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Is marriage everything?

*Understanding shame and culture through bridal kidnapping in
Kyrgyzstan*

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Abstract

'Can it ever be okay to kidnap a wife?' This thesis combined fieldwork observations with narrative interviews from twenty-two kidnapped women from an ethnographic four-month research stay in Kyrgyzstan. From a starting point, the thesis took a normative framework, understanding that everyone has the right to equal rights. The framework relied on the global monitor mechanisms, CEDAW and CAT, which claim that Ala Kachuu (bride kidnapping) is harmful. The thesis aims to demonstrate how shame-anxiety, through Ala Kachuu, influences the locals' lives and how marriage life is perceived in Kyrgyzstan, where marriage is the ruler of freedom and burdens simultaneously. The thesis questions notions of victimisation on a local and global level to understand how their lives are not static in victimhood. The thesis indicates how the global monitor mechanisms need to understand the lives of the locals and understand that life is different everywhere across the globe. These differences are what make choices and possibilities different everywhere. The thesis concludes that kidnapping a wife is never acceptable due to global human rights standards. However, when feelings of shame are more substantial than anything else, it is not only the notion of Ala Kachuu which needs adjusting, but the reasons underneath it.

Keywords: bride kidnapping, shame-anxiety, victimisation, local, global, motherhood, ala Kachuu, Kyrgyzstan, life-history, qualitative research, ethnography, human rights.

Dedicated to Christopher and Mathias

Who continue to be my inspiration in life with their courage and love.

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Prolog

‘...so, two women came to the car and asked: let's go have some tea. I said no, I have work, I need to go, and then they left, and then they came a bit a little bit later, and there was one man holding something, like sort of something to beat with, and they came to me, and they just grabbed me as an item and took me to the house....’ Interview

glimpse from a kidnapped woman.

1.0 Introduction:

It is October 2021. The global Pandemic is on default, and I have been in Bishkek for roughly two months. My close friend asks me jokingly, before pouring tea into my cup, if I want her to respect me or if I would prefer to have more tea. I know well what she is asking because I finally learned. If a local Kyrgyz person respects you, they will pour less tea into your cup. The more tea one receives, the less respect one has for you. When the tea is in my cup, I learn with time to accept the cup with both hands, as this is another custom, another way of showing and paying respect to the person in front of you. And while I now have this knowledge, I realise with time that it is the opposite of the South to the North of the country. For every behaviour lies a custom or tradition beneath it, which has the population act in manners that appear distinctive and worth exploring. Part of it is the view on women and men and their role in Kyrgyzstan. Though customs, practices and traditions are not unique to Kyrgyzstan, it becomes intriguing for me to find the differences and similarities between our countries apart.

A few weeks before this tea event, I had lunch in a café in Bishkek. This café reminded me of my study town, Lund, in Sweden. Though the prices were lower, the study atmosphere was the same, and the fashion style was close to the one at home. I thought to myself that I could be anywhere in the world, and I would have the same discussions with my friends here as in Sweden or Denmark. But what comes to mind is, that this is not anywhere else in the world. This is Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. And while the atmosphere, at this café, is adjoining to home, I will soon learn that approximately 12.000 girls and women are kidnapped for marriage yearly.¹ Open Line's 2013 campaign illustrates the unjust related to this : *Sheep are worth more than women in this country.*² The imprisonment for kidnapping before 2014 was three years; kidnapping a sheep is 11 years. After the laws of 2014, the punishment progressed to 13 imprisonment years for

¹ UN Women, *Stopping bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan*, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2016/8/stopping-bride-kidnapping-in-kyrgyzstan> (accessed 20 May 2022).

² Appendix 2.

kidnapping girls under 18 and 7 years for women over 18.³ Forced marriages are not unique to Kyrgyzstan, and neither is domestic violence. In Denmark, over 32% of women experience physical violence throughout their lives.⁴ In Iceland, 22% of all women experience lifetime physical partner violence.⁵ That same number is 26.2% in Kyrgyzstan.⁶ This statistic shows that women suffer globally from misogynist powers. The situation in Kyrgyzstan is not unique, but how violence is performed can differ, so it is interesting to investigate specific conditions to understand the complexity of gender-based violence locally. It becomes interesting because of how it is performed through Ala Kachuu.⁷

1.1 Legal framework and the police in Kyrgyzstan

This section will explain the legal background for Ala Kachuu. It is essential to see how the legal framework is incorporated into everyday life because it gives value to how and why these kidnappings can occur. Further it is important to understand the global mechanism view on the practice of Ala Kachuu, to know why Ala Kachuu is important in the name of human rights.

In 2014 the criminal code against bridal kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan was strengthened and has since been punishable from 5-7.5 years if the kidnapped is above 18, and 10 years if below 18.⁸

Before the research took place in the autumn of 2021, two cases were brought to public news and troubled the locals. The latest one, Aizada, was killed in April 2021 because

³ UN women, New Law in Kyrgyzstan toughens penalty for bride kidnapping <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/2/new-law-in-kyrgyzstan-toughens-penalties-for-bride-kidnapping> (accessed 18 May 2022).

⁴ UN Women, *Global Database on Violence against women, Iceland*. <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/europe/denmark> (accessed 18 May 2022).

⁵ UN Women, *Global Database on Violence against women, Iceland*. <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/europe/iceland> (accessed 18 May 2022).

⁶ UN Women, *Global database on Violence against women, Kyrgyzstan* <https://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/fr/countries/asia/kyrgyzstan> (accessed 18 May 2022).

⁷ See section 1.6

⁸ Human Rights Watch *Kyrgyzstan: Pressure builds to protect women and girls* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/05/28/kyrgyzstan-pressure-builds-protect-women-and-girls#:~:text=Bride%20kidnapping%20is%20punishable%20by,requires%20both%20parties'%20voluntarily%20consent> (accessed 18 May 2022).

she did not accept the kidnapping. Her kidnapper had also killed himself.⁹ While this was after the legal changes from 2014, the mother of Aizada, said, the local police laughed her off when she came to them.¹⁰ The other woman, Burulai, was kidnapped twice by the same person. Both times they were found by the police. When later left alone inside the police station, the kidnapper stabbed her to death.¹¹ The murder was sentenced to 20 years in prison.¹² These two cases would often be mentioned in conversations, either as *this still happens* or to explain to me that since these two cases, no woman any longer accepted kidnappings. These two cases shocked the population, and I experienced different opinions about the police because of it: some argued that one could always get help and others thought the police were of no beneficial use.

After Burulai was murdered in 2018, UN wrote following in a press release: “*Child and/or forced marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights with far-reaching consequences not only to the individuals directly involved but to the well-being of the entire society. Practices such as bride kidnapping, forced marriage or Ala-Kachuu do not belong to the culture and tradition of Kyrgyzstan but are a violation of the rights of vulnerable people.*”¹³

Kyrgyzstan ratified Convention against Torture (CAT) in September 1997, The Optional Protocol of the Convention against Torture (OP-CAT) in December 2008 and the Committee on the Elimination on Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in February 1997.¹⁴

⁹Human Rights Watch, *Another Woman killed in Scourge of Kyrgyzstan ‘Bride Kidnapping’* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/04/09/another-woman-killed-scourge-kyrgyzstan-bride-kidnappings> (accessed 18 May 2022).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Human Rights Watch *Young Woman’s Murder in Kyrgyzstan shows cost of ‘tradition’* <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/05/31/young-womans-murder-kyrgyzstan-shows-cost-tradition> (accessed 18 May 2022).

¹² A, Dzhumashova, Burulai murderer sentenced to 20 years in prison in 24, 11 December 2018, https://24.kg/english/103632_Burulai_murderer_sentenced_to_20_years_in_prison/ (accessed 24 May 2022)

¹³ UN, UN Statement on bride kidnapping and child marriage, 31 May 2018, <https://www.unicef.org/kyrgyzstan/press-releases/un-statement-bride-kidnapping-and-child-marriage> (accessed 24 May 2022)

¹⁴ UN, UN Treaty Body Database, https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/TreatyBodyExternal/Treaty.aspx?CountryID=93&Lang=EN (accessed 24 May 2022)

While Kyrgyzstan has taken some measures to prevent kidnapping, the CAT report from December 2021 shows significant concern about the numbers of domestic violence and bridal kidnapping. They state the following:

*“...While noting that articles of the Criminal Code strengthen penalties for bride kidnapping, which is treated as a serious crime, the Committee remains concerned about the persistent abduction of women and girls for forced marriages. It would appreciate an update on the additional measures taken in this regard and on their effectiveness...”*¹⁵

Also, CEDAW has concerns. While they welcome the new penalties against bride kidnapping, they are concerned about the persistence of this harmful practice. Further, they remain worried about the lack of support and protection for victims; it is stated as follows: *“That the prevalence of non-consensual bride kidnapping, child marriage and forced marriage remains high, especially in rural areas, despite their criminalization under articles 175, 177 and 178 of the Criminal Code.”*¹⁶

None of the 22 women interviewed had contacted the police regarding their kidnappings. Disputes are often sheltered within the local community, and at maximum, an Aksakals¹⁷ will be present over disagreements between neighbours.¹⁸ CEDAW comments on behalf of local NGOs that most women fear filing a complaint against their husbands, as they are afraid of losing their children. CEDAW remains further worried as the numbers for Ala Kachuu have risen in the COVID pandemic and how this have affected the statistics.¹⁹

¹⁵ UN Treaty Body Database, Concluding observations on the third periodic report of Kyrgyzstan, Committee against torture https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/_layouts/15/treatybodyexternal/Download.aspx?symbolno=CAT%2fC%2fKGZ%2fCO%2f3&Lang=en (accessed 18 May 2022).

¹⁶ CEDAW, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic system of Kyrgyzstan <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/351/71/PDF/N2135171.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 19 May 2022).

¹⁷ See Appendix 1.

¹⁸ J. Beyer, *The force of Custom: Law and ordering of Everyday life in Kyrgyzstan*. 1st.edn. University of Pittsburg Press 2016, p.12.

¹⁹ CEDAW, Report of the inquiry concerning the Kyrgyz Republic under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the convention on the elimination of All forms of discrimination against women https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/CEDAW_C_OP-8_KGZ_1_8755_E.pdf (accessed on 20 May 2022).

1.2 Statement of purpose

This study is motivated by the interest in how shame and culture exceed the enjoyment of human rights. It interviews 22 women in Kyrgyzstan who have experienced Ala Kachuu (bridal kidnapping) and observes local life over four months. From both CEDAW and CAT, it is seen how Ala Kachuu is perceived as a harmful practice, and CEDAW asks that Kyrgyzstan pursue efforts to combat this practice and adequately prosecute perpetrators. With Ala Kachuu being seen as a harmful practice by Global measurements, it is interesting to understand the women of such crime and how it influences their livelihood. To do so, I have researched the notion of shame in a local context in Kyrgyzstan to chain it with the women's decision-making regarding marriage.

1.3 Research question:

How does shame impact the livelihood of the women in Kyrgyzstan?

How does life after Ala Kachuu continue?

How can we understand victimisation concerning the Kyrgyz women local and global?

1.4 Kyrgyzstan

Kyrgyzstan is a landlocked country in Central Asia, with more than 5 million people. Most of the population has roots in nomad families, who live in yurts and travel throughout the country in the year's warmer months. Officially Kyrgyzstan is a secular state, but the majority are Muslims.²⁰ Most of the income comes from farming. In 2020, 25,2% of the population lived under the poverty line.²¹

²⁰ E, Ashiraliev, 'Kyrgyzstan Attempts to isolate local islam' in *The Diplomat*, 28 August 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/kyrgyzstan-attempts-to-isolate-local-islam/> (accessed 25 May 2022).

²¹ Asian Development Bank, *Poverty Data: Kyrgyz Republic* <https://www.adb.org/countries/kyrgyz-republic/poverty#:~:text=In%20the%20Kyrgyz%20Republic%2C%2020.1.die%20before%20their%205th%20birthday>, (accessed 18 May 2022).

1.5 Soviet Background

Many countries suffered in the Soviet Union, but it was different for Kyrgyzstan, which had a small window to a different life, with more equality, options, and better livelihood. The end of the Soviet Union unravelled everyday life as they knew it. The welfare system was severely damaged, there was no longer a work guarantee, and locals lost their social benefits.²² With the fall of the Soviet Union, many lost their jobs, which led to poverty, and poverty led to a rise in the kidnapping statistic.²³

1.6 Ala Kachuu

Ala Kachuu means bride kidnapping. It translates directly into *grab and run*.²⁴ It can happen in numerous ways, from arranged between family members, the couple itself has agreed, and some stolen on the street by a stranger. CEDAW differentiates between consensual and non-consensual kidnappings, where one is an act of elopement without the family's consent, and the other is kidnapping without the woman's approval.²⁵ They describe it as following:

“The Committee notes the need to distinguish consensual elopement from non-consensual bride abduction. Consensual elopement traditionally takes place with the prior mutual consent of the bride and the groom. It is rooted in the cultural tradition of overcoming the resistance of parents to a marriage by kidnapping the bride with the help of the

²²A. Begim, Am I Muslim or Just Kazakh? Politics of care in Postsocialist Kazakhstan in M.C Inhorn and N. Naguib *in Reconceiving Muslim Men* New York, Berghahn Books, 2018, p. 173.

²³ Ibid. p.161.

²⁴ J.D, Mathews, ‘Take this woman to be your wife’, *The Guardian*, 27 March 2010, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/27/kyrgyzstan-kidnapped-brides-photo-essay> (accessed 24 May 2022)

²⁵ CEDAW, Report of the inquiry concerning the Kyrgyz Republic under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the convention on the elimination of All forms of discrimination against women https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/CEDAW_C_OP-8_KGZ_1_8755_E.pdf (accessed on 20 May 2022).

relatives of the groom and often serves the purpose of avoiding high expenses for a wedding ceremony”.²⁶

When someone is kidnapped, they are immediately taken to the groom's house, where the woman is required to write a letter of ‘consent’ to her family and pressured to wear a headscarf. When the woman *consents* to wear the headscarf, she *approves* of the marriage and she will then be staying in the house. The persuasion of the headscarf can go on for hours and even days.²⁷ The kalym (bride price) is often removed when someone is kidnapped, and the marriage happens at a lower cost.²⁸ Through the personal interviews, the women would often talk about their experiences and how they had slept in a room with the elderly on the first night. The ‘bride’ stays furthest from the door, and if she wants to escape, she will have to jump over every one of them, which will be seen as disrespectful to the elders.

2.0 Literature review

This chapter starts with the notion of how Global politics influence local initiatives, highlighting the transition from global human rights to local settings. It continues with understanding the local traditions through *Salt* in Kyrgyzstan and how it affects everyday life through customs and practices. One of these practices is marriage, which is first described in general terms and then continues with previous work on Ala Kachuu. The literature chapter and theory chapter work together and are supposed to be understood as dependent work and a continuation of each other.

2.1 Global and local

The thesis theoretical framework centres around global and local, so it is essential to rely on scholars to understand the meaning of what such research entails.

Sally Merry’s theory on vernacularization is essential for this thesis, as it is through vernacularization that human rights are translated into local contexts by social

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ C, Becker, S, Steiner, L, Zhao, *Forced marriage: Models of Ala Kachuu*, Philadelphia, 2018, p.4.

²⁸ Ibid. p.29.

movements. The process of vernacularization transforms universalistic human rights into a local understanding of social justice. Vernacularization can, in other words, bridge the gap between universalism and relativism. Instead of seeing them as opponents, it is a way of understanding how human rights translate in practice, how they are adapted, and what they encounter as difficulties, when the rights encounter other local ideologies.²⁹

Merry argues that the word local becomes problematic in transnationalism as it refers to those who lack wealth, mobility, and education. Global opposition itself on being able to move across borders and adopt more universal moral frameworks.³⁰ Merry is occupied with how human rights are primarily a top-down process, from the transnational to the local and the powerful to the less powerful.³¹ Merry is engaged with this paradox of human rights. To be accepted, they need to be adapted to local contexts and resonate with traditions. Still, to be part of an equal human rights system, they need to be autonomous and stand for equality, and personal choice.³²

Who gives it, who receives it,³³ is Caroline Reeves's main argument in her scholarly work about philanthropy-imperialism.³⁴ She shows that through history, local actions of giving have been erased by overseas work, generally those from the West.³⁵ She points out that local traditions have been erased by imperialist powers.³⁶ This philanthropy-imperialist way of experiencing the world has led to a disregard for local initiatives and capacity and local agency.³⁷ Reeves argues that instead of erasing local initiatives through global standards, the global world must celebrate social initiatives based on local value systems and traditions.³⁸ While Reeves characterizes the current work done from the global to the

²⁹ P, Lewitt, S.E, Merry, *The vernacularization of women's human rights*. Cambridge University Press, 2016. p.4.

³⁰ S.E, Merry, Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the middle, in *American Anthropologist* 2006, Vol. 108 2006 p. 39.

³¹ Merry, 2006, p. 48.

³² Ibid.

³³ C, Reeves, Lost in Translation, Local Relief Provision and Historiographical Imperialism in *New Global Studies*, vol 12, no. 2 2018, p.289.

³⁴ C, Reeves, Lost in Translation, Local Relief Provision and Historiographical Imperialism in *New Global Studies*, vol 12, no. 2 2018.

³⁵ Ibid. p.278.

³⁶ Ibid. p.279.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

local as racially marked,³⁹ she asks that the international community invites local initiates and stakeholders to have a voice in the building of their society,⁴⁰ if we continue as until now, we show that some are only fit to give and who is fit only to receive.⁴¹

Serene Khader puts herself in the same debate and is occupied with the Western feminist missionary approach, that different choices can have different meanings in different contexts.⁴² Khader claims that the Western Missionaries do not grasp the struggle and initiatives of the locals but believe that all must fight for women's rights identical globally. They do not give value to other matters of feminized powers.⁴³ Khader claims that the missionary feminist believes that they belong to the modern world, and those who are different from the west are backwards and must change to become more like the contemporary Western world.⁴⁴

Lila Abu-Lughod and Susan Moller Okin are occupied with understanding Muslim women from a western perspective.⁴⁵ They have different positions in the scholarly debate about how the global community interferes in matters of Muslim women's lives. Okin is occupied with how some traditions and cultures make it impossible for women to live their lives independently without men.⁴⁶ She finds the world an unequal place and argues that many women do not have the right to their own personal self-determination.⁴⁷ Okin positions herself relatively differently from Reeves and Abu-Lughod and argues that power dynamics between genders negatively impact women. She has little regard for local cultures and traditions.⁴⁸

Abu-Lughod argues that initiatives which can work in one place might have a different impact somewhere else and might not *translate well*.⁴⁹ Humans benefit from various

³⁹ Ibid. p. 290.

⁴⁰ Ibid. p.292.

⁴¹ Ibid. p.291.

⁴² J, Khader, *Decolonizing Universalism: A Transnational Feminist Ethic*, Oxford University Press 2019, p. 127-128

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵L, Abu- Lughod, *Do Muslim Women need saving?* 1st edn. Harvard University Press 2013.

⁴⁶ S. M. Okin, *Is multiculturalism bad for women?* Princeton University Press. 1999, p. 123.

⁴⁷ Ibid. p. 119.

⁴⁸ Ibid. 12.

⁴⁹ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.42.

agencies and initiatives. She argues that we need to be aware of local differences and respect other cultures, which can have other paths toward social change.⁵⁰ She argues for a perspective of looking for similarities through our different positions in life, not to disown our responsibilities and humanity. Abu-Lughod argues that choices might appear differently to different humans because of different circumstances, and we need not be oblivious to those differences.⁵¹ Various strategies can work differently in different contexts. In a global context, the matters of local initiatives and struggles are not identified globally.⁵²

2.2 Shame

Shame is one of the major powers in Kyrgyz society, and this thesis needs to understand it by previous scholars to comprehend the whole meaning of its power.

Judith Beyer (a previous researcher in Kyrgyzstan) shows through her work how the locals in Kyrgyzstan have a strong tradition of *Salt*. *Salt* is by Beyer translated into custom, but it is more than that for the local Kyrgyz. The positions a person has, make them behave and act according to *Salt*. It is how one thinks relations with others should be.⁵³ Everything one does and says can be explained through *Salt*.⁵⁴ Beyer's notion of the Kyrgyzstan culture shows a different culture than the West, with its own societal behaviours, where *Salt* is crucial for life. Through *Salt*, the importance of *uiat* becomes fundamental for one's societal status behaviour.⁵⁵

Not only is Beyer occupied with salt, but also *uait*. Julie McBrien builds upon Beyers notion with the following: The word which preeminent explains it is shame-anxiety.⁵⁶ The term functions on different levels in daily practice and is a way of understanding the meaning of shame in Kyrgyzstan. When someone disrupts the harmony in Kyrgyzstan, it

⁵⁰ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.45.

⁵¹ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

⁵² Khader, 2019, p. 128.

⁵³ Beyer, 2016, p.177.

⁵⁴ Beyer, 2016, p.179.

⁵⁵ Beyer, 2016, 148.

⁵⁶ Beyer, 2016, p.149.

is *uiat*. When people are silenced in their words or action, *uiat* works as a prevention to keep the harmony.⁵⁷ *Uiat* is then also seen as a way of controlling the population.⁵⁸

When *uiat* is uttered, it gives a notion and indication of who has the authority over one and others to bring that kind of shame⁵⁹ and hence give hierarchal relationships and imbalance in the society.⁶⁰ *Uait* is a way to understand emotional practices among adults.⁶¹ It is a way to act morally and appropriately and see if the action contradicts the notion of *Salt*.⁶² One of the ways to do *uiat* is by going against one's parents because it is disrespectful.⁶³ *Uiat* becomes a means of understanding proper behaviour.⁶⁴ To know why shame-anxiety is important, it is essential to realise that harmony is at the core of the lives of the locals.⁶⁵

This way of understanding shame-anxiety through *salt* can be connected to Michael Herzfield's notion of *cultural intimacy*, which legitimises a social order and its behaviours.⁶⁶ Through Herzfeld, we can call behaviours *salt* for a semiotic illusion.⁶⁷ It becomes the external world, which creates the rules in the society,⁶⁸ and he points out that all cultures in this sense are invented.⁶⁹

While Beyer is occupied through her research for local notions, Heller is simultaneously essential in such a discussion. She discusses *a sense of shame* and how internal and external feelings strongly impact choices through autonomy and self-determination.⁷⁰ In the theory chapter, this will be explained further and connected to Beyer. On a note on internal and external feelings, Ken Plummer's notion of intimate citizenship becomes equally essential to the research of what emotions the idea of shame has for the women through being seen as an object.⁷¹

⁵⁷ J, McBrien, On Shame: The efficacy of exclaiming uiat! in Kyrgyzstan. In *American Ethnologist*, 2021, p.469.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p.462.

⁵⁹ Ibid. p.468.

⁶⁰ Ibid. p.471.

⁶¹ Beyer, 2016, p.149.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Beyer, 2016, p.93.

⁶⁴ Beyer, 2016, p.140.

⁶⁵ Beyer, 2016, p.175.

⁶⁶ M, Herzfield, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation State* London, Routledge, 2014, p.3.

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.32.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.176.

⁷⁰ A, Heller, *The Power of Shame, A rational perspective*. Boston, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1stedn. 1985, p.8.

⁷¹ K, Plummer, *Intimate Citizenship*, Seattle, University of Washington Press, 2003, p.57-58.

2.3 Marriage

Marriage is at the core of the women's lives, no matter how it begins, so it is essential to understand marriage locally and globally.

Through *Salt* is the tradition of marriages and the understanding of this. While we now understand *Salt* in the local contexts, it is essential first to comprehend marriage on a global level and later a local level of tradition, shame and *salt*. Marriage is often seen as actions and interactions combined with mutual expectations from cultural norms and values.⁷² Marriage can be seen as a dynamic behavioural system, where each spouse has a unique position.⁷³ The commitment that happens through marital circumstances involves interpersonal, social, and legal intricacies, which are not found in other types of relations.⁷⁴

Frank Jacob and Jowan A. Mohamed state that while marriage is often considered a union of love between two individuals, it is usually a disadvantage for women and represents a form of patriarchy exploration.⁷⁵ Marriage is a legal and social commitment between two individuals; it gives rights and spousal benefits, determined by local societies. Further marriage gives a right to private relations, which is defined by public policy.⁷⁶ Marriage can have different meanings through different times and cultures, from a sacred religious institution to a contractual legal one.⁷⁷ If nothing else, marriage is a declaration of one's future intention: to make the commitment lifelong.⁷⁸ Marriage is, to some extent, always a public one, as it entails the couple and at least one other person to officiate it, and it often becomes a public statement of their togetherness as well as it can be as a sign of seeking approval of the relationship between two

⁷² J, Mirowsky and C.E, Ross, The social construction of reality in marriage: An empirical investigation in *Sociological perspectives*, vol 27, no. 3, 1984, p.281.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.284.

⁷⁴ S.E, Byrd, The social construction of marital commitment in *Journal of marriage and family*. Christopher Newport University, 2009, p.319.

⁷⁵ J.A, Mohammed and F, Jacob, *Marriage discourses*, Berlin, De Gruyter Oldenburg, 2006, p.1-3.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ J, Miles, P, Mody, R, Probert, Introduction in *Marriage rites and rights*, London, Hart Publishing, 2015, p.6.

parties.⁷⁹ Marriage rituals can give a feeling of being connected to in-laws.⁸⁰ This brings us back to Khader, who argues that marriage can be seen as protective freedom for some women, which lets them have other opportunities. For women who do household work, marriage is arguably the single most important determinant of a woman's economic future, which makes reasoning for women to choose marriage.⁸¹

I differentiate between arranged and forced marriage.

Arranged marriages require both parties' consent but are mostly set by the parents to the bride and groom. Forced marriage is distinct from an arranged marriage, as one or more of the two parties do not consent or have been coerced or forced into giving consent.⁸² Perveez Mody argues against this statement, saying that it is not considerate of complex ranges of circumstances, which prevent the individuals from identifying the forcefulness in such a marriage or an obligation put upon them. Consent has impacts on sociological and psychological structures.⁸³ What becomes vital in Mody's argument is the fine line between persuasion and coercion,⁸⁴ and that feeling can seem different for everyone.⁸⁵

2.4 Ala Kachuu in Kyrgyzstan

While I am not the first to research the phenomenon of Ala Kachuu, it requires a short introduction to the work done before this project from other scholars.

Beyer is used to understanding culture through *Salt*. She has not done research directly on Ala Kachuu. She argues it is a topic which should be investigated on its own because of the force and violence and sometimes rape it entails.⁸⁶ And while the practice has been well documented after the end of the Soviet Union, it is generally about how Ala Kachuu

⁷⁹ Ibid. p.10.

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ S. Jayachandran, *The roots of gender inequality in developing countries*. Annu. Rev.. Econom. 7(1), 2015, p.63-68.

⁸² P. Mody, *Forced Marriage, Rites and rights* in J. Miles, P. Mody, R. Probert, *in Marriage rites and rights*, London, Hart Publishing 2015 p.194-196.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid. p.198.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.197.

⁸⁶ Beyer, 2016, p.198.

impacts other social issues, such as domestic violence.⁸⁷ Previous studies also show how abducted women are more likely to have mental and physical health problems.⁸⁸ Fatima Esengeldievna Sartbay argues against Abu-Lughod in ‘*The round table*’ article, saying that outside interventions have been effective in Kyrgyzstan, though partly due to local efforts.⁸⁹ Scholars from ‘*The round table*’ article agree that the practice of Ala Kachuu should be seen as a form of gender-based violence, which helps uphold male dominance over women.⁹⁰

“Ala Kachuu is the act of abducting a woman to marry her. It includes a variety of actions ranging from elopement or staged abduction for consensual marriage to violent non-consensual kidnapping.”⁹¹

While there is consensus that two different areas of Ala Kachuu are dominant, one where there is given consent and one which refers to a non-consensual practice. The latter is studied most.⁹² As we know from previous in this review, consent can be given in different ways and is not always free consent. Lori Handrahan has studied the Ala Kachuu practice, exploring links between ethnic manhood and violence against women. She concludes that women everywhere are affected by male violence or the threat of violence.⁹³

Dana Bazarkulova and Janice Compton published their research in 2021 about the relationship between bridal kidnapping and education.⁹⁴ Kleinbach (2005) gives statistics about abductions in Kyrgyzstan and argues that the practice is against numerous Human Rights Declarations.⁹⁵ To understand Ala Kachuu and how it is impacted by shame (*uait*), Cynthia Werner’s scholarly work plays a significant role in this research; she is occupied with how shame through tradition has influenced the women in Kyrgyzstan and what is

⁸⁷ C.Werner et al., Bride kidnapping in post-Soviet Eurasia: a roundtable discussion, in *Routledge Central Asian Survey* vol.37 no. 4, 2018, p.593.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p.594.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.* p.581.

⁹¹ Kleinbach et al. Kidnapping for Marriage, (Ala Kachuu) in a Kyrgyz Village, in *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, no. 2 2005, p. 191.

⁹² C.Werner et al., 2018, p.583.

⁹³ L, Handrahan, Hunting for women, in *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2004, p.228.

⁹⁴ D, Bazarkulova and J, Compton, Marriage traditions and investment in education: The case of bride kidnapping in *Journal of comparative economics*, vol. 49, 2021, p.147.

⁹⁵ Kleinbach et. al., 2005, p.198-199.

seen as proper behaviour in Kyrgyzstan and how it changed due to the Soviet Period.⁹⁶ Noor Borbieva O’Neil shows how discourses about kidnapping are changing and why it can exist despite laws and initiatives by local NGOs. While Ala Kachuu has dominant enforcement, it can also be about free choice and romantic love.⁹⁷ Charles Becker, Susan Steiner and Lin Zhao discuss the economic reasoning for kidnapping a bride.⁹⁸

3.0 Theory

In this chapter, I introduce the theory used to analyse the data. I use Heller and Beyer for shame and *uiat* notions for Kyrgyzstan. I use Plummer to talk about intimate citizenship and women’s self-determination. Together they combine the understanding of internal and external feelings in a local context. Then I move on to Fohring’s work on victimhood and how that can be understood concerning this project. The last section is Abu-Lughod and Merry combined, to directly understand the global and local in the context of Kyrgyzstan.

3.1 Uait, external and internal autonomy

In this section, I combine the theoretical framework for understanding the livelihood of the participants for the first part of the analysis. That includes Beyers’s notion on *uiat* (shame-anxiety), Heller on internal and external shame and Plummer’s intimate citizenship to see how inner and outer feelings play a significant role in a person’s self-determination.

In this section, I combine these three authors. Beyers’ notion of *Salt* and *Uiat* is already mentioned in the previous chapter. Beyer translates *Uait* into shame-anxiety. Through the anxiety of shame, people behave and act in Kyrgyzstan.⁹⁹ It is through this that the

⁹⁶ C, Werner, Bride Abduction in Post-Soviet Central Asia: Marking a Shift Towards Patriarchy through Local Discourses of Shame and Tradition, in *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, vol.15, no.2, 2009, 328.

⁹⁷ N.B, O’Neill, Kidnapping women: discourses of emotion and social change in the Kyrgyz Republic, in *Anthropologist Quarterly*, 2012, p. 163.

⁹⁸ C, Becker, S, Steiner, L, Zhao, *Forced marriage: Models of Ala Kachuu*, Philadelphia, 2018, p.29-30.

⁹⁹ Beyer, 2016, p.149.

population works morally and adequately.¹⁰⁰ One of the behaviors seen as *uiat* is disrespecting parents' wishes. It would be seen as shameful to everyone.¹⁰¹ Bringing a case to the criminal court is also shameful in Kyrgyzstan. It is better to handle disputes in the villages, as it can cause stigma for those responsible, which ruins the sense of harmony.¹⁰² While *uiat* is interaction through one's behaviour, it is also subjective reflexivity, whereas the humans conceive their individual practice through socialising in different manners and behaviours.¹⁰³ This brings us to Heller and her notion of the sense of shame.

Shame can come from internal and external authorities. The external authority is society. When society classifies something as shameful, the fear of being shamed surfaces.¹⁰⁴ Society becomes an authority which judges others through rituals, habits and behaviour.¹⁰⁵ When we do not act according to the standards set by society, one loses honour, which can lead to guilt and further lead to shame-guilt.¹⁰⁶ External shame makes us act in conformity within a social setting.¹⁰⁷ Through norms from the outside, one *learns* how to become human,¹⁰⁸ and it is then through the shame that one are regulated in our socialisation with others; if we do not follow codes and conduct, we can be in debt to the external authority.¹⁰⁹ This external authority gives obligations for the individual to know how to act and how not as well according to the social code.¹¹⁰ Those norms need to be accepted without reasoning,¹¹¹ and accepting the social codes can be a way of self-preservation.¹¹² The external shame is power. When power becomes an act of domination, the acceptance of shame legitimates the domination system in place.¹¹³ When shame becomes internalised in individuals, it becomes simpler to maintain the social structure without using the power of shaming.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid. p.92.

¹⁰² Ibid. p.68.

¹⁰³ Ibid. p.148.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Heller, 1985, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. p.5.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.p.7.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. p.9.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid. p.40.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

When society cannot maintain a sudden ethic, the individual can develop an internal authority, that can overtake the external.¹¹⁵ This also means going away from the norms in society, and it translates into internal autonomy. Instead of relying on society, the individual becomes the determinant of their own character and actions.¹¹⁶

At times the will of the autonomy can differ from the individual's actual behaviour, which leads to a contradiction within the person, and such a feeling can be worse than shame. Instead of being in debt to society, one is in debt to themselves.¹¹⁷ When the external and internal autonomies differ, individuals can start questioning their inner voice righteous.¹¹⁸ While the individual's internal autonomy and beliefs can be different from the society, it is still that society that determines what to feel shameful for. How much it influences is up to the person's autonomy.¹¹⁹

External and internal autonomies are connected to Plummer's intimate citizenship, where one, through such citizenship, belongs to a society with rights and obligations. When one has intimate citizenship, they have self-determination over feelings, individual thoughts and their own body. The citizenship gives rights to personal decisions. The citizenship is further about the person's identity and refers to *who is and who is not*. Through the person's identity, there is an outside and inside feeling. We create solidarity in society through an outside surface by feeling recognised and belonging. The inside is who we *really are* and what we feel deep inside. The intimate citizenship is the individual experience for all individuals to have rights, ownership and freedom to decide over one's relations, emotions and body—the most intimate possessions for the human being.¹²⁰

Plummer is connected to Heller because if one does not listen to those norms in society, which can lead to shame, one is not only in jeopardy of being shamed, but it can impact the intimate citizenship, where both inner and outer feelings are threatened. If it is through

¹¹⁵ Ibid. p.8.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p.27.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid. p.44.

¹¹⁹ Ibid. p.19.

¹²⁰ Plummer, 2003, p.50-58.

the society we find our belonging, and this society is shaming our behaviour, then it becomes further challenging to have self-determination.¹²¹

3.2 Victimhood

To understand victimisation and the social and psychological disadvantages of this, I rely on scholar Stephanie Fohring:¹²² The word victim has many negative connotations and stigmas. According to Fohring, this explains why a person might be motivated not to be labelled as a victim.¹²³ Socially the word victim is associated with blame, derogation, weakness, and shame.¹²⁴ Fohring points to how victimisation invalidates our security, predictability, trust and optimism.¹²⁵ Fohring argues that if we blame the victim for the situation, then we can tell ourselves that we still live in a just world and that something like that wouldn't happen to us. That way, others safeguard their belief system.¹²⁶ When one has been victimised, it becomes that individual's struggle to relearn about the self in relation to the world.¹²⁷ Fohring sees two powerful motivations not to be labelled as a victim: The negative public perception of a victim but also the victim's internal belief about the self and the world.¹²⁸ Fohring points out that victimhood is a fluid state, and many instead prefer the description of being a survivor.¹²⁹ When one is a victim, there is an understanding that the person was weak, which takes away the power, and one can suddenly see themselves as vulnerable and powerless.¹³⁰ Fohring points to notions of feeling sorry for oneself, also is seen as weak.¹³¹

Fohring is occupied with the fluidity in victimhood. Victimhood is not static but changes over time, and individuals can go back and forward between non-victimhood and victimhood and return again.¹³² The dichotomy between coping and suffering is essential

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² S, Fohring, What's in a word? Victims on victim in *International Review of victimology*, vol.24(2) 2018, p.151.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid. p.152.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p.153.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.154.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Ibid. p.157.

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Ibid. p.160.

here, and it can become necessary for those experiencing victimhood to both minimise the incident and fight and overcome it.¹³³

Refusing such a label, Fohring states, can be the strength and resilience of the victim.¹³⁴

3.3 Global and local understandings

"The forms of lives we find around the world are already products of long histories of interactions among those living far from each other".¹³⁵ When Abu-Lughod makes this statement, she simultaneously points out that we need to be more sensitive when dealing with cultures different from our own and understand that a long history line has brought them to.¹³⁶ Abu-Lughod is occupied with the idea that just because women from the West have a life one way, it does not automatically mean that people from the East would want or even benefit from the same life.¹³⁷ Freedom, choice, and consent can look different depending on placement, history etc..¹³⁸ *"...it seems to me that we have to work hard at recognising and respecting differences – but as products of different histories as expressions of different circumstances as manifestations of differently structured desires"*.¹³⁹

Abu-Lughod investigates how honour plays a part in some cultures and how life is complicated for everyone. It has never been easy to distinguish between duties, freedom, choices, consent, bondage, and compulsion.¹⁴⁰

Abu-Lughod argues that if we wish to help Muslim women, it should be with the understanding to look and listen carefully, understand the big picture and all the differences.¹⁴¹ She is asking those who choose to work with Muslim women to be critical of themselves, reflect and constantly recognise their own humanity—a humanity which looks different and acts differently due to different forces.¹⁴²

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Citation after quote

¹³⁶ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.40.

¹³⁷ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.42.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid. p.43.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid..111.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. p.224.

¹⁴² Ibid.p.227.

Abu-Lughod should in this project be understood together with Merry and her theory on vernacularization. It is through vernacularization that human rights translate into practice, which becomes essential to understanding Ala Kachuu.¹⁴³ It is when human rights translate into practice, that it becomes important for the global society to understand the differences in a local setting and the differences there are from one place to another.¹⁴⁴ For human rights to be recognized, they need to be understood in a local context of tradition, simultaneously, while they are autonomous and part of a global system which stands for equality and personal choice.¹⁴⁵

4.0 Methodological framework

In this chapter, I will explain my position as a scholar in relation to subjectivity, the interview method, the ethnography and the normative framework. Lastly, I present several ethical considerations, which appeared in the process of this thesis.

4.1 Understanding the normative framework and position of the author

This section explains the importance of my subjectivity, and how my background can have influenced the outcome of the thesis. This section will further explain how the thesis proceeds in a normative framework through an ethnographic study, and narrative interviews combined with Abu-Lughod¹⁴⁶.

Through the normative framework, the research could influence the lives of those it is about, with an understanding of the women's social context.¹⁴⁷

Our interpretations in interviews depend on our prejudices. What we come from and what we have done previously influences how we reflect upon others' lives.

Understanding our beliefs, values, and practices makes us judge the outside in one way.

¹⁴³ P, Lewitt, S, E, Merry, 2016, p.4

¹⁴⁴ Abu-Lughod, 2013, p.111

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Abu- Lughod, 2013

¹⁴⁷ J.A, Maxwell &K, Mittipalli, Theory in *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Social Science Research Methods*, Sage Publications, Inc., Thousand Oaks.2011, p.876.

This means, for this project, that everything is connected, and my subjectivity does matter in the name of this research.¹⁴⁸ During my time in Kyrgyzstan, I tried to make it explicit that I had a background in working with women who experience domestic violence. This also gave me a pre-assumption of understanding of violence and the impact it provides. When I made my background familiar to the participants, it was to attain some level of objectivity throughout the interviews.¹⁴⁹

From my previous work, and considering CAT and CEDAW's comments on Ala Kachuu, my stance was that Ala Kachuu was a violent act, which I assumed would bring unhappiness to those involved. This gave me a preunderstanding, a subjectivity that I had to acknowledge, while I simultaneously tried to understand that lives everywhere are different. To keep my pre-understandings aside, I had to let them be evident, to be as objective with the interviewees as possible¹⁵⁰. Through this, I relied on Abu-Lughod to try to see similarities between cultures,¹⁵¹ and if we look for those similarities, we might be better equipped to find solutions for gender-based violence.

The predominant ideas of the research are positioned around gender equality, marriage purposes and patriarchal hierarchies. As the researcher, I had to come to terms with how these ideas influenced the research questions, and the framework I moved within, throughout the period of conducting my interviews and observations.¹⁵² Through the framework, the research explores social constructions of marriage in Kyrgyzstan and attempts to understand what is beneath such structures.¹⁵³ With the understandings from CEDAW and CAT, Ala Kachuu is a harmful practice, and it becomes essential how those facing such harmful acts select their choices and develop autonomy.¹⁵⁴ The idea is to understand both what is happening and why it is happening, to gain more mutual respect between different cultures and humans, despite other choices and ways of living.¹⁵⁵ It was this normative framework I had with me in Kyrgyzstan while I positioned myself in the

¹⁴⁸ S, Brinkmann, M. H, Jacobsen and S, Kristiansen, in P, Leavy, in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.21.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p. 221-223.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p.1.

¹⁵⁵ Abu- Lughod, 2013 p.221-223.

field of human rights.¹⁵⁶ I believe that everyone has the *right to* equal rights but trying to realise that this concept is different in different places.¹⁵⁷ We might see contexts in foreign countries not as disconnected from our worlds and lives.¹⁵⁸ Still, our rights to safety, equality, choices, and dignity might appear different in different places because of their relation to opportunities and possibilities in different settings.¹⁵⁹ I had an approach to the ethnographic work where it was more than participant-observation. I had to build and understand relations while being in field.¹⁶⁰

To understand how I positioned myself through the ethnographic work, I relied on Harrison to be sensitive to the historical frame.¹⁶¹ I rely on his words on motivation to understand broader between cultures.¹⁶² The places I stayed changed frequently to explore both the metropolitan capital and rural areas. They are both a part of Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyz culture but could differ in mindset and understanding.¹⁶³

I positioned myself in the research according to Abu-Lughod with respecting and understanding the local culture of Kyrgyzstan but bewildered if we as human beings, can focus so much on accepting and respecting that we forget that in the name of violence, it is never acceptable, no matter how and where it is done. Benefiting from human rights also gives an obligation to uphold them for others. The aim of the research and the reasons to choose this methodology is to question my own stance on how we help those who are different from us, those who do not know they need help when we need to respect culture, traditions and individualism while having a minimum core of human rights.

¹⁵⁶ J.A, Maxwell &K, Mittipalli, 2011, p.1.876.

¹⁵⁷ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

¹⁵⁸ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.202.

¹⁵⁹ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

¹⁶⁰ G, Feldman, if ethnography is more than participant-observation, then relations are more than participant-observation: The case for non-local ethnography in a world of apparatuses in *Anthropological Theory* no.11(4) 2011, p.390.

¹⁶¹ Harrison, 2014, p. 225.

¹⁶² Ibid. p. 226.

¹⁶³ R, Maxwell, Why are urban and rural areas so politically divided? *The Washington Post*. 5 March 2019 <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2019/03/05/why-are-urban-rural-areas-so-politically-divided/> (accessed 4 April 2022).

4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research is an approach to learn about different social realities. It is used to explain a social phenomenon and the meanings people portray. It is a way to understand the importance of specific aspects of life. Qualitative research is an umbrella term for numerous ways to conduct research.¹⁶⁴ Through qualitative research, the aim is to understand the lives of a few.¹⁶⁵ Some of the genres in qualitative research include fieldwork and interviews.¹⁶⁶

In the life history approach, the focus is on narratives, where the emphasis is on studying people to understand their lives. Conducting such research comes close to representing the contexts and integrity of those involved.¹⁶⁷ It is through the narratives in storytelling that experiences attach meaning.¹⁶⁸ When making a narrative approach, the storyteller decides what to tell and what not to, but it is the researcher who analyses the spoken story and words.¹⁶⁹ The researcher interprets, understands, and hears the story, which affects the research outcome from different standpoints.¹⁷⁰ When doing narrative storytelling it is unstructured interviews, where no questions have been prepared in advance. Though Brinkmann argues that interviews can never be unstructured, the researcher always has a presumption or aim of the interview before entering and might stir the conversation in such a direction.¹⁷¹

In this thesis, through the qualitative method, the approach of narratives through storytelling was used to interview the women. While the approach was unstructured, the women knew from the beginning that I was researching Ala Kachuu, which might have led the conversation automatically in the direction to hear about their personal stories of

¹⁶⁴ P, Leavy, Introduction in P, Leavy, in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford University Press, 2014, p.2.

¹⁶⁵ S.H, Merry, *The Seduction of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence and Sex Trafficking*. 1st. edn.2016, p.1.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ A.P Bochner and N.A, Riggs, Practicing narrative inquiry in P, Leavy in *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Oxford University Press, 2014 p.198.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. p.203.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid. p.204.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ S.Brinkmann, Unstructured and Semi-structured Interviewing in P.Leavy in *The Oxford Handbook on Qualitative Methods*. Oxford University 2014, p.286.

Ala Kachuu. At the same time, many of the interviewees also had side stories of other experiences throughout their lives.

4.3 Ethnography

Ethnography work is often perceived as participant-observation to study other societies and cultures; however, Harrison argues that it is more than this. It also has levels of motivation, intention, and opinions about the research being produced.¹⁷² Through ethnography, culture is constructed in texts of context, which is based on the effective presentation.¹⁷³ It matters what relation is set up between the writer and the reader and the subject.¹⁷⁴

In the ethnography work, I relied on Merry and how place-centred ethnographic work allows the analysis to understand the intersections between social relationships, law, political power, and religion.¹⁷⁵ It is within the understanding of a local place necessary to understand the global framework which constitutes the place I researched.¹⁷⁶ While the local are constricted by, e.g., international laws, the global is transformed and appropriated in the local context.¹⁷⁷ According to Merry, one cannot understand the local context without knowing what is happening globally in the same area.¹⁷⁸

Through four months of ethnography, this thesis tries to understand the global influence on local traditions of Ala Kachuu and notions of shame.¹⁷⁹ I lived with the locals whom I researched. This way, I did a participant-observation, where I could gather rich insights into the women's lives through observations, conversations, and interviews.¹⁸⁰ It was

¹⁷² A.K, Harrison, Ethnography in P, Leavy in *The Oxford Handbook on Qualitative Methods*. Oxford University 2014, p. 226.

¹⁷³ Ibid. p. 243.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ S.E, Merry, Crossing boundaries, ethnography in the twenty first century, in *Political and Legal Anthropological review*, vol.23, issue 2, 2000, p.127.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. p.1129.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid. p.130.

¹⁷⁹ S.H, Merry, The potential of ethnographic methods for human rights research in B.A, Andreassen, H, Sano, H and S, McInerney-Lankford, in *Research Methods in Human Rights A Handbook*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing 1st. edn.2017, p146.

¹⁸⁰ L,Nader, *Up the Anthropologist – Perspectives gained from studying up*, ERIC, 1972, p.21

simultaneously essential to understand how mechanisms such as CEDAW and CAT viewed the practice of kidnapping to understand the global relationship in this setting.¹⁸¹

4.4 Ethics and ethical considerations:

In this section, I will explain several of the ethical considerations I had during the thesis. When working with vulnerable humans, the ethical dilemmas one can experience is endless, hence this chapter discuss predominant considerations for this project.

4.4.1 Money:

My local supervisor asked me to give each interviewee money as a motivating factor for participating. Beyer discusses that in Kyrgyzstan, in the name of giving respect, claiming authority and ranking social bonds, money is given.¹⁸² Further, she argues how social relations must accept money/gifts.¹⁸³ In interviewees and research, payment is not valid. Hence the guidelines at Lund University censure this. I had to go against the local way of showing and paying respect, which might have made some interviewees feel insulted or not participate in the interviews. On the other hand, the motivation for sharing their narrative could have been the wrong incentive to participate.

4.4.2 Power Dynamics

In every relation, there are power dynamics, also between researcher and interviewee.¹⁸⁴ When doing the research, I needed to remember the women's autonomy, though it is not always a straightforward concept in the name of consent.¹⁸⁵ During the interviews, there might have been times when I could feel I knew better than the interviewee over sudden topics with my scholarly knowledge and background. It was influential throughout the interviews to remember that they are the experts in their own life.¹⁸⁶

I come from a privileged place, and in many ways the women's lives were intriguing

¹⁸¹ Merry, 2017, p.151.

¹⁸² Beyer, 2016, p.122.

¹⁸³ Ibid. p.129.

¹⁸⁴ H,Antczak, H, Nørrelykke, R, Posborg, *Socialrådgivning og socialt arbejde*. Hans Reitzels Forlag, Copenhagen, 2013, p.500.

¹⁸⁵ A, Traianou, *The Centrality of Ethics in Qualitative Research in Leavy, Patricia: The Oxford Handbook on Qualitative Methods*. Oxford University 2014, p.63.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

because they appeared distinctive and different from my own.¹⁸⁷ As the researcher, I have the power of what to bring out from the interviews and what not to, which makes it unequal power exchange between me and the participants.¹⁸⁸ With my background in the Global North, the project could be seen as a way of studying down¹⁸⁹. The aim was to listen carefully and explain the women's narratives, and in that way, try not to be superior in the project, where I do not assume to know better.^{190,191}

4.4.3 Values and cultural differences

In correspondence with power dynamics, it became vital that I remembered my personal values and understood what they meant for the outcome.¹⁹² I disagreed with the interviewee's points and arguments throughout some of the interviews, and it became essential to understand and listen to the participants.¹⁹³ The project is supposed to understand someone different from myself, so I tried to keep an open mind to other ways of living life and understanding the world.¹⁹⁴ Even though they differed from my beliefs, I respected their individual lives and approached the topic with sensitivity.¹⁹⁵

4.4.4 Anonymity

It seems evident for the project that the women must remain anonymous when doing the interviews and throughout the entire project. Their names and specific regions are not mentioned. I do that, knowing that even in a small country like Kyrgyzstan, there are huge variations between different regions, and it can be different livelihoods I found. Still, protecting their anonymity is at the forefront of this project.¹⁹⁶

4.4.5 Beneficence or non-maleficence

¹⁸⁷ Harrison, 2014, p. 224.

¹⁸⁸ Antczak, Nørrelykke, Posborg, 2013, p.500.

¹⁸⁹ Nader, 1972, p. 5.

¹⁹⁰ M, Barnett, *Empire of Humanity*, New York, Cornell University Press 2011, p.31.

¹⁹¹ Ibid. p.14.

¹⁹² E, Aadland, *Etik: Dilemma og Valg*, Viborg, Dansk Psykologisk Forlag, 2012, p. 226.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ G, Ulrich, *Research ethics for Human Rights researchers in* Andreassen, B.A, Sano, H and McInerney-Lankford, S: *Research Methods in Human Rights A Handbook*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing 2017, p. 206.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid. p. 204.

¹⁹⁶ Traianou, 2014, p.66.

Throughout the research, different conducts could harm the target group both during and after the interviews. The work done can influence the participant why it became essential to act in good manners throughout the thesis.¹⁹⁷ One participant was called by her husband and yelled to come home straight away. To not put her in a difficult situation, I told her it was right to leave, as I sensed her feeling obligated towards giving an interview.

One way to harm the participants is if their safety is jeopardised through this work because of the information, they have given, hence the importance of anonymity as mentioned previously.¹⁹⁸ Throughout some of the interviews, the interviewees would cry or have similar emotions. To not re-traumatize them in this project and harm them in any way, I allowed them to contact me if they felt after, so we could seek professional guidance.¹⁹⁹

4.6 Data selection and coding

This section will explain how I gather data and analysed it.

The participants for the project are of different ages, and their stories differ significantly.

The common denominator is Ala Kachuu, and no matter age, religion and other living conditions, their different arguments will give a more nuanced representation of Ala Kachuu. To make my collected data more reliable, Simon Walker points to transparency in the methods and coding used in the project.²⁰⁰ To make the project more valid, I have focused on the exact words and their meaning throughout my coding to give the project a higher sense of validity.²⁰¹ Through the data and coding and my narrative approach, I am aware that what might be the truth in this given time can change over time and with another researcher.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Ulrich, 2017, p.197.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid. p.199.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid, p.214-215

²⁰⁰ S. Walker, Challenges of human rights measurements in B.A, Andreassen, H, Sano, H and S, McInerney-Lankford, in *Research Methods in Human Rights A Handbook*. Cheltenham UK: Edward Elgar Publishing 1st. edn.2017, p.329.

²⁰¹ Ibid. p. 322.

²⁰² A.P, Bochner and N.A, Riggs, Practicing Narrative in Leavy, Patricia in *The Oxford Handbook on Qualitative Methods*. Oxford University 2014 p.209

The interviews have been transcribed, and each interview has then been colour-coded into different wording and themes, so common factors for all of them have been highlighted. Through a Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA), this project has found, analysed, and concluded from the data.²⁰³ To begin with I foresaw which information I would require (qualitative interviews and field notes), and then I devised a strategy for gathering the data needed, which was collected in Kyrgyzstan. After accruing enough data, I have organised it. I have jotted it, in the end, to prioritise only a tiny percentage of it. The coding had different categories that each participant's statement could go under. That could be shame/ divorce, happiness etc..²⁰⁴

5.0 Analysis

The analysis of this thesis is divided into three chapters. The first one illustrates general data findings from the interviews and gives insight into their lives and decision-making. The two following chapters analyse their spoken words from the interviews. Throughout this analysis, I will use data gathered through my fieldwork. This primarily will be quotes from the narrative interviews, but field observations will occasionally be broad.

5.1 Introduction to the participants

This chapter introduces the 22 women I had personal interviews with and uses three tables. These tables show the age of the interviewees, their marital status, and prior connection to their kidnapper/future husband.

²⁰³J, Saldaña Coding and Analysis Strategies in Leavy, Patricia in *The Oxford Handbook on Qualitative Methods*. Oxford University 2014, p.209.

²⁰⁴ Ibid. p.581-582.

Figure 1: The different age groups which was interviewed.

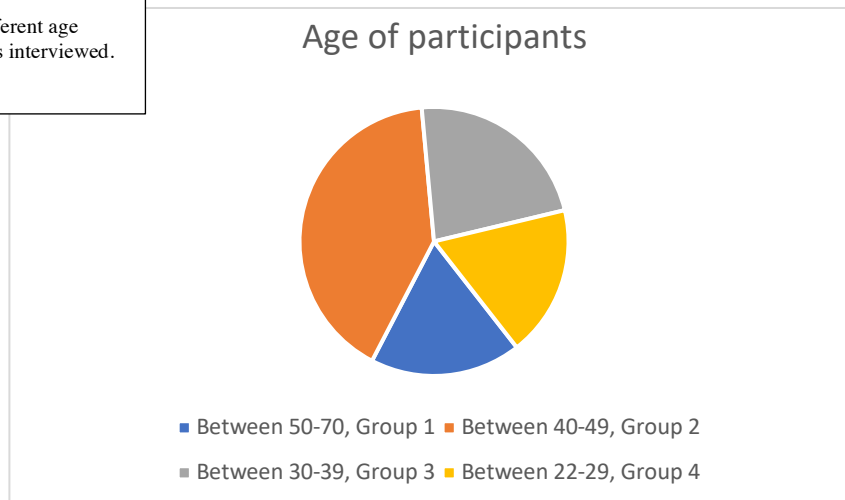


Figure 1 shows that most of the participants are between 40-49. This also means that they were kidnapped closely after the Soviet Union. As explained in the introduction, the end of the Soviet meant that many lost their jobs. One of the biggest reasons for kidnapping is poverty and not being able to afford a massive wedding. With that factoring in, it becomes essential to watch Ala Kachuu closely in the next period, both due to the current war in Ukraine,²⁰⁵ which influences livelihood in all previous Soviet countries, but also due to global pandemic influences worldwide.²⁰⁶

Of twenty-two women, four were kidnapped after the legal changes in 2014, and two of them remain married. The two who divorced both suffered from domestic violence from their husbands.

²⁰⁵ A, Bahr, 'The impact of Russian-Ukraine war on Central Asia' in *Geopolitica*, 10 April, 2022 [Phhttps://www.geopolitica.info/impact-russian-ukraine-war-on-central-asian-economy/](https://www.geopolitica.info/impact-russian-ukraine-war-on-central-asian-economy/) (accessed 25 May 2022).

²⁰⁶ CEDAW, Report of the inquiry concerning the Kyrgyz Republic under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the convention on the elimination of All forms of discrimination against women https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/CEDAW_C_OP-8_KGZ_1_8755_E.pdf (accessed on 20 May 2022).

Figure 2

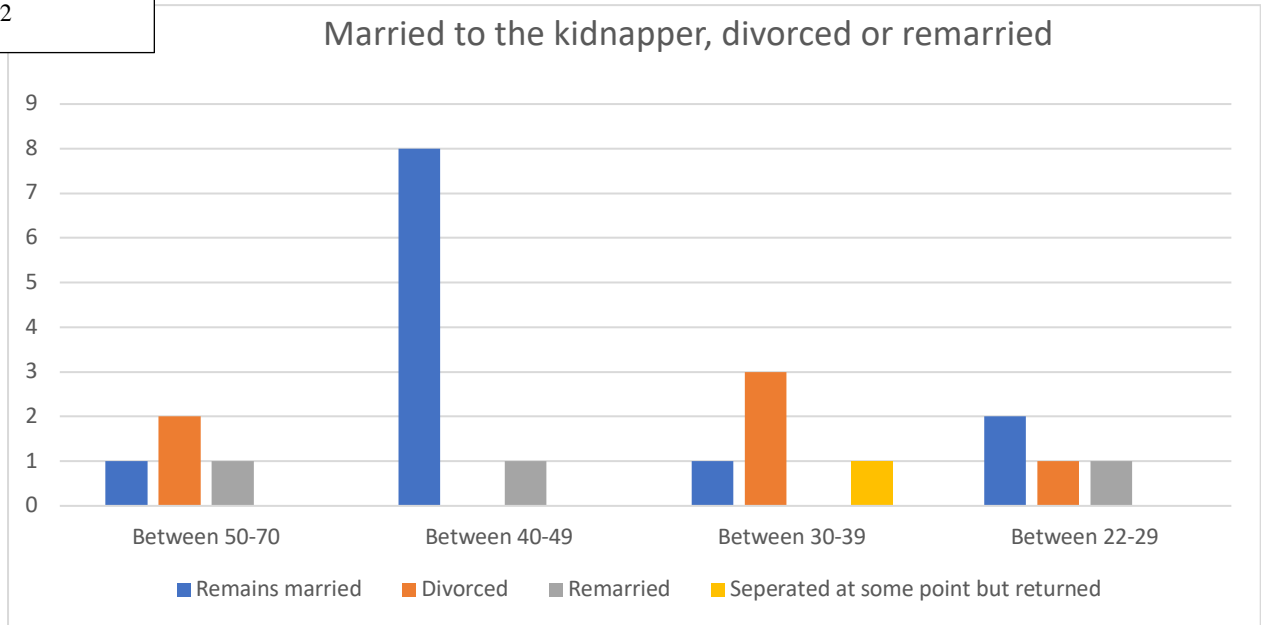


Figure 2 shows us that 6 out of 22 were not married to the kidnapper at the time of the interview. In category 50-70, one person is remarried. She got a child with her kidnapper and then remarried later. Two others got divorced later in life due to marital problems. In the second category, only one remarried; she left her kidnapper straight after. In the third category, 3 out of 5 are divorced. Two of them divorced due to domestic violence and after being married for a more extended period. The last one escaped after being in the kidnapper's house for two months. She told that maybe she had been lucky, because she was studying in another town, and it was through this she could escape. By saying so, she indicates that other women, might not be as fortunate as her and have the possibility of escaping.

Another one left due to marital problems, although she returned and was back together with her husband at the time of the interview. In the last category, two out of four remain married. One left on the day of the kidnapping, and one divorced after having two children.

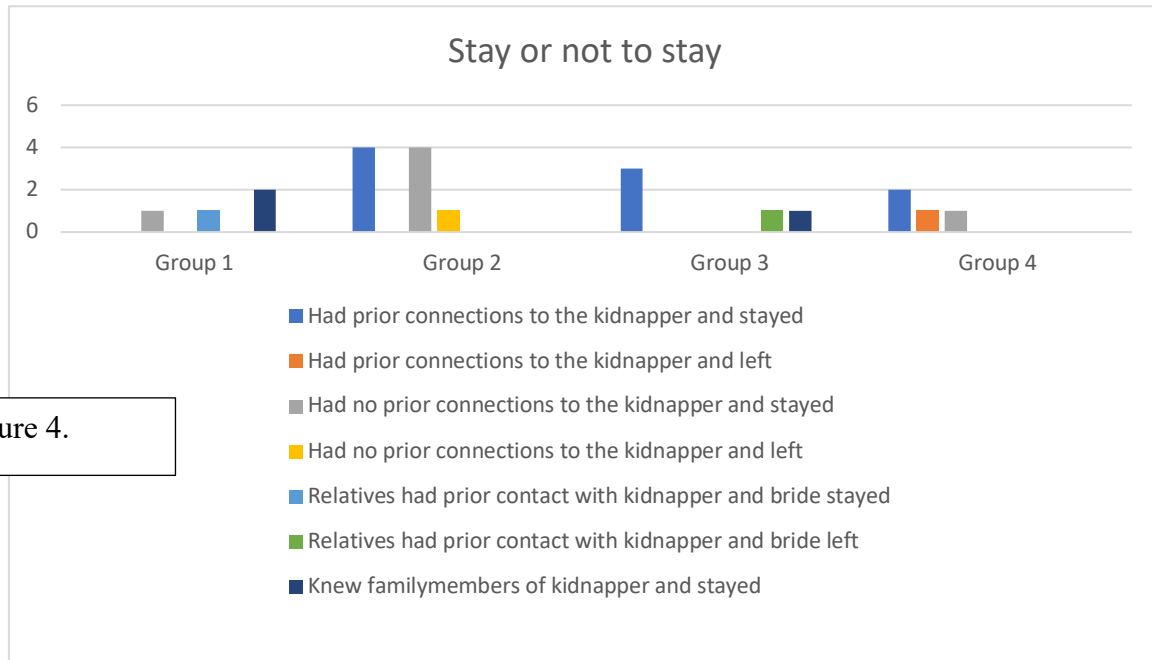


Figure 4.

Figure 4 tells us that one of those three women who left in the first few days had known him personally before. She is the only one of all who left despite that fact. One participant had been kidnapped twice in group two, but she only figured once with her second husband. The first kidnapper, she neither knew nor stayed with.

Out of twenty-two participants, nine were not married to the one who kidnapped them. Six out of nine left after having children. That leaves us with three women out of twenty-two who left in the first period after the kidnapping. Two of them married someone different and had children with their second spouse. The women told different notions of why they said yes to the marriage, but most of them are related to shame. This will be expanded further in the next chapter.

The interviews took place in five different regions in Kyrgyzstan (Seven regions in total). In each village, I had a contact whom I stayed with. Most of the interviews were conducted in these home settings in privacy. In Bishkek, the interviews were conducted in a coworking space, where I had rented an office. The shortest interview took twenty minutes due to interruption by a spouse. The longest one took three and a half hours. The general length was between one and two hours. The women mostly seemed enthusiastic and interesting in sharing their stories, but a few were reluctant and felt unease. At the

beginning of the interview, we would discuss other things to make it a more comfortable setting.

For the interviews, I would serve tea and snacks. When we had the interviews in guesthouses, the host would do so. When one is invited to a house as a guest, there is a particular way one must sit according to their local custom: facing the door but furthest from it. I would always try to make the interviewee sit in this spot simultaneously as they would want me to sit there.

For most of the interviews, I had an interpreter with me, who spoke either Russian or Kyrgyz. Out of the twenty-two women, seven of them spoke fluent English, which meant these interviews were conducted without an interpreter.

In Kyrgyzstan, I learned that there is no long tradition of sharing emotions. This meant I needed to be patient to get deep into their emotions and deepest feelings. During the interviews, few of them would cry, but it was not a static process of the conversations. Most of them would smile and be happy when they talked about their children. Some would laugh when they explained the kidnapping itself. It was hard for others to discuss their kidnapping and they spoke in general terms instead. Some of them would ask after if they had answered the question to my satisfaction. In those moments, it became clear to me how challenging it can be to give all this information to a stranger. One told me she had been practising the previous day because she had been so nervous. Others told me it was a burden lifted off their shoulders because they finally told their story to someone. For the majority, it was the first time they shared their thoughts about Ala Kachuu with anyone.

6.0 Analysing marriage and shame in Kyrgyzstan:

This second chapter of the analysis is further divided into two sections: 'Reasons to stay or not to stay' and 'Everyday life'. To analyse it, I use Heller, Plummer and Beyer.

6.1 Reasons to stay or not to stay:

This section will give different notions on women's decision making, after being kidnapped. The following will show, that for some, it was not in their own hands to decide, and for others, they could choose.

Before leaving for Kyrgyzstan, the aim was to study Ala Kachuu. Still, throughout the period, it became more and more evident that Ala Kachuu was only the beginning of issues for the women, and that married life, in general, was hard. One of the women in her late 20s said the following:

"Well, particularly in Kyrgyzstan.... Ala Kachuu is not the worst part. I'd say married life is the worst part, as a burden. Yes, for a woman, because... when I was thinking of getting divorced or not, what should I do. So, I kept consulting my friends and just asking them, and you know, like, if I talked to 10 of my friends, and four of them were not married, they would say, no, stay in your marriage, don't walk away, like, you will need your husband and blah, blah, blah. Four of them are divorced, six of them are married, and six of them would say, I would walk away from this marriage with my biggest pleasure".

While she struggles in her married life, and she even left her husband for some time, the quote also indicates that while one might feel the marriage is terrible, getting away from it will give regret. Many chores are put on women when she enters a new family as a *kellin*.²⁰⁷ This woman did not accept the kidnapping and left the same day. The quote further indicated that while she had not accepted the kidnapping, she was still unhappy in

²⁰⁷ Appendix 1

her current life. She had tried to listen to her inner reasoning, instead of the external ones, where one must be married.²⁰⁸

She was not the only one having a specific burden on her; another interview was abruptly interrupted by the husband, who yelled that she had to come home and do chores at the house. She had no choice but to stay in the interview or not. While both women clearly showed emotions of feeling burden, it could be through their relations to their husbands that they find themselves and are both longing to belong and be recognized.²⁰⁹

One of the prevalent reasons to stay when experiencing Ala Kachuu was noted as shame for themselves and their families. Following the theoretical framework, we know that two factors, external and internal, are essential in decision making.

One woman in her 40s said: *“My grandmother was saying if someone takes you, don’t come back, because this salt thing we cannot do it. I didn’t want them to be ashamed of me”*.

While she does not mention her own wishes, disgracing her family and making them feel wrong about her was the worst she could imagine, which is why she acted according to the local customs in Kyrgyzstan.²¹⁰ She gives *Salt* and hence *uiat* a vital role in her decision making.²¹¹ This means that it is the external factors which decide over her internal autonomy.²¹² For her, the inner voice, the wish is surrounding being in a good relation to her family, why she chooses the external power, to decide over her decision making.²¹³²¹⁴

A woman in her 40s, who was kidnapped, tells what went through her mind during her youth.

“that time, I didn’t think of my rights. I thought about my parent’s shame.”

²⁰⁸ Heller, 1985, p.27

²⁰⁹ Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

²¹⁰ Heller, 1985, p.7.

²¹¹ Beyer, 2016, p.149.

²¹² Heller, 1985, p.7.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Plummer, 2003, p.51-57

”.... *It was so shameful to go back from the place you were kidnapped back then; it was very important my parent’s reputation what people say because this village is small and everyone talks about me bad things so first, I stayed because of that I didn’t want my parents to hear so many words. Second of all, it’s because my husband had a weak family. (..) that’s why I decided to stay”*

She decided to stay, but it seemed to her there was inner reasoning for choosing this marriage, as he came from a *weak* family. Her internal authority might have felt a sense of sympathy for the person in front of her, which let her stay, while it corresponded with what the external power wanted her to do.²¹⁵

Another woman, also in her 40’s, says the following about her reason for staying: *“Ala Kachuu was also bad because I’ve never met him before. I had to stay. I didn’t stay there (in the beginning). First, I did it after two days. It was too far from the house. Because of salt, you cannot leave the place. . I was shamed to stay, to not leave. So, I stayed”*.

As introduced previously in this thesis, *Salt* relates to social customs and behaviours, so when she gives that for her reasoning to stay, it should be understood as the external factor that is judging her to feel shame.²¹⁶ She had no say in the matter, and it was the society which decided for her.²¹⁷

One woman in her early 30s was divorced at the time of the interview. She had been kidnapped twice. After returning home after the first kidnapping, she said: *“Okay, so my father was asking me why I came back because in Kyrgyz culture, if you go to one family, you have to stay, and he would ask: why did you do that”*.

Because of her internal autonomy,²¹⁸ she chose not to stay to the immense disapproval of her father. Her mother had asked her if the kidnapper had raped her, as being raped on the wedding night was a further indication of having to stay. She hadn’t been raped. When she was kidnapped again, the father said the following: *“so and then my father said, well, it’s the second house, it’s better to stay what people would say. So he wanted me to stay”*

²¹⁵ Heller, 1985, p.3-7.

²¹⁶ Ibid. p.4-5.

²¹⁷ Ibid. p.7

²¹⁸ Ibid. p.27.

While she shows internal autonomy over her decision-making, in the first kidnapping, the shame makes her father decide, and that way, he takes away her ownership, rights and freedom to choose what she wants.²¹⁹ It becomes her feelings of intimate citizenship which are jeopardized,²²⁰ due to the external shame the father is placing upon her.²²¹ When she later divorced, it was due to the husband being a domestic abuser and an alcoholic. After the divorce, he has tried to kill her. When she compares the two kidnappings, she says the following:

“... but it seems like the first kidnapping experience for me it was the most cruel one the way they treated me they there were three guys and one lady and they just sort of using me as a thing like thrown to the car and get him to the very far away village.”

She indicates that not feeling like a human and as someone who could be moved around it correspond with Plummer's notion of not having citizenship over one's own body.²²² She was deprived of her self-determination.²²³

A woman in her 20's said the following:

“When I was kidnapped, I called to my parents, and my sister said (to) me that actually my mom now has like pressure in health problem and you should just sit in silence after this. I didn't talk with my parents for one month”.

She realised that her voice was irrelevant; their wishes and actions didn't matter.²²⁴ Through pressure from her family, she was silenced to stay and deprived of freedom for decision-making.²²⁵

Also, a woman in her 30s felt shamed into saying yes to the marriage:
“I cried actually because my relative came, and they said your dad said okay. My mom died when I was a child. So, dad was the one who raised us... I didn't want him to feel ashamed, and I decided to stay. Now if I have a fight, I don't say to my husband or my father. There are always some fights in the family.”

²¹⁹ Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Heller, 1985, p.7

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ K, Manne, *Down girl: The logic of misogyny*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2017, p. 19.

²²⁵ Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

Because of her towards her father and family, she decides to follow his wishes and marry the guy who stole her; she lets the power of shame determine her life circumstances,²²⁶ while it contradicts her internal wishes.²²⁷ Because she respects her father, she also silences herself, her own needs, and desires.

One woman decided to stay due to her age when she was 23:

“... in our culture, being a 23 and not in the marriage was embarrassing. And it was a shame because at the time 23 years old girls had, they already three kids”.

She was married later than her peers, and hence she encountered a feeling of shame internally for not being married. She, therefore, showed internal autonomy for her own decision making, but due to external behaviours.²²⁸

Another woman also has a notion of shame from her kidnapping, where she was forced to stay. She had no desire to be in that marriage. While she did separate from him, she was at the time of the interview back in their living situation, trying to work on their difficulties. She said the following as to why she couldn't leave after the kidnapping: *“At the time, it was like a bad stigma and shame for the girl to divorce the man. I can't say that it was like a stigma for all of the society but for our family, it was. Maybe because my parents are very conservative people, they live with some rules, that's why we they also upbrought us with these rules...”*

“They still kept put on me the scarf and pressing me to sit me, making me sit here”.

She is here explaining that in the eyes of her family how the notion of shame was put on her if she divorced her husband. If she said no to the kidnapping simultaneously while the family-in-law tried to pressure her with the scarf. This clearly indicates that, like most of the participants at the time of the abduction, she had an inner struggle. The internal authority didn't seem more significant than the external, and she had to decide which one would be the reasoning for the decision making.²²⁹ When these two feelings contradict each other, the inner will and the domination from the outside, the feeling can, according to Heller, be worse than the shame itself, as it can then question one's personal voice as

²²⁶ Heller, 1985, p.5.

²²⁷ Ibid. p.7.

²²⁸ Ibid. p.9.

²²⁹ Ibid. p.27.

being wrong.²³⁰ For this woman, the external authority ended up being a power in shame, which let her decide the circumstances in her life.²³¹

One participant who ran away in the first period was silent for a long time after her kidnapping. She feared the reputation she would be getting from her surroundings:

'... there are many factors why I was silent and why it's also social pressure and then maybe I was exhausted, it's not safe. And also, and I was in, when I was silent..I was sure it's also a shame to talk about it or just why I ran away....'

She had her internal autonomy decide over her decision-making, but she was still influenced highly by the society's external factors for some time. So even though she made a different decision than most of the participants, she was not excluded from the influence of society's norms and standards.²³² It was her family who had arranged the kidnapping. Throughout the interview, it was an important factor how the relationship had developed negatively, as she had lost her trust in them.

Another participant, at the beginning of her 30s, was kidnapped after the legal changes to the law in 2014 and accepted the marriage. At the time of the interview, she was divorcing him and fighting for custody. She had said yes to the marriage to get away from her mother, who was psychological violent to her. *"I am running because my mom is a very terrible character or very hard person. She is only controlling"*. This shows that her reasoning for marrying was to choose freedom and a life where she was away from the violence. The husband was also a domestic abuser, so she filed for divorce. But that indicates her self-determination and internal powers to keep fighting for her own freedom.²³³ She accepted the kidnapping for freedom, and when she found out it was not her desired freedom, she chose to listen to her internal autonomy.²³⁴

I learned from a local employer at UN Women, that not only is it shameful, if one is raped on the night of the kidnapping and decides to leave. Further, that woman is then seen as

²³⁰ Ibid.p.44.

²³¹ Ibid. p.40.

²³² Ibid. p.19.

²³³ Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

²³⁴ Heller, 1985, p.27.

someone whom the men from that village can continue raping as they want. It is through this notion, that women become objects, ²³⁵ because of the external shame which is let upon them, ²³⁶ This gives further reasoning to stay with the kidnapper, as the fate which is brought upon one after, might seem even more damaging.

6.1.2 Summary:

From the narratives above, we can see that external reasoning often plays a significant role in women's lives. Even if they listen to their internal autonomy and choose something different from their parent's commands about marriage, they are influenced by society's norms and standards. It is through the external pressure, that the women tend to stay, ²³⁷ and if it is not the shame itself, it is a choice of freedom, to get the autonomy back over their own life.²³⁸ The society influences their decision making and their own thoughts, no matter if they have a big internal autonomy.²³⁹

6. 2 Everyday life:

While most of the participants are married, either to the one who kidnapped them or someone they met later, the ones who stayed had different notions of their lives. This section will examine how life proceeds after the kidnapping.

One woman, age 22, was pregnant with her second child. She had been severely unhappy in the marriage but explained the following:

“But now, everything is okay, because I don’t know... maybe loves comes after marriage and now, we are waiting for our second child....”

In the interview, she said that the happiness and love for her husband came in the last year after giving birth to their first child. Before their marriage, she had cared for him as if he was a brother and the same way, three years into the marriage. This shows us that while

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Heller, 1985, p.19.

²³⁷ Ibid. p.9

²³⁸ Plummer, 2003, p.51-57

²³⁹ Heller, 1985, p.8

she had no decision making over the wedding herself, the marriage led her to something she desired, children, which made her happy. Then, the external factors are what made her inner desires and dreams come true. She regains ownership over her dreams, thoughts, and wishes.²⁴⁰

A woman over 70 told two things during the interview:

"..My second husband was very good very respectful for me. But I can say that my soul wasn't satisfied while living like this". Later she said: *"now I think I'm satisfied that I have good health I'm 70 I'm 70 years old now. I am happy that I have good health that my children are happy now"*.

At the time of the interview, her husband had passed away. While she indicates that she did experience dissatisfaction throughout her life, seeing her children happy gives her happiness, which shows us that her inner dreams are coming true through this.²⁴¹

A woman in her 20s who is still married to the kidnapper said the following about her feeling toward her husband:

"But the feeling to my child really different. It is more bigger. And I cannot even say something bad to my children because I love them".

A woman in her 40s said: *"Very happy now. I think my life is full of happiness, but if my two sons and one daughter will get married, I will be more happy than that"*.

A woman in her 30s said following: *"I'm happy because I have children now, but at the point when I had Ala Kachuu, I was not very happy"*.

All the women who had continued the marriage would refer to their children as being their happiness in the same ways. It becomes the source of being recognised as mothers through children and, hence, a way to belong in society.²⁴² Mothers become *who* they are and *what* they are. From Plummer, there comes here both an inside and outside notion of who they are through motherhood.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Heller, 1985, p.19.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Ibid.

While there is a notion of happiness for the women who stayed and got children, another woman in her 40s left the kidnapper to marry someone else and felt that her new faith was a punishment from God and said the following:

“I don't know if I have made a good decision because my second husband is an alcoholic. My mother in law already 90 years old. They weren't financially stable. So I think is it a karma or God did to me that I left a good person and God (said), that if you don't want to marry this person then try this.”

While she experiences feelings of regret and punishment from God, in her sentence is also a notion that her dreams and wishes for her life didn't matter. As a person, she should accept the fate put upon her and not have her individual goals her self-determination. Because she didn't accept the first *proposal*, she felt punished. She felt her decision over her own life had left to worse circumstances. While she let her internal authority speak for her future, she regretted not listening to the external power surrounding her. This could indicate that the contradiction which happened between internal and external thoughts grew stronger over time.²⁴⁴

She is not the only one who struggles with burdens in her life, a woman in her 20s is separating from her husband due to marital issues. Her husband did not kidnap her, but as a young girl, she did experience Ala Kachuu with a different person. She was picked up the same day by her father and never married that man—years after she married from love. One day, she was in a house with a close male relative; they had stayed in one room in the evening but had separate beds. In the morning, she had woken up to him touching her; when she spoke about this, her mother said the following:

“...So I told to all of my family members. And my mom was so mad at me like, well, you don't know that it's a shame that you are divorced, that you don't live anymore with your husband. And now you got into this case. So, she was seeing it as if it was my choice. And as if I was the one to blame....”

For her, there are two layers of shame from this quote. First, she is being shamed for being divorced; it goes against the custom,²⁴⁵ which should make her consider her circumstances even further when she no longer has the protection of a man. These are the external judges

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p.44.

²⁴⁵ Beyer, 2016, p.100.

who play a significant role.²⁴⁶ This is not society at large, which blames her, but her mother, who judges her by society standards. The mother tends to give her daughter a sense of debt, which leads to shame. Throughout this debt, the mother says that by being divorced, she is losing her honour, which could make the woman feel guilt, and from that shame, guilt can arise.²⁴⁷ While her mother is trying to blame her, she will not listen to it, which can be an act of internal autonomy. Heller says, when one is shamed, it needs to be without reasoning, but here we have one looking for a reason when she knows what her relative did was wrong.²⁴⁸ She might have had a higher sense of internal authority, while the external authority blames her. It then becomes up to herself how much to let the external power of shame influence her.²⁴⁹

Through married life, there is *salt*, and everyone must act according to it. It does give some freedom in some circumstances to *belong* to someone. I participated in a wedding ceremony near the end of the field trip. The woman placed next to me had come without her husband. She told me it was against the culture and tradition and how it was frowned upon being there without her husband. We had to do a few dances during the evening, but she was more reluctant to participate in those activities. She told me that she was not supposed to because she could be shamed for her misbehaviour. One interviewee said the following quote: ‘...*So when even you come without a husband, and you behave yourself very openly, they will think of your bad things. It's a part of the culture of the male. They will think, oh, she's not married, and she behaves like that, and she's like weird, you know? It's a male culture in Kyrgyzstan that works like that...*’. We see from both women some autonomy to go to weddings alone, but they are aware of the external powers which influence their self-determination.²⁵⁰

Specific burdens are put upon women through marriage:

²⁴⁶ Heller, 1985, p.3.

²⁴⁷ Ibid. p.5.

²⁴⁸ Ibid. p.8.

²⁴⁹ Ibid. p.19.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. p.27.

“yes, there is always stigma. You are a woman. You should; you should keep silent you should be tolerant in anyways from the woman from the men....”

What can be understood from this woman is that it is important to keep silent as a woman to protect male dominance, and her perspective might have been destroyed.²⁵¹ Her right to being herself is destroyed, if she wish to belong in society. Her feelings contradict themselves and reject the outside understanding of her behaviour.²⁵²

One woman, in her 40s, told throughout her story that it was shameful to be divorced and that women should be tolerant towards their husbands throughout the marriage:

“.... Also, if you are living with a violent man, it's also on the woman to change him. So, for instance, in one month, you start to make effort to put one word into his mind in 10 years you will change him into control everything. So, if a woman is smart enough, she will not be arguing with that man...she will be patient and she'll..be smart enough to change his opinion.”

What she states revolves around shame again and how to keep the Kyrgyz marriage traditions in life; a woman needs to be patient and committed to the life chosen for them. This quote tells us that the external power should influence one's behaviours and, in these circumstances, the responsibility put upon women in marital circumstances.²⁵³

Responsibility is connected to a feeling of shame, as if one cannot be responsible for one's actions, then one might inherit a sense of shame. When not being responsible, one might be put in debt to society, and when placed in debt to society, as mentioned previously, it can be a meaning of shame-guilt.²⁵⁴

One participant in her late 20s was divorced and had to leave her child behind. It left her heartbroken to leave her daughter with her ex and in-laws, but she had no choice in this matter and was aware of her situation as a divorced mother, both economically and socially. She stated that she wanted a good life throughout her interview, and she kept fighting for it. She refused to back down from the fight and said at one point: *“It's not my life like, I was living like in prison. Seriously, it was like this”*. While she was having

²⁵¹ Manne, 2017, p. 15.

²⁵² Heller, 1985, p.8.

²⁵³ Ibid. p.3.

²⁵⁴ Ibid. p.5.

hardship in her marriage, she also did not want to see herself like this. While external powers were decided over her reasoning, she later let her internal autonomy decide over her life.²⁵⁵ Her internal reasoning became bigger, that can be due to the fact, that the situation escalated over time, and she could no longer find reasoning to listen to external authorities.²⁵⁶

6.2.1 Summary

Like everywhere else in this world, life is complicated, and it can be hard to disguise one's desires in a world with so many external factors. This part of the analysis shows us that while marriage gives burdens and negative impacts, it also provides happiness through children. Through marriage, women can act differently in social settings. This part of the analysis indicates that while many stayed in the marriage for external reasoning, it is external and internal reasons that make them content in life and make them feel human.²⁵⁷²⁵⁸ This section further indicates that, some have an internal voice, which differs from societies standards,²⁵⁹ and when deciding to listen to that voice, the battle for freedom becomes enormous.²⁶⁰

7.0 Analysis: local and global victimisation in Kyrgyzstan

This chapter of the analysis will examine if and how victimisation plays a role on a local and global level. To draw on this, I use Fohring to explain victimhood on a personal level and Abu-Lughod and Merry on a global level. I divide this part into two sections:

Am I a victim and *Am I a victim in the eyes of the global society*

²⁵⁵ Ibid. p.44

²⁵⁶ Ibid. p.27

²⁵⁷ Heller, 1985, p.19

²⁵⁸ Plummer, 2003, p.51-57

²⁵⁹ Heller, 1985, p.27

²⁶⁰ Plummer, 2003, p.51-57

I draw on Abu-Lughod and Fohring; I also draw on information from local NGOs and the women whom I interviewed.

7.1 Am I a victim?

This section focuses on victimhood in a local setting and how the women move in and out of victimhood.

As we can see from the previous chapter, many women became happy and looked back at their lives with fulfilment due to their children. Some felt marriage was a burden, full of chores and restrictions, but for some, marriage life had also given them opportunities to act in specific ways and manners. When most women say that they are happy because of children, this can be just that. But it can also be, as Fohring states, that victimhood is not static, and these women chose to focus on the good in their life instead of being in a constant position of suffering as a victim throughout their marriages. Instead of focusing on the victimhood in their lives, they position themselves in the world as something different, as mothers, which gives them optimism and a different label than victims. We know from Fohring that optimism is a powerful motivation for coping with victimhood.²⁶¹

One woman said about living with a violent partner:

“ Of course, the woman becomes a victim of that situation. But he's probably not a monster, and if there is a bad side, there could be a good side of him that you like”.

While she states that women are victims in some situations, she also argues that it is not *all they are*. She gives women the autonomy not to stay in a victimhood position; she tells them to cope with it and remember their husbands' good sides.²⁶² It can be debated whether focusing on the good sides is coping or struggling to survive in a bad situation.²⁶³

This idea corresponds well with another woman's ending remark: *'In the Kyrgyz society, women set up the standards, and women are the victims of these standards'*. While men benefit from a misogynist society, it doesn't mean, according to Manne, that those women

²⁶¹ Fohring, 2018, p.154.

²⁶² Ibid. p.160.

²⁶³ Ibid.

operating in such a society are not helping those standards to continue to exist as their capacity for independent perspective can be destroyed.²⁶⁴

Another participant was direct and said that women were victims:

“Ala Kachuu is a bad tradition, by my opinion, because it didn't let us women of Kyrgyzstan to choose somebody, to choose our way of life, our profession. For example, maybe I want to live in the city of Bishkek, for example, or in Osh or in Talas. But somebody stole me, and I should stay at very, very high in the mountains and I cannot, for example, milk cows or milk example sheep take care of sheep, etc., and it is very, very bad tradition and many girls and women are victims of this methods and in our legislation, try to stop by giving ten years in prison for men who is stolen bride” By not giving the women choices and autonomy how to live their lives, they become victims of not only Ala Kachuu but also in the eyes of society.²⁶⁵

She continued with:

“...But out women didn't know about it, that that they are objects of belonging to men. It's maybe normal for them. And they didn't know that they are in domestic violence, that they are victims of domestic violence. It's normal for sure. And it is very terrible”.

This takes us back to the second chapter of the analysis, where women are seen as belongings and as being an item,²⁶⁶ it becomes a part of victimhood.²⁶⁷ Though this is her general point of women's lives in Kyrgyzstan, it is not the notion of her own life. She said she had become happy recently after living further from her in-laws, who used to give her wrong words and do wrong actions. She was fortunate enough to move out of her victimhood. We know from Fohring that victimhood is not static and is something a person can move in and out from, which might be what this woman has done.²⁶⁸

One woman had experienced two times of Ala Kachuu, and while she had stayed with the second kidnapper, she was divorced at the time of the interview. She had been running from him for most of her life, going to work abroad away from her child. While she

²⁶⁴ Manne, 2017, p.11.

²⁶⁵ Fohring, 2018, 154.

²⁶⁶ Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

²⁶⁷ Fohring, 2018, p.153.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. p.160.

dreamed of her son going to sports and activities in the city, she was not allowed to sign him up for anything without the other parental consent. It seemed impossible to her to get legal custody over her son, even though the father had never shown interest in the child, been addicted to drugs and even showed up with a gun at one point: *“So it's actually it's been 11 years since our divorce, but he's still threatening me searching for me. He hasn't been married after me. But even he doesn't even really care about the child, but he thinks of me that I left him. So I asked everyone from that village he lives in (...). I asked everyone not to give my information, but he's like searching for asking everyone, and even he found out about my XXXXX and came there with guns”*.

While she doesn't say it in clear words, her emotions throughout the interview and this sentence indicate that she is a victim both of a violent ex-husband and the societal structures in Kyrgyzstan. By not saying it, it can be that she refuses to label herself as a victim and instead is trying to find a coping mechanism to be a survivor of this.²⁶⁹ Through her story, it was clear that while she realised she was a victim of his violence and Ala Kachuu, but she was also a mother, and a sister and her victimhood was not static for her.²⁷⁰

One woman in her 40s ends her interview with the following statement: *“I think there were some happy families because of Ala Kachuu, but there were more victims of Ala Kachuu, like they don't know each other. They don't know their personalities. And after two or three years, they're divorcing, but I don't think that the more plusses and minuses maybe one in 100 situations maybe”* For her, Ala Kachuu puts women in a situation of being victims,²⁷¹ not necessarily because of the violent act, but because it leaves to divorce which leaves to shame.²⁷²

One participant in her 40s said the following about women's general happiness in Kyrgyzstan: *“....I accept that woman who will marry by Ala Kachuu is not happy, maybe they told that they are happy, but they are shy to say that they are not happy and this why they lie about a really really stuck situation of her life....”* She indicates that because of

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

²⁷¹ Ibid. p.151.

²⁷² Heller, 1985, p.3

the shame and weakness put upon women, it is hard for them to admit to outsiders the feeling of being a victim. The question remains then if that is coping or suffering in silence.²⁷³

One participant in her 30s, who had run away and not remarried, said: “...*somebody can't change situation to better side because we are very a few people, and they can do something nobody do in every day. Me also including me. And what can I do? I don't know. But sometimes and I'm thinking it's also some help and when I am shame. It's not good because it's this, this situation this traditional, like this broke all my life*”. She had been arguing against Ala Kachuu for a long time, and even though she had not married, this quote indicates that years after, she is suffering from the situation someone else put her in. Her life was shattered through the circumstances, and it has since been hard for her to find meaning and comprehend her new relation to the world.²⁷⁴

7.1.1 Summary:

This part shows that women are reluctant to call themselves victims in their lives, and they try to find a coping mechanism to take them out of this situation. This can either be to have children, fight against the system, move away, or accept the given situation they are in. It shows that while some women experienced victimisation, it has, for most, not become a static part of their lives.

7.2 Am I a victim in the eyes of the global society?

In this section, I continue with the notion of victimisation, merely combining it with a global perspective of understanding the lives of the locals.

One of the participants did not tell me the whole story of her life. She said, she and her husband had a happy life; when I later interviewed a family member of hers, I was informed that she had been divorced for a few years because of difficulties in her marriage. When asked why she left this part out, she said that telling it was shameful and losing her honour. If we combine this with Fohring, she might not have wanted me to

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Fohring, 2018, p.153.

see her as a victim of her husband, as it would have shown her as weak and shameful.²⁷⁵ Abu-Lughod argument also becomes essential here. Life is different everywhere, and throughout the interview process, there was a power dynamic that I could and should not be oblivious to. She knew that I had the power to write about her country and family situations in ways that could bring shame to her. It could be due to her possibilities and opportunities, which she felt, an outsider would have no understanding for.²⁷⁶ She might not see herself as a victim because she still has her family, and family resembles love, closeness and passion, but also difference, struggles over authority, and ambivalence.²⁷⁷ We know from numerous participants that motherhood was something that brought happiness to their lives. It can be a coping mechanism, which could be problematic for others to understand, but being in a constant static place of victimisation is also hard.²⁷⁸

One woman told the following in her interview:

“So why it's important to make to respect the man, it's because it's from the history. You need to tell the man that he is strong, that he's responsible for the family and raise him that way that he once, he becomes the real leader of the family, he will be always sort of, you know, in control of himself and do everything to help the family.”

For her, it was clear that all men become leaders one day, and her responsibility as a parent was to teach him. In this quote, this woman first puts herself down, saying that women need to be led by a man, and by saying so, she upholds a patriarchal system and even helps to reproduce those standards.²⁷⁹ Speaking from Abu-Lughod, when women tell stories like this, it is crucial to remember to understand which power dynamics this person is saying from and try to understand why she wishes to uphold such a structure of her sons. It can be that equality, choices, and safety might look different everywhere.²⁸⁰ She was speaking from her truth, in a society where her happiness had come through having children, hence through marriage, and her husband had been the primary provider of the household. Okin states that while choices can be different depending on the culture,

²⁷⁵ S, Fohring, What's in a word? Victims on victim in *International Review of victimology*, vol.24(2) 2018, p.152.

²⁷⁶ L, Abu- Lughod, *Do Muslim Women need saving?* 1st edn. Harvard University Press 2013, p.221-223.

²⁷⁷ L, Abu- Lughod, *Do Muslim Women need saving?* 1st edn. Harvard University Press 2013, p.220.

²⁷⁸ S, Fohring, What's in a word? Victims on victim in *International Review of victimology*, vol.24(2) 2018, p.157.

²⁷⁹ Okin, 1999, p. 125.

²⁸⁰ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

and while it can be a road to mere freedom, it can still be oppressive, and we need not be oblivious to that.²⁸¹

She continued with the following:

“So look, if you tell the If you respect the man and say you are the leader of their family, he gets the whole responsibility to him and he becomes the main reason the source of everything happening in life. But if you say that, hey, we're equal, he becomes lazier and he doesn't take responsibility. So, it's a very comfortable position for the man in Kyrgyzstan to be in”. By giving her husband a vital role in the family, she coped with the burdens she felt she would have had through equality; she took over her autonomy and livelihood.²⁸² As an outsider, her choice here might be challenging to understand, but as Abu-Lughod states, equality, safety, and dignity can look different.²⁸³ Having a good life didn't mean being equal for this woman, but she also did not see herself as a victim.²⁸⁴

One way to get autonomy in Kyrgyzstan is through age, or when your son gets married and your family that way gets a new *kellin*.²⁸⁵ One woman experienced a notion of how they mistreated her in her new family: *“My mother-in-law talked bad about me, so that time I was young, and I didn't understand. If now I am thinking about if I understood this, was I couldn't stay there, but I was young, so I didn't understand he like he was he behave badly”*. While she *accepted* the kidnapping, she also acknowledges that she was mistreated, being a *kellin* in her new house. It seems from this statement that her mother-in-law was also violating her, but she coped with it by trying to understand her own position in relation to the world she now lived in.²⁸⁶ Most of the participants had similar statements, and while some felt they earned respect with time, this can be, according to Okin, a sign of elder women receiving the first sign of power in their own livelihood.²⁸⁷

The same woman said the following:

²⁸¹ Okin, 1999, p. 124.

²⁸² Plummer, 2003, p.51-58.

²⁸³ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

²⁸⁴ Fohring, 2018, p.160.

²⁸⁵ Appendix 1.

²⁸⁶ Fohring, 2018, p.153.

²⁸⁷ Okin, 1999, p. 129.

“So my brother came and asked my husband why what happened? Why did you have a fight? And he said he didn't say anything. He said I'll go pee and come back, but he didn't. And then he, my brother, started a conversation with my mother-in-law. And she said the story that it never happened, but she said, " Take her, I don't need her take the children and go away”.

Another woman said:

“So, when I was leaving with their relatives, I respected them a lot. I was a very good Kellin. And so five years I had three children. We were living together with the relatives in the rural area in the village. But then we actually separated and moved to Bishkek, and I had two other children, and now I feel like that all the respect that I put in their efforts and put when I was kelling back then now, I'm getting in return because they will never argue even if I had some I said I didn't agree with them. I still kept I was patient; I didn't say anything. And now I sort of have the good consequences of that”.

They both give notions of how mothers-in-law must have sudden respect from their new *kellins*. While it was not reciprocated for the first one, it came later for the second one. She had been a victim of Ala Kachuu, but because she coped with all that entails, she profited from it at a later stage.²⁸⁸ This way of redemption is different from a western perspective, but if we look at Abu-Lughod again, it shows us to have a greater understanding of lives lived differently than our own. While we should still condemn violence in all it matters, we should respect that the road to a life without violence might look different for different women elsewhere.

One participant who ran away from the kidnapper said the following:

“..Now..I'm in a house, and I have some achievements in life, and I am happy, but it's still many girls, and they're still... they can be also in potential and keep them (kidnapped) because we still silent when it's also in then how I can criticise and other people and when I am also I still myself and silent....” While she has some coping mechanisms in her own life and has gotten herself out of a static place of victimhood, she does say that her silencing is hindering her. Her silence could be an act of not feeling safe. While it is not

²⁸⁸ Fohring, 2018, p.160.

her desired way of coping with the situation, it is still a coping mechanism after being a victim.²⁸⁹

While her way of coping differs from most of the participants, as she ran away in the first few days, she found a different notion of living her life in a world where she had felt weak at some point felt weak.²⁹⁰ She differs between two choices, being happy that she chose what she wanted and unhappy for not speaking up and keeping herself silent. Like Abu-Lughod states, our choices are never easy, and what we want in life is never black and white.²⁹¹

Other women would tell stories about being silent in their neighborhood to keep a good reputation for themselves and their husbands. This is also a way of coping,²⁹² even though it might seem unsatisfying to the outside world.²⁹³

7.2.1 Summary:

This section shows us that while different from Eurocentric livelihoods, the women find their own autonomy and voice throughout their lives and cope with the life in front of them. While it can seem as if they are victims, most refuses to put themselves in that category, and they find ways to cope with the life they are given. This can be hard, for outsiders to understand, when life seems difficult, but it is important to know that it is their life, and they are their own autonomy, not the outside world.

8.0 Discussion: Is the focus wrong?

In this chapter, I will discuss the findings from the analysis in relation to the global monitoring mechanism together with previous scholars in the work of Ala Kachuu.

Out of the twenty-two participants who gave their narratives on Ala Kachuu, four women left in the first few days after the kidnapping. We know from the analysis that those who stayed had different reasons to do so; for some, it was love, running away from parents,

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Ibid.

²⁹¹ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.215-216.

²⁹² Fohring, 2018, p.160.

²⁹³ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.221-223.

and for others, shame. The analysis indicates that while most of the participants experience periods of victimhood, this is not a static situation in their lives. For those who stay, their lives become happy because and through their motherhood and a newly required sense of freedom through marriage. The analysis further indicates that the external surroundings in their livelihood determine their decision-making. This correspond well with Hellers notion on external shame.²⁹⁴ The consequences of saying no to Ala Kachuu are much more complex than marrying someone against their will. This becomes interesting in combination with the local regulations against the practice of Ala Kachuu. The legal framework everywhere implies punishment after the deed is done, but once it is done, it is done. In other words, while the preparator might be penalised, so will the victim, not from the authorities of law but society's authorities.²⁹⁵

We know from Abu-Lughod that choices are never easy, and life everywhere is complicated.²⁹⁶ From the women's narratives in this research, the significant context of complication becomes apparent, which influences their lives. It is thus interesting that the monitoring mechanism as CEDAW continues to focus on adequately punishing the preparator and protecting the victims.²⁹⁷

Though this is the general assumption in human rights work, to focus on distinguishing fires instead of focusing on how not to let the fire start in the first place. The local NGO, Open Line, in Kyrgyzstan, does focus on outreach work to the young generation, showing the harm and suffering through this practice. This became evident when I was invited to participate in one of their events. Not only do they arrange events to engage the young population, but they also invented a videogame to prevent more kidnappings.²⁹⁸ Through

²⁹⁴ Heller, 1985, p.3-7

²⁹⁵ Heller, 1985, p.3.

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ CEDAW, Report of the inquiry concerning the Kyrgyz Republic under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the convention on the elimination of All forms of discrimination against women https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/KGZ/CEDAW_C_OP-8_KGZ_1_8755_E.pdf (accessed on 20 May 2022).

²⁹⁸ UN Sustainable develop group, *how a mobile game is helping to end bridal kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan* <https://unsdg.un.org/latest/stories/how-mobile-game-helping-end-bride-kidnapping-kyrgyzstan> (accessed 20 May 2022).

this game, the young people learn about their own rights.²⁹⁹ This is a way for the local NGOs to adopt their initiatives, capacity and agency.³⁰⁰

When even the CEDAW distinguish between the non-consensual and consensual version of Ala Kachuu, it shows the complexity of the practice.³⁰¹ One might say that while the consensual one is positive because it gives the population a way to choose their own significant other, however, I see dilemmas in this formulation. When having to *fake* a kidnapping, to have self-determination over one's choices and behaviour, this is also being a victim³⁰²—not from the husband, but the parents, performing a negative social autonomy (external) over their children's lives.³⁰³ And it leads them to cope³⁰⁴ according to the society they are in.³⁰⁵ Opposite, this might work beneficial for those involved, as it gives them the desired freedom and a life of their choice. By saying such practice, though consensual, is incorrect, it is plausible to lack understanding of the local adaption of human rights. By saying it is wrong to those choosing the consensual Ala Kachuu, it can become degrading to their lives³⁰⁶ and continuously maintain the women in a state of victimhood from an outside perspective.³⁰⁷

Further, by coming from a global setting and pointing to their adoption of human rights is not in line with a minimum core of human rights, it can appear as if we do not recognise the humanity in Kyrgyzstan as being different to the one in the Global North, we do not understand that freedom, choices and duties can appear different in different places.³⁰⁸ From the analysis, it seems that options appeared in their lives for many women, though the beginning was not a conceitful choice. It came from the freedom to behave differently and through their motherhood. This shows indication, that the human rights needs to be

²⁹⁹ Ibid.

³⁰⁰ Reeves, 2018, p.279.

³⁰¹ CEDAW, Concluding observations on the fifth periodic system of Kyrgyzstan <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N21/351/71/PDF/N2135171.pdf?OpenElement> (accessed 19 may 2022).

³⁰² Plummer, 2003, p.50-58.

³⁰³ Heller, 1985, p.3.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. p.3.

³⁰⁶ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.42

³⁰⁷ Fohring, 2018, p.154.

³⁰⁸ Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.111.

adapted into the local context of Kyrgyzstan and resonate with traditions, which might differ from the West, though still have a minimum core of equality and personal choice.³⁰⁹

When a practice like Ala Kachuu can be a favorable settlement, to escape something or to run towards something, it indicates that the core of the problem is not the practice itself, though it is also harmful. The problem is the surrounding powers and the society's judgment as to the external autonomy to decide what is proper and improper behaviour.³¹⁰ And a conflict between universalistic human rights and cultural relativism then surfaces.³¹¹ The matter of translating human rights into a local setting in Kyrgyzstan becomes rather tricky, not because of the practice of Ala Kachuu, but because of the sense of shame and *uiat* in the local setting.³¹² There is an ideology of social behaviour, which becomes stronger than universalistic human rights.³¹³

As shown throughout the analysis, implementing human rights in a local setting like Kyrgyzstan, with a strong tradition of shame, is difficult. Merry argued that human rights translate into practice through vernacularization.³¹⁴ In Kyrgyzstan, this occurs when human rights meet the notion of shame. The local ideology makes it difficult for human rights to be upheld at a minimum threshold.³¹⁵ This is not only the act of Ala Kachuu, but the experience of shame and the many ways shame is performed in the local society, which makes human rights challenging to respect, protect, and fulfill.³¹⁶

On one side, we have the local monitor mechanism as CEDAW and CAT, who continuously call Ala Kachuu a harmful practice. Opposite, we have the women's own narratives, and as shown in this thesis analysis, these narratives consists of many different emotions. Many of the women are part of setting the local standards of shame. They set standards for their own daughters, their *kellins*, and the women surrounding them. While most of the women experienced hardship around the time of their own Ala Kachuu, this experience of victimhood was not what they generally reflected upon later in life. Life

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Heller, 1985, p.7

³¹¹ P, Lewitt, S.E, Merry, 2016, p.4

³¹² Abu- Lughod, 2013, p.111.

³¹³ Heller, 1985, p.3.

³¹⁴ P, Lewitt, S.E, Merry, 2016, p.4

³¹⁵ Ibid.

³¹⁶ Beyer, 2016, p.140

continues, and they become part of society on new terms. According to Abu-Lughod, this does not in any way justify the act of something harmful, no matter what the outcome might be, but it makes it more difficult for outsiders from the West to understand the choices, the local women in Kyrgyzstan make.³¹⁷ The act of Ala Kachuu is not black and white for the locals as it also produces positive experiences for some. However, from an outside perspective, it seems problematic to choose such a way of life. Thus, an understanding of the local ideology of marriage is necessary.³¹⁸ Through marriage the women get to experience motherhood and some newfound freedom. The analysis shows, that if the women are raped on the wedding night, the destiny for those who decide to leave is awful. With that knowledge, marriage means not only freedom and motherhood but also protection from the public shaming that leaving would bring.³¹⁹ When we discuss how to uphold human rights in a global setting when Ala Kachuu happens, it becomes about the ideology of shame and marriage, in addition to everyday life in Kyrgyzstan. Therefore, it makes it difficult for human rights to be upheld.³²⁰ To enable local respect of human rights, we might need to address and change the traditions. Despite the good intentions of the concept of vernacularization of human rights being translated into local settings, this would deny the independence human rights should have globally and locally. However, if tradition through shame is detached from Kyrgyzstan, this might make it more difficult for other states to ratify the human rights monitor mechanism if this denies their culture through human rights. The question then remains whether the protection of the autonomy of the state or the individual person is valued highest.

To further research of focus, I find it unavoidable to examine the men who kidnap. If we need to understand this problem from a holistic viewpoint, it becomes evident to see their understanding of this issue. One way to adopt a more holistic view is by looking at Norway's approach to violence. Their focus is to understand violence as a social and health problem, and through this support, the person to not commit violence.³²¹ Råkill and his treatment focus on the shame, which is connected to committing violence; through

³¹⁷ Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 44

³¹⁸ P, Lewitt, S.E, Merry, 2016, p.4

³¹⁹ Beyer, 2016, p.140

³²⁰ P, Lewitt, S.E, Merry, 2016, p.4

³²¹ Lev uden vold conference, (online video) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NnWI6oSHKzk> (accessed 18 May 2022).

this, they see that the committer of violence is not immune to the impacts of violence and is affected by the harmful effects it causes. It is composed and not just an equality problem, a human rights problem, a democracy problem, or a societal problem, but it is a large extent, a public health problem.³²² Råkill points out not to undermine the violence, not trivialise it, not fragmenting it and not explanatory it away but to talk about violence respectfully and professionally. We need not hide it because it brings shame to those who cause violence.³²³

9.0 Conclusion

This thesis focused on how we can understand human rights adoption in a local setting. On one side, we have a monitoring mechanism like CEDAW and CAT, which declares the local practice of bridal kidnapping harmful and dangerous. On the other side, we have scholars, such as Abu-Lughod, who indicate that life is different everywhere, and choices and meanings are a response to that, and the global community needs to understand that. This research takes framework in understanding that nothing is simple, also not the questions related when international rights encounter local traditions. We must understand and respect personal choices everywhere, but we must also have an obligation to help those in need and those who wish for it.

We see how Ala Kachuu impacts the lives of the women, however, the shame from the society is what becomes the central issue and influences their decision making. The impacts from society have an enormous effect on their everyday life. Many of them cope with this victimisation, and through motherhood, they gain new agency and happiness in their lives. The situation of victimhood is not static throughout their life, though it is painful when it happens. Through motherhood, the women regain happiness and control over their own lives. Marriage also gives them options to behave differently in local settings. Those not married but divorced struggle against a system where their husbands'

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Ibid.

signature is still essential for their own, and their children's lives and some must live in silence. All the participants fluctuate in and out of victimhood status, where they are also, e.g., mothers and daughters. *Motherhood becomes everything.*

Life is different everywhere, even though it is also connected and only through respecting each other can we support women everywhere. We should never accept violence, no matter where it happens, but we need to see that the global north can learn from the global south and vice versa. There are many ways to live your life, but no matter where and how that life takes place, it should be a consensual life, where human rights are upheld, and everyone has the freedom to choose a different life without the consequence of shame. I believe Open Line outreach work for the young generation; talking about the rights is the beginning of changing the dynamic of shame.

For the Kyrgyz women, marriage influences their lives, whether they are married or not. Through the society, marriage becomes essential; it becomes who they are and how they can act accordingly. By changing the notion of shame, we can change the harmful and dangerous practice of Ala Kachuu. Still, changing the concepts of shame and *uiat* is the foundation of Kyrgyz culture, which needs to be advanced. The question then becomes whether outsiders from the global setting can determine that.

Marriage is not everything - but shame is everything. The external shame from society makes us behave and act in specific ways according to the norms set by that society. Without those norms from society, and without shame, we would be no one. To avoid shame, we act accordingly, and we might even find our dreams, hopes and wishes according to what is shameful. To go against those norms is that shame means nothing to us, and we let our internal autonomy decide. When we understand human rights on a global level, we need to understand other ideologies and their impacts on society. If we don't, human rights will never work.

To conclude this thesis, in short, the global society needs an understanding of local traditions and livelihood. This way, human rights have the best chance of existing. Simultaneously this thesis concludes that when human rights meet local ideologies, it is difficult to prioritise what is most significant.

Shame might even be more significant than human rights itself. It is, after all, the shame, the custom of Kyrgyzstan, which makes my friends serve the tea in a specific way and let me receive it in a respectful manner. Where should we let the tradition of shame start, and where should it end?

Epilog:

*“Because kidnapping I think it is poor mind of choice. Because if you're poor, so you can like decide, you can kidnap this lady and this she will be the wife. But this is not the solution. This is not a decision. It's not a good decision. Because you don't know the lady how she is, how she's thinking in what's her aims, goals, right? ”*From one of the interviews.

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Appendix 1: Dictionary

Aksakal: A male elderly of each village who can determine disputes in the village.

Kalym: The price the groom's family usually pay to the bride's family before the wedding can take place.

Kellin: Daughter-in-law

Salt: Custom and ways to behave in Kyrgyzstan – a way to act accordingly

Uait: Translates into shame-anxiety and works to keep the society acting according to *Salt*.

Appendix 2: Open Lines Folder

башташы. Айнура качабын деп орд
кет жасады. Чуркап бара жатканда,
артынан Камил келип, тутуп алды.
Аны тебип, бошойун деген Алина-
га "Сен эмне күчүң пайда болуп кал-
дыбы? Эмне мени тебип жатасың?",
- деп, жинденген Камил кызды дагы
зордуктады. Кыздын күчү калбай,
үнчүкпай калды.

Үйгө телефон чалып, Камил эмне
болуп жатканын билди. Көрсө, Ай-
нуранын ата-энеси милицияга ча-
кырышып, анын үйүндө күтүп жа-
тышыптыр. Анда Камил Айнураны
машинага олтургузуп, айылдагы
коңшунун үйүндөгү короого кир-
гизди. Ал жерде Камилдин жеңеси,
эжеси күтүп турушптур. Алар Ай-

нуранын туугандары кызды көрүп,
эч нерсени угушпай, Айнураны кай-
ра алып кетишет.

Үйдө жүргөн кызга кайра-кайра
эле телефон чалып, "Сен меники
болосуң баары бир", - деген кор-
кутуулардын айынан, кызды кор-
гоо максаты менен Айнуранын ата-
энеси милицияга арыз жазышат.

Үчүнү жолу Айнураны 30-сен-
тябрьда ала качышат. Бирок бул
жолку ала качуунун максаты нике
кыйууга аябай аз окшойт эле. Ант-
кени, кызды дааратканадан чыгып
жаткан мезгилде кармап, машина-
га олтургузуп кеткен Камилдин бир
гана максаты бар болчу - миция-

сүйөмүн, өзүмдүн эркем менен кел-
генмин, арызымды кайра аламын",
- деп айт дешет. Камилдин эжеси
ыйлап, Айнурадан суранат: "Айла-
найын бирөөнүн өмүрүн кыйбачы,
арызды алчы", - дейт. Биринчи күнү
"эч качан арызды албаймын" деп
ойлогон Айнура, күч-ал кетип, айла
жок айтайын деп турганда бөлмөгө
оперативдүү топ кирип, кызды кут-
карат.

Ошентип, бул иш азыр сотто ка-
ралып жаткан учуру. Айнура болсо
көптөгөн физикалык, моралдык зом-
булукту башынан өткөрүп, "Айкын
багыт" Коомдук фонду жана "Сезим"
Кризистик борборунун салымы ме-



АЯЛДАН ДА МАЛ КЫМБАТТЫ?

Мал уурдоодо жазанын чеги -
үй-мүлкүн алып коюу менен **11**
жылга чейинки мөөнөткө
эркиндигинен ажыратылып
жазаланат. (Кылмыш-жаза
кодекси, 165-берене)

Кыз уурдоодо - эсептик көрсөткүчтүн
жүз өлчөмүнүн эки жүз өлчөмүнө чейин
айып салынат же **3 жылга чейинки**
мөөнөткө эркиндигин чектөө
жазылат.