (see Table 1). The websites were chosen based on representing international aid organizations that work actively in Kyrgyzstan on gender- and human rights-related development issues through projects, campaigns, or financial support of local NGOs. The chosen entries focus specifically on bride abduction in the Kyrgyz Republic.

Organization Name	Website Entry (author, year,)
UNDP	Sarandrea, 2015
UNICEF 1	Alymbekova, 2019
UNICEF 2	UNICEF, 2018
Amnesty International	Amnesty International, 2018
Human Rights Watch 1	Sultanalieva, 2021
Human Rights Watch 2	Human Rights Watch, 2019
The Advocates for Human Rights	The Advocates for Human Rights, 2019
Equality Now	Equality Now, 2019
CSCE	CSCE, 2017
GirlsNotBrides	Hughes, 2013

Table 1 - Overview of Website Entries for Discourse Analysis

One group of entries represents UN organizations. They are associated with what could be classified as a mainstream international (development) organization that provides aid in Kyrgyzstan (UNDP, UNICEF1, UNICEF2). The second group of entries represents international human rights organizations that provide aid in the form of human rights advocacy in Kyrgyzstan (Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch 1, Human Rights Watch 2, The Advocates for Human Rights). The other three entries represent an international non-governmental organization focusing on gender equality (EqualityNow), an international non-profit focusing on preventing child marriage (GirlsNotBrides), and a US-based government organization working internationally on human rights issues, peace and security, and economic development (CSCE). The website entries are published as articles, blog posts, reports, press statements, and information texts. They are all separate entries on the official website of the organization. The selection was made using several rounds of internet search with various keywords and using several search engines. As websites are subject to change, the data represents a point in time. Website entries written in English (some are also available in Russian, French, or Kyrgyz) were chosen over other possible sources because they can be assumed to represent the official stance and opinion of bride abduction by the organizations communicated to an international audience. This means that they represent the organizations' official internationally targeted narrative, i.e., framing of bride abduction. While they are subject to change by their authors, they are also compared to other online sources, like social media pages relatively slow to change and comparable to each other.

The coding of the material loosely followed the steps outlined by Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp.192-198) in their book on research design and the principles of discourse analysis outlined by Punch (2013, pp.191-196). The first step was organizing and preparing the data with a first read-through which allowed for an overview. Following that, the material was coded by identifying sections of text that shared overarching themes in terms of content. Afterward, the use of language was looked at systematically, identifying noticeable phrases and stylistic devices. The third round of coding looked at the structure, use of headings, and use of imagery. These three steps were repeated until common themes emerged and results were applicable to all website entries or groups of entries. The same method of coding, but less focused on the language and more exclusively on the content, also guided the literature review (Chapter 4.1). Whereas during step one, identifying reasons for bride abduction and how they relate to other aspects of reasoning for bride abduction was the lens applied during the coding process, during this second step, the focus was on how international aid organizations portray bride abduction. As such, doing a discourse analysis, i.e., focusing on how something is being said as much as what is being said, allows for a fuller picture of the framing of bride abduction by international aid organizations (Punch, 2013, pp.191-196). The concept of framing (see Chapter 5.4) guided the analysis of the website entries. Based on this lens, the focus of the analysis was on how the international aid organizations portray bride abduction, what they portray bride abduction as, and how nuanced their portrayal is.

4.3 Relating Literature Review and Discourse Analysis – Mapping the Mismatch

The third and final step compared the findings of the first and second steps to each other. It was guided by the main research question, which asks how the local functions of bride abduction match the top-down framing by international aid organizations regarding the practice. Here, the local functions identified during the literature review were related to the insights as to how international aid organizations frame bride abduction, as evident from the discourse analysis. No new data was introduced during this step. Instead, the findings act as material. The process of comparing the findings consisted of coding the findings of the previous two steps using a similar approach as for the discourse analysis and the literature review (see Chapter 4.2). The identified themes were then used to reexamine the material (the key academic articles and the website entries). This allowed for checking if the findings were applicable to the original data, rethink the results, and make adjustments. After three rounds of adjustments considering both the original data and the analyses regarding local functions

and framing, the findings were representative of both data pools. Using the theoretical framework, they sufficiently compared the findings of the literature review and the discourse analysis. The findings were reviewed using the concept of *decoupling* as per Meyer's World Society Theory (see Chapter 5.2) and the concept of *complexity* (see Chapter 5.1). The comparison, which aims to explore the mismatch between aid organization framing and local realities, was guided by the idea of such a mismatch as present in development literature.

4.4 Limitations and Ethical Considerations

Limitations of this thesis include its replicability, its reliability, and its external validity and generalizability. As indicated above, the findings, particularly those of the discourse analysis of the website entries, are unlikely to be replicable. Website entries like everything on the internet are subject to change and might be different or unavailable at a future point in time. However, as the question aims to understand the potential mismatch between local realities and aid organization framing and compares the website entries to academic literature representing the same time period, this limit to the replicability of the research should not hinder the internal validity of the findings. Due to algorithms of search engines and potential human error in selecting the keywords and when and where to search, the material selection for the second step might have been biased. It was attempted to circumvent this through several rounds of searching and using different keywords and search engines, but it might nonetheless have influenced the findings. This is a limitation to this thesis's reliability, meaning another researcher using similar techniques and selection methods might not come to the same conclusions due to this potential bias (Creswell and Creswell, 2018, pp.199-202). In terms of external validity, this thesis's findings are applicable beyond this case, and regarding generalizability, there are some limitations. As it is a case study that explores a specific mismatch as it manifests in a specific space and point in time, the findings can only be viewed as mapping and describing this specific mismatch and possibly having some indications for further research on the same topic in the same context. (De Vaus, 2001, pp.323-390)

Ethical considerations do not explicitly impact the data collection or analysis process of this thesis as the data is made up of openly accessible written text. However, considering the subject matter and the sensitivity of the issue, some might argue that a more critical stance towards bride abduction, power structure, and the lack of voice of the victims of

abduction within this thesis is ethically questionable. The decision to avoid being overly critical and not condemn or judge the practice of bride abduction was made in an effort to avoid bias and to acknowledge the complexity of bride abduction. This could be received as making light of an issue that is, as this thesis points out, a human rights and gender equality concern and that manifests and reproduces the vulnerability of women (Werner, 2004). The decision to not exclusively focus on non-consensual abductions and refrain from stating too much of a personal opinion was made consciously. Nonetheless, it needs to be acknowledged as possibly ethnically problematic. Others, for example, Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007), take a more critical approach in their research on the subject.

5. Theory

The theoretical framework is based on the idea of a mismatch between local realities and top-down aid organization strategies in the Development Studies literature (e.g., Chang, 2003; Evans, 2004; Ramalingam, 2013). This is in line with the overall premise of this thesis as expressed in the main research question - exploring the mismatch between local functions of bride abduction and top-down framing by international aid organizations. Mapping the mismatch requires establishing what is meant by "mismatch" and defining the concepts of *decoupling* and *complexity*, which are used to analyze it on a deeper level. Further, to answer the first sub-question, which asks what functions bride abduction fulfills for those that reproduce it, it is imperative to establish what is understood under *local functions*. The second sub-question asks how international aid organizations frame Kyrgyz bride abduction online. Here, the concept of *framing* needs to be outlined.

The central idea of why aid strategies are ineffective or fail, as theorized by critics of top-down development aid (e.g., Chang, 2003; Evans, 2004; Ramalingam, 2013), is that the strategies are out of touch with local realities and work based on a simplified (and sometimes false) understanding of complex issues. The mismatch here lies in the disconnect between complex realities and unreflective, over-simplified, and sometimes ideological understandings and solutions by aid organizations. This type of mismatch is prominent in, for example, Chang's (2003) *Kicking Away the Ladder.* Chang (2003) argues that blueprint-type development strategies that model "good institutions" fail because they are based on

simplified (Western) ideals and out of touch with the complexities at the local level. It is similarly expressed by what Evans (2004) coins "the pitfalls of institutional monocropping." Moreover, Ramalingam (2013) explains how aid strategies are failing because they treat complex and context-specific issues as if they were straightforward and predictable and could, thus, be addressed with simple linear solutions. What these arguments have in common is that they say that context-specific development issues like Kyrgyz bride abduction are complex and that there are equally complex reasons why they exist and continue to exist locally. Consequently, aid organizations trying and failing to solve these issues might be because their understanding is at a disconnect or mismatch with the real-life complexity of the issue. At first glance, this might be the case for Kyrgyz bride abduction, which is why the main research question asks in how far, if so, there is a mismatch between local functions of bride abductions and top-down framing by international aid organizations online.

5.1 Decoupling

The concept of *decoupling* as expressed in World Society Theory can be used to operationalize the observed mismatch between local realities and international aid practice in the case of Kyrgyz bride abduction. It functions as a lens to help characterize and understand this mismatch. World Society Theory, as per Meyer et al. (1997), centers around the idea that nation-states are central actors in the global system. In order to attain the power to act in the global setting, nation-states assimilate to a common model of what global society deems a "good," "strong," and legitimate nation-state (ibid.). Meyer (2000; 2007) argues that assimilating to these worldwide models leads to isomorphism, i.e., nation-states formally resembling each other strongly and changing in similar ways if the model shifts. For new nation-states like the Kyrgyz Republic after Independence in 1991 or nation-states wanting to build power and gain external legitimation to increase their capacities, isomorphism to those global models might mean establishing formal institutions and laws in correspondence with these models (Cole and Perrier, 2019). This might include agreeing to global consensus by ratifying, for example, the Declaration of Human Rights (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008). However, these nation-states might not want or be able to change informal institutions or enforce these institutions, laws, and principles internally (Meyer, 2007). The result is local practices, for example, when it comes to Human Rights law concerns, not matching the intentions which the nation-state sets on the global stage (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008). Meyer

et al. (1997) use the term "decoupling" to encompass this difference between external stance and internal realities. In the third step of the analysis, "decoupling" is used to analyze if aid organization framing reflects the global models Meyer proposes are used as the basis of isomorphism and how they address the actions of the Kyrgyz government when it comes to bride abduction.

5.2 Complexity

The concept of *complexity* is used alongside decoupling to explore the observed mismatch between local functions and international aid organization framing. In *Aid on the Edge of Chaos*, Ramalingam (2013) argues that aid organizations overlook complexity and use simplified solutions to development issues because of this oversight. However, as local realities are complex systems, these simplified aid solutions are often disconnected from those realities and therefore ineffective or failing. Complexity, according to Ramalingam (2013), can be established if a system or phenomenon like bride abduction fulfills four main criteria: interdependence, connectedness, diversity, and adaptation. The analysis considers bride abduction as a complex issue and discusses, in how far aid organization framing simplifies bride abduction or reflects the complexity, i.e., in how far there is a mismatch, as based on Ramalingam's work and overall mismatch literature might be the case.

5.3 Local Functions

The first sub-question asks what functions bride abduction fulfills for those that practice it. In the main research question, this is summarized as *local functions*. The term "local functions," in this thesis, is used to capture an idea present within the overall literature that accuses top-down aid as failing due to being at a disconnect with on-the-ground realities. The idea is that there are reasons why practices like bride abduction exist locally and why they cannot simply be stopped – they fulfill functions for the community and/or the individuals that would need to be effectively covered by formal institutions to make it realistic for change to occur (Borbieva, 2012). It needs to make sense for individuals and local communities to change their actions.

In an effort to explore this thought from a sociological viewpoint, it is helpful to consider Weber's work on social action. Weber distinguishes between rational and non-rational action

(Dillon, 2014, pp.129-135). Rational action can take the form of instrumental-rational action or value-rational action. Instrumental-rational action describes behavior that is employed to achieve a goal strategically and that makes sense from a "means-end" standpoint (Dillon, 2014, pp.130-132). An example might be choosing to invest in real estate to earn income in the future. Value-rational action is similarly deliberate, but instead of being interested in achieving a goal that (economically) makes sense, it is motivated by striving for the values of the individual or group (Dillon, 2014, pp.129-130). For example, an environmentally conscious person might take the train instead of flying to reach a destination, spending more time to reach the intended destination but behaving in accordance with their values. Non-rational action, according to Weber, might be motivated by emotion or tradition (Dillon, 2014, p.132). Emotional action means behavior that is motivated by personal emotions such as anger or annoyance or emotion towards another person or group like fear not to be accepted or shame (ibid.). Acting based on tradition means behaving a certain way not because it rationally makes sense but because it is costumery (ibid.). Most actions are, of course, motivated by an interplay of rational and non-rational factors (Dillon, 2014, pp.133-135). Engaging in a practice like bride abduction is likely to be facetted and the result of multiple factors that lead to abducting or to the community playing along with abduction.

For Bourdieu, everyday social actions, including performing lifetime events like weddings or, in the Kyrgyz case, bride abduction, maintain the status quo and thereby social order (Dillon, 2014, pp. 428-450). Social order is characterized by social stratification, which means individuals possess different amounts of power or, as per Bourdieu, capital. How much economic, cultural, social, and symbolic capital an individual has, defines their status or class in society (ibid.). Local functions or factors in the decisions to engage in bride abduction can be related to maintaining the status quo and one's position in society.

Within and beyond the Weberian theory of what motivates social action and Bourdieu's conceptualization of capital, there are many reasons why societal structures are socially reproduced in specific contexts. One example of a practice that international aid organizations aim to end, but that continues to be socially reproduced in some contexts because it fulfills certain functions, meaning there are factors motivating people to continue to practice it is child labor. Trask (2010, pp.106-124) points out that if a child working is the only way for a family to survive, ending child labor is pointless if the function of child labor - earning income and increasing security guaranteeing the family's livelihood - is not fulfilled.

In more complex cases, when the family could technically survive, it might still be rational for a teenager to work instead of or alongside attending school (ibid.). In some contexts, working might be the only or fastest way to acquire the experience and skill necessary to earn a steady income in the future (ibid.). This example could be criticized for over-simplifying the issue or not treating it with the necessary sensitivity. Nonetheless, it illustrates that practices (also those violating human rights) fulfill functions in the sense that there are factors and reasons why they make sense for individuals and communities to maintain. "Local functions" or "functions that reproduce bride abduction" in the analysis, therefore, are understood as factors or reasons why individuals engage in bride abduction. More specifically, why men abduct, why women stay (why refusal is almost impossible), why parents support or at least tolerate their son abducting and their daughter being abducted, and why local communities accept bride abduction.

5.4 Framing

The second sub-question asks how international aid organizations frame bride abduction online. Therefore, the concept of *framing* needs to be understood to answer this question. Framing has been a broadly used concept in Sociology since the mid-1960s (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Frame analysis originated in the work of Ervin Goffman, who described a frame as a shared understanding of reality, for example, of a situation, institution, or social phenomenon, by individuals (Goffman, 1974, pp.8-10). The theoretical concept has been developed and applied in a multitude of contexts since then. Most notably, literature tends to distinguish between individual frames and media frames. Individual frames are, in the spirit of Goffman, how one or more individuals construct a shared interpretation of everyday life (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Media frames are used, developed by sociologists such as Gitlin, to look at how (mass media) organizations communicate interpretations of reality to a large audience - what and how they select to write creates the lens through which their audience is led to view reality (Dillon, 2014, pp.293-294). This thesis uses this second category of frames as it is looking at how international aid organizations frame bride abduction online.

According to Chong and Druckmann (2007, p.100), "a *frame in communication* or a *media frame* refers to the words, images, phrases, and presentation styles that a speaker (e.g., a politician, a media outlet) uses when relaying information about an issue or event to an audience." These types of frames are macro-constructs that reduce complexity to make reality

accessible to the audience (Reese and Lewis, 2009). This process of simplifying reality and creating a narrative lens is referred to as frame building. Frame building can happen consciously (strategically) or unconsciously but by choosing what is worthy of communicating and how it is phrased and interpreted, an author impacts their audience's construction of meaning (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). Frame building is not an objective process (Van Rossum, 2012). Even reports attempting to achieve objectivity are, in essence, texts that could have described the same aspect using different words and images or that could have concentrated on a slightly different aspect. Ardèvol-Abreu (2015) further points out that in analyzing frames, it is crucial to understand what aspects of reality were emphasized and what was omitted, i.e., left out of the narrative.

Frames can be more or less effective at creating a shared understanding of meaning. There are strong frames and weak frames (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). While all frames are in some way embedded in culture, some incorporate more aspects generally accepted as "good" and "true," that is, are more firmly rooted in the generally accepted worldview of their audience (Lewis and Reese, 2009). These frames are more easily applicable and gain strength by seeming like a natural way to see the world. Strong frames do not just fit the cultural norms and ideals; they are also communicated frequently and are relevant to the everyday life of the audience (Ardèvol-Abreu, 2015). These underlying principles of interpretation that exceed the specific issue are referred to as generic or primary frames (ibid.). Human rights or gender equality are an example of such a primary frame. In the Western world, human rights are generally understood as "good," "just," and something to achieve in case of violation (Van Rossum, 2012). In this sense, frames can reveal ideologies (Weninger, 2020).

Lewis and Reese (2009) identify three steps in the process of effective frame building: transmission, reification, and naturalization. Transmission refers to the process of communication of frames, i.e., telling the narrative and repeating it to an audience (ibid.). Reification describes treating the frame, which is a simplified interpretation of reality, as a concrete, material fact and acting upon it (ibid.). Naturalization, as per Lewis and Reese (2009), occurs when a frame becomes so embedded in the mainstream that it is adopted as the standard way of interpreting an issue. Strong frames, frames that are natural to the mainstream, are influential, hold power, and can inspire collective action. Benford and Snow (2000) describe how framing is used to achieve collective action. They call these action-oriented frames "collective action frames." Collective action frames use diagnostic framing

(identifying an injustice or problem), prognostic framing (proposing a "logical" solution to solve the problem), and motivational framing (establishing urgency and severity of the issue to appeal for action) as strategies to inspire action (Benford and Snow, 2000). This can lead to the organization of social movements if the frames are strong and legitimate enough in the eyes of their audience to warrant adapting one's behavior.

The website entries of international aid organizations on bride abductions are analyzed based on this definition of framing. There is some ambiguity as to how exactly framing should be defined and how it distinguishes itself from related concepts like priming or agenda-setting (Cacciatore et al., 2016). Nonetheless, using the concept of framing is helpful in the interpretation of an issue by actors and understanding what they consider as legitimate actions to be taken by themselves and their audience based on the shared meaning they assign to this issue.

6. Analysis

6.1 Local Functions of Bride Abduction

Identifying the functions that bride abduction fulfills for those that reproduce it based on the literature review indicates the complexity of the issue. Based on the analysis of the literature review, local functions (factors why men abduct to marry, why women find it almost impossible to refuse, and why families and communities accept abduction) can roughly be categorized into four categories: economic functions, socio-cultural functions, functions related to ethnicity and masculinity, and functions related to tradition. Beyond these functions, which are explained in the following sections, the literature revealed that there is no sole deciding factor that motivates taking the action to abduct or tolerate abduction. Economic, socio-cultural, ethnicity- and masculinity-related, and tradition-based functions are interconnected, and which factor is given more emphasis seems to vary on a case-to-case basis. While each of the articles examined acknowledged each group of functions, most concentrated mainly on one or two in their analysis (e.g., Kim and Karioris, 2020; Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007; Werner, 2009; Handrahan, 2004). The roundtable discussion by Werner et al. (2018) discussed all factors equally, but it became clear that some participants seem to attribute more weight to some factors.

6.1.1 Economic Functions

Economic functions summarize the impact that the groom's, the bride's, and their family's financial situation have on bride abduction decisions and the role overall economic instability has on the continued existence of bride abduction. For the men, "high rates of poverty and unemployment make it difficult for families to pay for wedding expenses." (Werner et al., 2018, p.588). Affording a courtship, the celebrations that come with wedding festivities, and potentially paying a bride price to the woman's family is often beyond the means of the groom and his family, and bride abduction is a way around that issue (Borbieva, 2012; Werner et al., 2018; Kim and Karioris, 2020). Historically, Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) find that this might also have been one factor contributing to the rise of non-consensual bride abduction during the 20th century. Additionally, it is more difficult for men with a poor financial status to attract a wife, limiting their choice of finding a partner (Kim and Karioris, 2020). Werner et al. (2018) point out that some men who abduct have previously experienced rejection due to their financial situation. They also claim that the (perceived) financial status of the bride's family is one factor that can impact the groom's decision to kidnap her because it makes her more or less attractive as a potential wife (ibid.). For the women, economic factors can impact their decision to stay and concede to the marriage, as they often lack the economic support necessary to refuse (Werner, 2009; Werner et al., 2018). A woman's family might also urge her to marry her abductor out of fear of financial repercussions that might result from a tarnished reputation if their daughter resists. On a larger societal scale, some (e.g., Borbieva, 2012; Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007) suspect that economic instability after Independence contributed to a rise in bride abduction marriages and the decision to marry through abduction. Borbieva (2012, p.153) claims, "Kyrgyzstani citizens today are living through an era of disorienting social change and economic instability." It is unclear whether or not an increase in bride abduction and marriage overall in a quest for stability or belonging in the face of uncertainty is the case. Findings by Nedoluzhko and Agadjanian (2015, p.876) regarding post-Independence marriage trends somewhat contradict the claim that this is a long-term contributing factor. They write:

> Overall, the marriage trends in Kyrgyzstan detected in our study largely mirror those in other post-Communist settings. Studies in several such settings suggest that marriage rates somewhat increased there around the time of the collapse of the communist system and breakup of the USSR. The subsequent years, however, were characterized by considerable marriage declines. The declines did not stop after the most severe economic and sociopolitical shocks of the transitional

period were over and continued, albeit at a slower pace, during the years of sociopolitical stabilization and economic recovery.

On the other hand, higher rates of poverty and unemployment today than during Soviet times might contribute, if not to a rise in marriage, to the persistence of bride abduction as a practice through the economic functions it fulfills for the men that abduct (Werner et al., 2018).

6.1.2 Socio-cultural Functions

Socio-cultural functions of bride abduction include the cultural importance of marriage and the social acceptance of the practice. In Kyrgyzstan, marriage is a central social institution whose importance has increased since Independence, according to Kim and Karioris (2020). Borbieva (2012, p.154) explains that "Marriage is a rite of passage" needed to officially transition into adulthood and gain the respect associated with that in the community. It is further a way to create alliances between families and strengthen the social support system of the families. There is high societal and parental pressure on both young women and men to get married (Werner et al., 2018; Kim and Karioris, 2020). This is not just because marriage is necessary to become a full adult member of the community but also because happiness and success in life in Kyrgyz culture are defined through having children (Borbieva, 2012). For women, for whom this expectation is particularly true, this means that there is pressure to marry early, ideally in their early twenties. How crucial children are in defining marital happiness is demonstrated by Borbieva's (2012) observation that many of the women she interviewed claimed to love their husbands, despite initially not wanting to marry them, on the basis of having children together. Moreover, for men, there is pressure to provide their parents with a daughter-in-law. For parents, particularly mothers, having a daughter-in-law means having help around the house and increasing social status in the community (Kim and Karioris, 2020). Parental pressure on sons to get married quickly is often particularly high if their sons work abroad as labor migrants (Borbieva, 2012). According to Werner et al. (2018), for labor migrants, bride abduction provides an opportunity to quickly get married in the short time at home, which considerably hinders having a long courtship.

Social acceptance and cultural expectations of children, particularly girls, being obedient to their parents and placing the collective good of their family over their own

happiness contributes to why it is almost impossible for women to refuse marriage after being abducted. Women feel pressured to stay because not doing so is attached to stigma and considered to bring shame on oneself and one's family (Werner, 2009; Borbieva, 2012; Handrahan, 2004). Werner (2009, p.322) reports: "Many of the same people who told me that they believe it is wrong for a man to abduct a woman without her consent also believe that it is wrong for an abducted woman to reject the marriage." Rejecting marriage is shameful as honor is tied to ideas of virginity and modesty. Merely crossing the threshold of the abductor's house can tarnish a woman's reputation (ibid.). Consequently, leaving impairs a woman's standing in society, her chances for future marriage (and becoming a mother), and the honor of her family (Werner, 2009; Werner et al., 2018; Borbieva, 2012). Considering the importance of marriage, it is difficult for both the abducted woman to resist and for her parents to support her in resisting. Werner et al. (2018) claim that social acceptance, cultural importance, and stigma and shame, also hinder bride abduction from being reported and prosecuted.

6.1.3 Ethnicity, Masculinity, and Tradition

Performing ethnicity and masculinity are further local functions of bride abduction. "In constructing a new ethno-national identity, the independent Kyrgyz state promoted de-Sovietisation through glorifying 'authentic' Kyrgyz lifestyle." (Kim and Karioris, 2020, p. 4). Within this construction of ethnic identity, gender plays a central role. Particularly in rural areas, masculinity and identity as a "Kyrgyz man" are tied to pastoralism (ibid.). However, it is increasingly impossible to secure livelihood with pastoralism as the primary source of income (Sabyrbekov, 2019), making it harder for young men to fulfill their role as "Kyrgyz man." Kim and Karioris (2020) argue that this results in symbolic expressions of manhood and, as such, abduction becoming more common. Werner et al. (2018) similarly claim that bride abduction is tied to ethnicity in the sense that men use it as one way to perform being a strong Kyrgyz man. Handrahan (2004) also emphasizes bride abduction's function in performing identity as an "ethnic adult male." Consequently, bride abduction is a way for men to be socially recognized as respectable adults. At the same time, remaining unmarried, a marriage proposal being rejected, not abducting when one's friends do, and failing to abduct are tied to intense feelings of shame and anxiety (Handrahan, 2004; Kim and Karioris, 2020). Therefore, one local function of bride abduction can be argued to be performing masculinity, ethnicity, and adulthood.

Ethnicity and masculinity are local functions of bride abduction that are related to tradition. While non-consensual bride abduction is not historically a tradition but instead emerged during the first half of the 20th century, it is still perceived by many in Kyrgyzstan as a tradition (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007). Both Kleinbach and Salimjanova (2007) and Werner et al. (2018) argue that bride abduction, today, is practiced as tradition. Traditionality is used to legitimate bride abduction (Handrahan, 2004; Werner, 2009; Nedoluzhko and Agadjaninan, 2015). At the same time, performing traditionality like performing ethnicity and masculinity is one factor that impacts individual decisions regarding bride abduction (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007).

6.1.4 Understanding the Complexity of Local Functions

This analysis based on the literature review shows that bride abduction fulfills a range of local functions, including economic functions, socio-cultural functions, and functions related to ethnicity, masculinity, and traditionality. It demonstrates that several factors influence why men abduct, why it is difficult for women to resist, and why families and society tolerate and often support bride abduction. Based on this analysis, it can be established that local functions of bride abduction fulfill the four main criteria of complexity outlined by Ramalingam (2013): interdependence, interconnectedness, diversity, and adaptation. Local functions of bride abductions are interdependent and interconnected. For example, poverty and unemployment make abduction an attractive option in an economic sense (saving wedding costs and increasing economic security) and relate to masculinity. Poverty and unemployment, or insecure pastoral livelihoods, can influence the decision to abduct to achieve social acceptance as a strong and respectable adult man (Kim and Karioris, 2020). Moreover, the fact that local functions consist of and are connected to diverse factors from economic, to social, to cultural, to identity-related with different emphasis mattering on a case-to-case basis and dependent on viewpoint further indicates complexity. Local functions of bride abduction have also adapted over time and space. The most apparent adaptation occurred when bride abduction during Soviet rule, adapted from mock-kidnapping as an alternative to arranged marriage to increasingly non-consensual abduction that became related to performing ethnicity and traditionality (Kleinbach and Salimjanova, 2007). Based on this brief analysis, the local functions of bride abduction can be understood as complex.

Considering the complexity of local functions, it is likely that the interplay of factors influencing the action of practicing bride abduction is also complex. The analysis indicates that in the Weberian sense, instrumental-rational action interplays with value-rational and non-rational action, which includes both emotion and tradition-motivated action (Dillon, 2014, pp.129-135). One example of an instrumental-rational factor is abducting to avoid the cost of wedding festivities. This interplays with value rational action, for instance, when another factor in the decision is the wish to be married and have children because it holds important cultural and personal value. In turn, non-rational factors like the fear of rejection, of not being respected by one's peers, or disappointing one's parents might be emotion-motivated factors impacting the decision to abduct. Similarly, the belief that bride abduction is just what a Kyrgyz man does is a tradition-motivated non-rational factor of action. Following Bourdieu's ideas on social action being motivated by keeping and gaining capital and, thereby, one's place in society, choosing a woman to abduct based on her family's (perceived) financial status is one example of how bride abduction is tied to the (attempted) accumulation of economic capital (Dillon, 2014, pp.428-450). Moreover, a woman willing to marry her captor due to fear of stigma and shame can, through this lens, be viewed as a way to hold on to one's social capital. From the perspective that bride abduction is a symbolic expression of manhood, meaning a performance of ethnic identity and masculinity, it can be viewed as an act to increase the groom's symbolic capital (Kim and Karioris, 2020). Overall, considering local functions of bride abduction as factors contributing to the motivation of practicing bride abduction shows that the practice and its local functions are complex.

6.2 Framing of Bride Abduction by International Aid Organizations

The website entries on Kyrgyz bride abduction share several themes. Bride abduction is portrayed in different ways, but it is possible to identify some common themes in the framing of the issue.

All organizations, without exception, explicitly portray bride abduction as a human rights issue and as a crime. However, there are differences in nuance and emphasis in the portrayal of bride abduction. Some organizations like UNICEF (Alymbekova, 2019) build most of their argument on bride abduction being a human rights violation and see increasing empowerment of women by educating them about their rights as a key solution. Others like Amnesty International (2018) acknowledge the human rights aspect but put more emphasis

on bride abduction being a crime that is structurally supported by the government failing to put institutions for prevention and protection in place and failing to enforce existing laws and policies. Interestingly, both Amnesty International (2018) and Human Rights Watch (Sultanalieva, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2019), which are human rights organizations, do not stress the human rights violation factor as much as the UN-associated organizations or INGOs. Similarly, while all organizations acknowledge that bride abduction is illegal under Kyrgyz law, some emphasize its status as a crime and concentrate on the laws prohibiting bride abduction and their lack of implementation (e.g., Human Rights Watch, 2019). Whether or not they situate their framing in the human rights or criminal aspect, the entries all include a call to action and/or a clear statement denouncing bride abduction, which can be assumed to be their purpose. Some like the UNDP entry (Sarandrea, 2015) with its heading "A call to action." or EqualitiyNow's (2019) "Kyrgyzstan: Call to end bride kidnapping." make this aim clear explicitly whereas, for example, GirlsNotBrides (Hughes, 2013), while denouncing bride abduction, is more implicit in their phrasing.

Beyond the human rights and legal aspects, bride abductions status as "tradition" is mentioned by most organizations but in various ways. Most websites either root bride abduction in tradition or acknowledge its status as being perceived and defended as a tradition while not necessarily being one. The website entries that describe bride abduction as a tradition argue that it needs to be overcome because it violates human rights. They go as far as stating that "One of the less pleasant things associated with Kyrgyzstan is the cruel tradition of 'bride kidnapping'." (Sarandrea, 2015) or "Practices such as bride kidnapping /…/ do not belong to the culture and tradition of Kyrgyzstan but are a violation of the rights of vulnerable people" (UNICEF, 2018). The website entries being critical of calling bride abduction a tradition are reflective of the fact in their phrasing, for example, by calling it a "perceived tradition" (Hughes, 2013). A third strategy employed is not addressing the history and potential traditionality of bride abduction, concentrating on it as a current practice instead (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2019).

The most considerable discrepancies in the portrayal of bride abduction are in terms of tone. Approximately half of the analyzed website entries used strong language that appeals to the readers' emotions and framed bride abduction negatively in a black-and-white manner. UNICEF (Alymbekova, 2019), for example, used terms such as "deeply painful," "dangerous," and "violating." The UNDP entry (Sarandrea, 2015) refers to bride abduction as

a "cruel tradition" and bluntly states in its conclusion, "There is no bride in this picture – there are only kidnappings, rapes, tortures and suicides." Amnesty International (2018) similarly uses descriptions such as "horrific crime" and "ugly practice." It is imperative to recognize that the purpose of each of the website entries by international aid organizations is to inform and appeal to a Western (English-speaking) audience that bride abduction exists and that action should be taken to end it. Each of the articles is critical of the practice, stresses its human rights and crime status, and emphasizes the harm it brings to the women involved. However, some entries, against expectations prior to the analysis, carefully try to be reflective and use a more neutral tone to portray their argument. Most notably, GirlsNotBrides (Hughes, 2013) acknowledges that bride abduction involves different degrees of consent and varies from case to case. They refer to recent research, including the study by Becker et al. (2017) on birth weights of infants in bride abduction households, to establish the structural consequences of the issue. Moreover, they abstain from using overly emotional language or personal vignettes of a particularly dark case of bride abduction to illustrate. Both Human Rights Watch entries (Sultanieva, 2021; Human Rights Watch, 2019) are further examples of attempts of taking a reflective, nuanced, and neutral-in-tone approach to making an argument against bride abduction.

The use of individual stories as examples or refraining from doing so shows some similarities to differences in the use of tone. Using stories as a tool to make the reader connect emotionally and put a face to the statistics is instrumentalized by those authors also using a negative tone. The entries with a more reflective and neutral tone tend to forgo using stories to emphasize their point. UNICEF's (Alymbekova, 2019) "I never said 'Yes'" goes as far as using a direct quote by the bride abduction survivor whose story they use to talk about the issue as their heading. In this entry, the author tells the story in a descriptive way that sets the scene and lets the reader imagine the abduction. Direct quotes and somberly colored pictures of the women in the interview setting, as well as a 1:56 minute video of the interview's most notable moments, accompany the text (ibid.). In between the story segments, the author alternates between a definition of bride abduction, the statistical demographics of the practice, and how UNICEF perceives and works to stop it. UNICEF's (Alymbekova, 2019) ability to use a testimonial with a name and face attached to it brings the reader face to face with the more somber realities of some bride abduction cases. Story is instrumentalized to make the practice seem real and to make the reader care. However, the UNICEF website entry (Alymbekova, 2019) and others like UNDP's (Sarandrea, 2015)

telling the story of Roza and EqualityNow's (2019) three stories of abduction experiences demonstrates how using individual perspectives gives women involved a voice and appeals to emotions. However, it also tends to be accompanied by a lack of reflection and nuance. On the other hand, the website entries with a more careful choice of tone and a lack of individual story or those that like Human Rights Watch (2019) report on a prominent criminal case that sparked the interest of national and international audiences portray a more multi-dimensional picture of bride abduction.

Like stories, statistics are instrumentalized to strengthen the impact of the argument and convince the reader of the severity of the issue. Each of the entries includes some form of demographical data, however brief, that indicates the scale of the bride abduction issue in Kyrgyz society. Most websites use the report by the local NGO Women Support Center (see Chapter 2.1) that "estimated more than 11,800 cases of bride kidnapping occur annually in Kyrgyzstan, and that over 2,000 of those women and girls reported being raped after their abduction." (The Advocates for Human Rights, 2019). Some authors expand on these statistics by detailing a more extensive NGO report (EqualityNow, 2019), including statistics on how police officers perceive bride abduction (Amnesty International, 2018), adding crime reports and conviction statistics (Human Rights Watch, 2019), or adding demographics regarding child marriage to the picture (Alymbekova, 2019). These statistics function as a tool to verify the existence and extend of bride abduction and as factual statements add credibility, particularly to the more emotional arguments. Moreover, they are instrumentalized to stress the urgency of stopping the practice and any corresponding "call to action."

Human rights issue or crime, different portrayal of traditionality, differences in tone, instrumentalizing individual stories, and use of statistical data – the entries that stress the human rights violation as the basis of their argument tend to also describe bride abduction as "tradition," "ritual" or "notoriously Kyrgyz." They are also the ones tending to use a more condemning tone and, as described above, instrumentalizing individual stories to appeal to the readers' emotion. When looking at international aid organization framing of bride abduction as a scale between over-simplified and nuanced – these types of entries could be categorized as falling towards the over-simplified side of the spectrum. Nuanced portrays that reflect and acknowledge the issue's complexity seem, based on the consulted data, more seldom.

This analysis suggests that international aid organizations tend to frame Kyrgyz bride abduction in an over-simplified and negative manner. The "words, images, phrases and presentation styles" (Chong and Druckmann, 2007, p.100) used to portray this narrative to the audience include using strong, emotional language like "horrific crime" (Amnesty International, 2018); instrumentalizing individual stories to appeal to the readers' emotion and personalize bride abduction; and emphasizing statistics that demonstrate the severity and the urgency of the issue. Moreover, frames of bride abduction tend to emphasize the human rights and criminal aspect of the issue, which are aspects that legitimate taking action against it. While not always the case, some authors solely focus on non-consensual abduction and omit and the existence of mock-kidnapping (e.g., Sarandrea, 2015; Alymbekova, 2019). Rooting bride abduction in the human rights and gender inequality debate allows these international aid organizations to embed the frame in the global culture of their audience. Human rights are in the English-speaking world, which they address, generally accepted as crucial to defend and gender equality is part of the mainstream development discourse (Hafner-Burton et al., 2008). This means that the bride abduction frame is situated in generally accepted ideas of right and wrong, strengthening the frame but leaving little room for nuance. An appeal for action based on this frame is explicitly present in most of the examined website entries (e.g., EqualityNow, 2019; Sarandrea, 2015; Amnesty International, 2018; Human Rights Watch, 2019). Considering that all organizations are aid organizations whose purpose is to act as agents of change, it is implicitly present in each entry. As per Benford and Snow (2000), the bride abduction frames by international aid organizations can be considered collective action frames, regardless of whether or not they have successfully inspired a social movement or action. Nonetheless, these frames aim to inspire action and fulfill Benford and Snow's (2000) core tasks of collective action frames. The entries all identify bride abduction as an injustice and a problem to be solved, meaning they frame the issue diagnostically. They also frame it prognostically since they tend to propose solutions to solve bride abduction, for example, empowering women (Alymbekova, 2019) or increasing formal socio-economic support for victims (Human Rights Watch, 2019). Lastly, they engage in motivational framing, establishing urgency and severity, for example, through the use of story and statistics, trying to inspire action. Therefore, international aid organizations in the examined website entries can be argued to engage in frame building and constructing action-oriented frames. However, the analysis also revealed that not all entries over-simplify or omit the complexity of the issue. Some acknowledge and discuss nuance and refrain from using an

overly emotional tone to construct their narrative (e.g., Hughes, 2013; Human Rights Watch, 2019).

6.3 Mapping the Mismatch between Local Realities and International Aid Practice

Comparing the findings of the first and second step of the analysis, that is, relating the answers to both sub-questions, allows for mapping the mismatch between local realities and international aid practice and thereby for formulating an answer to the main research question: *In how far, if so, is there a mismatch between local functions of bride abduction and top-down framing by international aid organizations?*

The comparison shows that there is a mismatch between local functions and framing by international aid organizations, in so far as there is a disconnect between real-life complexity and over-simplified top-down narrative trying to address those complexities. There is a multitude of local functions, and thereby factors impacting how and why bride abduction is practiced locally. The findings of the literature review demonstrate that these local functions are complex. However, the discourse analysis of the website entries by international aid organizations on bride abduction shows that overall, bride abduction tends to be portrayed in an over-simplified and one-dimensional way. In this frame building, local functions are either omitted or brushed over. For example, the only entry in the data pool, hinting at economic functions of bride abduction like poverty, unemployment, and practicing bride abduction allowing to avoid the high costs of wedding festivities, is the entry by GirlsNotBrides (Hughes, 2013). The ambiguity around the traditionality of bride abduction is acknowledged in some entries. However, most entries deny the place of socio-cultural functions, for example, UNICEF (2018), when they claim: "Practices such as bride kidnapping /.../ do not belong to the culture and tradition of Kyrgyzstan but are a violation of the rights of vulnerable people." While this might make sense from a normative viewpoint, it does not reflect local realities as they are evident in the academic literature, where most authors seem to agree that bride abduction, while historically not a tradition, is rooted in and includes factors of current culture and perceived tradition. Overall, the literature review shows how local functions of bride abduction are complex, whereas the majority of website entry frames lack nuance and fail to acknowledge complexities. The collective action proposed based on this frame building similarly shows this disconnect.

As to whether or not it is possible to classify this established mismatch as decoupling as per Meyer's Worlds Society theory, the findings are more ambiguous. How international aid organizations frame bride-abduction does seem to be representative of the global culture or world society which Meyer et al. (1997) describe. Their "call to action" can be argued to be based around the Kyrgyz nation-state following these models. Human rights and gender equality are, as Hafner-Burton et al. (2008) argue, part of the current global consensus. States like Kyrgyzstan ratifying the Declaration of Human Rights can be viewed as a form of externally demonstrating isomorphism towards the accepted model of a legitimate nation-state (Cole and Perrier, 2019). The fact that bride abduction is nonetheless practiced locally and that the state seems to fail to formally put a stop to it speaks for a decoupling. Along those lines, it is notable how the website entries by international aid organizations make sense of the role of the legal situation and the government concerning bride abduction. Each website entry, without exception, noted that bride abduction is illegal by Kyrgyz law but that it nonetheless continues to be practiced. The majority of the website entries contribute this to a lack of enforcement by the police and insufficient government support of the law and the victims of bride abduction. Human Rights Watch's (2019) report uses the one-year anniversary of a women's murder in relation to her bride abduction as an occasion to provide a detailed account of the current legal situation. This includes gaps in the law, issues of implementation, and challenges in providing women affected by bride abduction with what they deem the necessary support. Therefore, the framing of international aid organizations indicates that formal measures are taken by the state, and its external stance on bride abduction does not seem to be effectively implemented internally. This is in line with the definition of decoupling. However, to establish whether or not this decoupling exists requires comparing the actions by the Kyrgyz state externally (in policies, official statements, laws) and its internal lack of action and the motivation behind it (how it is enforced or not, and why it is not enforced). As these findings are merely based on the suggestions within the framing of international aid organizations, they indicate that the mismatch is a decoupling as per Meyer's World Society theory, but they are not sufficient to argue that this is the case.

This third step of the analysis demonstrates that a mismatch or disconnect between local functions of bride abduction and top-down framing by international aid organizations can be established. It also indicates that it might be possible to classify Kyrgyz bride abduction as a case of decoupling as per Meyer's World Society Theory, but empirical data concerning the nation-state and further research would be needed to make this argument. Nonetheless, in so

far as top-down framing fails to recognize and work with the complexity of local functions, there is a mismatch that affects aid practice surrounding bride abduction.

7. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis aimed to explore the observed mismatch between local functions of bride abduction and framing by international aid organizations. It pursued this aim by conducting a literature review of eight key academic articles to identify the local functions of bride abduction. Local functions in this thesis were understood as factors impacting individuals in their decision to engage in bride abduction. Here, the theory drew on ideas by Weber and Bourdieu on social action. The concept of complexity was further used in the analysis. The literature review identified four groups of local functions of bride abduction: economic functions, socio-cultural functions, ethnicity- and masculinity-related functions, and tradition-based functions. It further suggested that how these functions interplay and impact individual decision-making varies on a case-to-case basis. It is argued that local functions of bride abduction are complex and need to be considered as such. In a second step, this thesis conducted a discourse analysis of ten website entries by international aid organizations on their websites. This was done to explore how international aid organizations frame bride abduction online. During this step, the concepts of framing and complexity were used as a theoretical framework. The findings showed that the website entries by international aid organizations used different frame-building tools to construct a narrative of bride abduction. The narrative shows characteristics of a collective action frame as it identifies a problem, proposes a solution, and, based on the established severity and urgency of the problem, calls for action. Moreover, the analysis showed that the majority of entries, while not all, framed bride abduction in an over-simplified way, instrumentalizing language (tone), traditionality, and use of story and statistical data to construct bride abduction as a human rights violation and crime. While a select few entries unexpectedly portray bride abduction in a more nuanced manner, the overall framing fails to acknowledge the complexity of the issue. In a third and last step, the findings of the literature review and the discourse analysis were discussed in relation to each other using the concepts of complexity and decoupling to map the mismatch between aid practice and local complexities as discussed in Development Studies literature. The main research question (*In how far, if so, is there a mismatch between*

local functions of bride abduction and top-down framing by international aid organizations?)
was answered during this final step of the analysis. The findings showed that there is a
mismatch between local functions of bride abduction and how it is framed by international
aid organizations in so far that there is a disconnect between real-live complexities of the
practice and the oversimplified narrative aid organizations construct to portray it and propose
solutions. The analysis further indicated that it might be possible to argue that this mismatch
can be conceptualized as decoupling as per Meyer's World Society Theory, but further
research concentrating more firmly on the role and actions of the Kyrgyz state regarding
bride abduction is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

7.1 Contributions and Implications for Further Research

While the findings need to be considered in regard to their limitations, this thesis
contributes to the discussion around (in)effective aid practices. Moreover, it addresses the
identified gap in the literature and contributes to understanding the underlying research
problem. The discussion of the findings and their (de-)limitations reveals some implications
for further research.

This thesis's findings demonstrate that bride abduction is an example of a
disconnected aid practice. However, the findings should not be seen as generalizable as they
are specific to the chosen case and its context. Considering other cases and conducting further
research would be necessary to establish generalizability. Moreover, it is crucial to point out
that this thesis can be criticized for what it accuses international aid organization framing of –
it simplifies the local complexities of bride abduction. A certain level of simplification is, of
course, a byproduct of trying to discuss and identify themes of any issue. Labels like
"economic functions" or "socio-cultural functions" help structure and give language to the
understanding of bride abduction, but at the same time, they are simplified categories. The
complexity of local functions of bride abduction goes beyond the identified types of
functions. Perhaps more importantly, exclusively discussing the local functions of the
practice limits the consideration of the complexity of the issue. Bride abduction exceeds local
functions. It goes beyond factors that contribute to why men abduct, why women tend to stay
with their abductor, and why families and society often accept abduction. There are also
factors that influence people not to abduct, not to stay with their abductor, or not to support
bride abduction. Attitudes and actions surrounding bride abduction include not just

reproducing the practice but also those resisting it (Turman, 2018). As discussed in the section on delimitations (Chapter 1.3), this thesis does not include these added complexities of local realities. Firstly, because it marks a gap in the literature and there is insufficient data to review it, and secondly, because it would have exceeded the scope of this thesis. However, it needs to be acknowledged in the discussion of the findings, and it is an area that could be focused on in future empirical research on Kyrgyz bride abduction.

The review of previous literature (Chapter 3) identified a lack of consideration of bride abduction as a development issue and a missing discussion around how aid-practice tries to prevent it as a gap in the existing literature. This thesis contributes to addressing this gap by exploring international aid organization framing of bride abduction as one factor in understanding bride abduction through a development-centered lens. Therefore, it can be argued to add a novel perspective to the academic discourse on bride abduction. While it does not contribute to a deeper understanding of bride abduction itself or establish causality, it identifies and discusses previously identified reasons why bride abduction is practiced in a new way, using sociological understandings of individual action, to do so. Moreover, it gives an indication of how bride abduction is portrayed on a level that might impact policy, aid practice, and social movement against the practice, by looking at bride abduction framing. However, the framing this thesis examined is limited to website entries written in English. These entries seem to address more of an international audience and might, as discussed in the delimitations (Chapter 1.4), not completely match the framing in Russian and Kyrgyz by those organizations or by local organizations targeting bride abduction. Therefore, further research on aid organization framing and practice should consider this type of data. Due to limits in scope and potential biases like sampling bias due to language barrier, to algorithms, and limited data being available for the literature review (all articles that met the criteria were examined) impacting its validity, the findings of this research should only be viewed as an indication. They indicate directions that can be taken in researching the underlying issue of why bride abduction continues to exist despite top-down intervention efforts. For example, the final comparison and the corresponding findings that Kyrgyz bride abduction could be regarded as a case of decoupling, but further evidence would be needed to confirm or deny this hypothesis also suggests that further research should investigate the role of the Kyrgyz state, the role of the law, and how policies are implemented regarding bride abduction.

7.2 Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, within its limits, this bachelor thesis contributes to the discourse within Development Studies concerning ineffective aid practice. It also identifies a gap in the context-specific literature on Kyrgyz bride abduction and contributes to addressing it and the underlying research problem using a theoretical framework rooted in Sociology. It establishes that there is a mismatch between local functions of bride abduction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan and international aid organization framing of the practice in so far as there is a disconnect between the complexities of why people practice bride abduction and the over-simplified frames that denounce and call for action against the practice.

Words: 14 963.

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