The Transformation of Central Asia

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2. Women, Marriage, and the Nation-State

THE RISE OF NONCONSENSUAL BRIDE KIDNAPPING IN POST-SOVIET KAZAKHSTAN

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One night during the spring of 1994 while I was living with a rural Kazakh family, a loud knocking at the door woke me from a deep sleep. Everybody in the house got up to greet our close neighbors, Gulnara and Zharkyn, and we all drank tea as they recounted their disturbing news.[1] Their eighteen-year-old daughter Aiman was missing and they suspected that she had been kidnapped by an admiring suitor! Her parents didn't know what to do, but they wanted to ask us if we knew anything about her whereabouts, and they mentioned that they might need to borrow the family car. A few hours later, the kidnapping was confirmed when members of the groom's family arrived to apologize for the kidnapping. Aiman's parents arranged for several relatives, including another daughter, to return with the groom's relatives in order to check on Aiman's condition.

The next day, upon their return, they described Aiman's version of the events. On the evening of the kidnapping, she was home with her younger siblings doing household chores, while her parents were attending a

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1. Pseudonyms are used throughout this paper to protect the identity of those who participated in this study.

dinner party. While she was outside washing clothes, four young men entered her family's fenced compound. They grabbed her, forcibly placed her inside a waiting car, and drove a few kilometers to a nearby village. Once she was in the car, she recognized one of the men from school. Having realized that she was being kidnapped, Aiman assumed that this was the man who wanted to marry her. Only when the car arrived at its final destination did she find out that instead she had been kidnapped by a virtual stranger! Apparently, her new husband Serzhan had fallen in love with her at first sight after seeing her at the local bazaar. They had never so much as exchanged a few words. Through friends, he learned enough about her to know that he wanted to marry her. He also found out where she lived. Not knowing the young man, she was not excited about the prospect of being married to him. She was also disappointed to find out that he was almost ten years older than she was and his family was not very prosperous. Nevertheless, she did not want to deal with the shame of being a "girl who returned home" so she reluctantly decided to accept her fate.[2] Although they were extremely upset, her parents agreed that this was the right decision.

In the months and years that followed, I heard many more accounts of bride kidnapping. And, in the fall of 2000, I conducted extensive interviews on this topic. I found that Aiman's kidnapping is an extreme but not an isolated case. Although most brides are kidnapped by men they know and many are kidnapped with their full consent, there are other women such as Aiman who are kidnapped by strangers without their consent. Cases like these appear to be increasing, first in the late Soviet period and now in the post-Soviet period. Despite the illegal nature of these kidnappings, few women return home and even fewer take the case to court.

After seventy years of Soviet rule, the practice of bride kidnapping, let alone the existence of nonconsensual bride kidnapping, provides a fascinating case study for examining state-society relations in Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan. From its inception, the Soviet state tried to transform the patriarchal nature of Central Asian society. In addition to providing women with new opportunities for education and employment, the state attempted to reduce gender inequality by banning a number of marriage

2. I use the term "girl" to refer to an unmarried woman. This is consistent with Kazakh language usage, which distinguishes "girls" (*qyz*) from "women" (*aiyel*) through the act of marriage and consequently sex. The term "girl" is synonymous with "virgin," and the term "woman" is synonymous with "wife." Contemporary American English, in contrast, distinguishes "girls" from "women" based on their age, though the distinction is often ambiguous. When it comes to men, the term "young man" is less problematic as a translation for the Kazakh term *zhigit,* and thus it is used consistently in this paper.

practices that limited a woman's freedom of choice, including child betrothals, arranged marriages, and kidnap marriages. Despite these policies, bride kidnapping did not disappear. In the Soviet context, especially in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, the practice of bride kidnapping was transformed in a way that reflected women's new position in society. By the 1970s, the practice of bride kidnapping had clearly been transformed into a practice of consensual elopement, disguised as abduction. In the post-Soviet context, the practice of bride kidnapping is being transformed yet again in a way that reflects the withdrawal of the state from gender-sensitive social issues.

Women, Marriage, and the State in Central Asia

Historical and Ethnographic Accounts of Marriage in Pre-Soviet Central Asia

Although the historical and ethnographic record is incomplete and biased by ethnocentric source material and Soviet interpretations, these accounts of pre-Soviet Central Asian society offer a glimpse into pre-Soviet social life. According to all available sources (Akiner 1997; Argynbaev 1978, 1996; Bacon 1966; Massell 1974; Michaels 1998; Taizhanov 1996), unmarried Central Asian girls did not have much say about their life or their marriage. The Kazakh proverb, "A girl's path is narrow," aptly expresses the social constraints on a Kazakh girl's life. Most girls' marriages were arranged by parents and relatives, especially the father, when the girl was still very young. The girl did not have any choice in the matter, and she rarely saw the groom before her wedding night. Once married, the girl left her natal family to live with the groom's family. Arranged marriages always involved transfers of bridewealth (*qalyn-mal*) and dowry (though Soviet sources placed more emphasis on bridewealth as an indication that women were viewed as commodities). Because of the difficulty of acquiring bridewealth and the practice of polygyny, the groom was often older than the bride.

Although the practice of bride kidnapping has received much less attention in the literature, there is sufficient evidence that bride kidnapping did exist in the pre-Soviet period.[3] Levshin (1832, 337), a Russian ethnogra-

3. Anthropologists also provide evidence that the practice of bride kidnapping has been found in other societies. In the nineteenth century, the evolutionary anthropologist John McLennan's (1865) treatise on the origins of marriage included a detailed survey of bride kidnapping. After McLennan, Firth (1936) and Levi-Strauss (1949) made cursory reference to bride kidnapping in their respective studies of Tikopia and comparative kinship. Then, the topic largely disappeared from the anthropological record until 1974, when a special

pher, describes the ritual enactment of bride abduction among some Kazakh clans in the eighteenth century. American historian Virginia Martin (2001) refers to a court case in the 1870s in which a father was seeking restitution from a man who abducted his daughter after he refused to allow them to marry.[4] Taizhanov (1995), a Kazakh ethnographer, mentions that bride kidnapping would occur when the girl's father requested a higher bridewealth (*qalyn-mal*) than the groom could afford or the bride's father violated the original conditions of matchmaking. In a more serious offense, the girl might be betrothed to one young man yet be stolen by another young man who was in love with her. This second type of case could lead to a battle between tribes or negotiation in the court of traditional judges (*bilar*). Karmysheva (1967), a Soviet Kazakh ethnographer, argues that the practice allowed pre-Soviet tribes to show their power vis-à-vis other tribes and allowed young men to display their boldness. She also refers to a case in which a young girl was kidnapped by a man after the death of her older sister, his betrothed bride. Argynbaev (1996), another Soviet Kazakh ethnographer, mentions that bride kidnapping also occurred in cases where the bride's father did not like either the groom or his family.[5] Elizabeth Bacon (1966, 40), an American ethnographer, mentions that Kazakh men preferred young brides in part because it "precluded the possibility of her elopement with a man of her own choice." Finally, Gregory Massell (1974, 114), referring to the works of early Soviet ethnographers Nukhrat and Brullova-Shashkol'skaia, indicates that genuine bride theft, as well as symbolic bride theft, also existed among

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volume of *Anthropological Quarterly* was devoted to bride kidnapping with case studies from Turkey (Bates 1974; Kudat 1974), India (Brukman 1974), Bosnia (Lockwood 1974), Mexico (Stross 1974), and East Africa (Conant 1974). In an introductory piece that examines bride kidnapping across cultures, Barbara Ayres (1974) distinguishes a number of different marriage practices: "genuine bride theft" (which does not involve knowledge or consent of bride); "mock bride theft" (which allows the girl to defy her parents' wishes while giving the appearance of obedience); "ceremonial capture" (which involves a pretended struggle between members of both families); "elopement" (which involves neither genuine nor pretended use of force or resistance); and "raiding" (which involves the abduction of an unknown and unspecified woman). Often, more than one of these practices can be found in a society at any given time.

4. I would like to thank Virginia Martin for pointing out this reference to me. In a personal communication, she also noted the importance of not generalizing marriage practices across all three hordes of Kazakhs.

5. It is interesting to note that Argynbaev does not describe bride kidnapping in a Soviet-era article (1978) on pre-Soviet marriage rites, yet does mention it in a post-Soviet book (1996, 137–38).

the Turkmen in pre-Soviet periods. Their accounts of this practice emphasize the use of force and rape. Taken together, these sources suggest that bride kidnapping in the pre-Soviet period was just as complex, varied, and misunderstood as bride kidnapping in the present.

Women, Marriage, and the Soviet State

Women's lives and marriage practices changed during Soviet rule. All modern states set controls on marriage by establishing minimum ages for marriage, banning certain forms of marriage, and establishing official procedures for marriage and divorce. In democratic states, regulations on marriage might be contentious but they tend to reflect the consensus of the voting populace. In contrast, in Central Asia, the early Soviet state introduced radical social policies based on Marxist ideology. Regarding women as the "surrogate proletariat" in need of emancipation, the Bolshevik leaders tried to widen the path of Kazakh girls by passing laws that outlawed patriarchal marriage practices (Massell 1974). In the early 1920s, the state passed laws that banned various "crimes of custom," including the payment of bridewealth, polygamy, child betrothals, forced marriage, and levirate. The state also established sixteen as the minimum age of marriage; the minimum age was later increased to eighteen. The Soviet state also pushed for gender equality in other spheres, including education and employment.

There is no consensus among scholars regarding the extent to which Soviet policies improved the lives of Central Asian women. On the one hand, Soviet scholars have pointed to the many achievements of Soviet rule in health care, education, and employment opportunities. Such studies also point out how Soviet policies have changed family relations and marriage practices in ways that benefited women. For example, the Kazakh ethnographer Karmysheva (1967) presents a rosy picture of family relations and marriage practices in a Kazakh village in Taldyqurgan Oblast. According to her account, the village women are free to marry men whom they choose, and their families no longer receive bridewealth from the groom's family. Moreover, women are treated fairly by their husbands and mothers-in-law. In reference to bride kidnapping, Karmysheva explains that the former practice of bride kidnapping is only imitated in the ethnographic present (the 1960s). Girls are only abducted with their full consent. According to Karmysheva, the "initiative and invention of youth" serves to simplify the complex and burdensome wedding customs, without detracting from the significance of the celebration.

Western sources tend to be more critical of the Soviet success story. In contrast to some Soviet scholars who portray radical change, some

scholars argue that Soviet policies did very little to change the status or lives of Central Asian women. Martha Olcott (1991) and Sergei Poliakov (1992), for example, paint a grim picture of women's lives in Soviet Central Asia. According to Olcott (1991, 235), "A woman's place is generally still predetermined at birth." Both Olcott (1991) and Poliakov (1992), one of Olcott's primary sources, go on to explain the life cycle of Central Asian women. Before marriage, young girls are expected to help with household chores as their families want to get some benefit from them before they leave home. Central Asian women, especially in rural regions, are usually married by the age of sixteen. Most marriages are arranged by parents, and the payment of bridewealth is still observed. Once married, women are emotionally and sometimes physically abused by their husbands and mothers-in-law. In addition, they are expected to have large numbers of children. Women who can't bear children may be beaten, divorced, or subjected to a polygynous marriage. Because of poor hospital conditions, rates for infant mortality and maternal deaths are relatively high. Women may work, but women from traditional families are restricted from taking certain jobs, and most women do not control their earnings. Women who are unhappy with their situation often commit suicide, sometimes through a dramatic self-immolation. This depiction of women's misery might apply to women in some parts of Central Asia, but it does not provide a balanced assessment for understanding the lives of the women I encountered in southern Kazakhstan, a region known for being more traditional. A more balanced assessment would consider the love and nurturance provided by natal families, the extent to which women do control their earnings, the fact that many husbands and mothers-in-law treat their wives and daughters-in-law with respect, and the fact that children (including girls) are not viewed as a burden.

Other scholars acknowledge the ambitious nature of Soviet objectives yet point to the numerous discrepancies between Soviet policy and actual practice. Bacon (1966, 139–40), for example, points out several instances where the local population understood yet chose to circumvent Soviet laws that challenged customary marriage practices. For example, men continued to marry multiple women, but they only registered one as their official wife. Families managed to avoid the law requiring a minimum age for marriage by registering a marriage at a later date. And bridewealth payments were made in cash more often than in livestock in order to conceal the transfer. Massell (1974, 338) similarly describes how the ban on bride kidnapping was ignored in the early Soviet period under the following circumstances: "(a) if the abductor proved his honorable intentions by actually marrying the girl; (b) if the abducted and violated girl refused,

out of shame or lack of viable marital alternatives, to lodge a complaint in court; and (c) if the girl forced into marriage by her parents and kinsmen refused, out of loyalty to kinfolk and custom, to testify against them."

Finally, some scholars are critical of the Soviet state's ability to solve women's problems. In studies of Soviet women, Buckley (1989) and Lapidus (1978) argue that the state successfully increased women's participation in the workforce but did little to change gender relations at home. Thus, they argue that Soviet women were stuck with the "double burden" of doing all the housework and working long hours outside of the home. Similarly, Michaels (1998) points out that Kazakh women who "freed" themselves from unhappy marriages faced new economic burdens and unequal wage structures. Despite these critiques, most scholars do acknowledge that the Soviet state was responsible for making significant changes in women's lives. And, as Elizabeth Constantine (2001) and Marianne Kamp (chap. 1) point out, Soviet policies were quite effective in changing women's expectations of the state and expectations for a certain quality of life.

Women, Marriage, and the Post-Soviet State

Although the Soviet state was unable to eliminate gender inequality, Soviet women experienced a state that provided a number of economic and social benefits for women: free education, guaranteed employment, a generous maternity leave, free day care, and monthly supplements for women with children. In the post-Soviet period, women in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe are coping with the realities of a post-socialist economy in which the state has terminated its social contract with women and transferred many of the costs of social reproduction to the household level (Zhurzhenko 2001). Many Central Asian families cannot afford the new costs of higher education, and some cannot even afford the costs of clothing and school supplies (Bauer, Green, and Kuehnast 1997). Employment is no longer guaranteed by the state, and many girls and women have turned to small-scale trade to ensure household income (Bauer, Green, and Kuehnast 1997, 67–69; Bauer, Boschmann, and Green 1997, 35–41; Werner 2001). In addition to putting economic strains on households, unemployment has brought a sense of helplessness to Central Asian women and men who were raised with Soviet attitudes toward work (Bauer, Green, and Kuehnast 1997, 25–27, 55). Cutbacks in the socialist system of subsidized day care have made it more difficult for women to gain employment outside the home in either the formal or informal economy (Klugman, Marnie, Micklewright, and O'Keefe 1997). Finally, the value of monthly supplements for children has decreased because of

inflation, and extended maternity leave is sometimes forced upon women by employers with limited budgets (Bauer, Boschmann, and Green 1997, 28). As Kamp points out (chap. 1), post-Soviet Uzbekistan has maintained and expanded welfare programs (such as supplements) that protect motherhood per se while cutting back on subsidies (such as day care) that support working women. Taken together, the postsocialist transition has brought new hardships to many Central Asian women. However, some enterprising women, especially younger women with foreign language skills, have managed to benefit from the transition to capitalism by working for foreign companies and international NGOs (Berg 2001; Ishkanian 2001; Michaels 1998).

The impact of the post-Soviet transition on women goes beyond these new economic hardships and opportunities. A number of studies indicate that postsocialist states in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are promoting nationalist agendas that involve the "re-traditionalization" of society (Gal and Kligman 2000; Graney 2001; Marsh 1998; Tohidi 1998; Verdery 1996). Among other things, this process is characterized by antiabortion policies (in Eastern Europe) and pronatalism, the decline of women's political power, and political discourse stressing the need to return to "traditional" gender roles. In post-Soviet Azerbaijan, for example, two contrasting images of women can be found — one emphasizing "physical beauty, Western fashion, consumerism, and Turkish identity" and one displaying "modesty, morality, Islamic values and Muslim identity" (Tohidi 1998, 137). According to Tohidi, Azeri women are increasingly opting for the second image, as their morality has become a sign that they are loyal to their ethnicity. In particular, "authentic" Azeri women do not appear in public without a male or an elder female chaperone, do not wear pants, do not drive cars, and do not smoke or drink in public (Tohidi 1998, 152).

Although the Central Asian states remain secular and wary of Islamic fundamentalism, there has been more acceptance of Islam and Islam's place in national identity formation (Abramson 2001; Michaels 1998). Throughout Central Asia, gender relations are being redefined as Islamic values are reinstated as the "guiding ethic for society," national histories and national traditions are rewritten and revived, and patriarchal authority (symbolized by the male head of state) is reasserted (Akiner 1997, 284). In particular, Akiner points to the growing number of mosques and madrasas in Central Asia and the greater acceptance of polygamy and bridewealth in public discourse. Marianne Kamp (chap. 1) explains that the shift from Soviet to Islamic ideology toward women started as early as the 1980s in Uzbekistan and continued in the 1990s. Discussions of

these issues in popular magazines and newspapers encourage women to leave the workplace and resume their proper role as mother and wife. On a related point, Roy (2000, 183) mentions how Islam Karimov, the president of Uzbekistan, has "established a presidential contest for the best daughter-in-law, whose most valued quality is of course to obey her mother-in-law." And, in her study of Uzbek dancers, Doi (2001) notes that Uzbek women in post-Soviet Uzbekistan are increasingly turning to the traditional role of getting married and having children.

Gender identities in post-Soviet Central Asia, however, are shaped by the introduction of Western fashions and lifestyles as well as by the revival of traditional culture and Islam (Akiner 1997; Kuehnast 1998; Michaels 1998; Tadjbaksh 1998). Tadjbaksh (1998) similarly argues that many post-Soviet Tajik women have welcomed the return of traditional culture, including the expectation that women will stay home with the children and the possibility of legalized polygyny, and view the acceptance of Western values as a rejection of their national culture. Different attitudes toward Western culture can be found in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, where the titular groups are known for being less influenced by Islam and more influenced by Russian colonial rule. Kuehnast (1998) and Michaels (1998) both suggest that young women in Bishkek and Almaty, respectively, are more influenced by Western capitalism and consumerism than by the revival of Islamic ideals of modesty.

Though there is a similar pull toward the West in Southern-Kazakhstan Oblast, this chapter on bride kidnapping indicates that the revival of traditional culture is playing a fairly strong role in shaping post-Soviet gender identities in that region of Kazakhstan. Although there have been many studies of gender identity and women's poverty, little attention has been devoted to the study of marriage practices in the post-Soviet context. A few studies have made cursory reference to bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Azerbaijan (Bauer, Green and Kuehnast 1997, 24; Tohidi 2001; Weatherford 2000, 268; Werner 1997, 6–7). In a previous publication (Werner 1997), I indicated that some brides conspire in their own kidnapping while others are kidnapped without their consent. And, similar to Kyrgyzstan (Bauer, Green, and Kuehnast 1997), I mentioned that bride kidnapping provides a less expensive option because a lower bridewealth is expected. Amsler and Kleinbach (1999) provide the only detailed study of bride kidnapping in the post-Soviet context. Their study of Kyrgyzstan focuses on the issue of consent. They conclude that approximately one-fourth of the women consent to the kidnappings while three-fourths are taken by deception or force, and they argue that nonconsensual kidnappings represent a violation of basic human rights. Here, I build on

their research by providing data on the frequency of bride kidnapping in general and nonconsensual bride kidnapping in particular in Kazakhstan and by placing the practice of kidnapping within a historical and political context. I have found that there has been a rise in nonconsensual bride kidnappings in the 1980s and 1990s, and this rise can be linked to economic and political change in Kazakhstan.

Research Methods

This chapter is based on ethnographic fieldwork in the Southern-Kazakhstan Oblast of Kazakhstan (in 1994, 1995, 1998, and 2000). During the fall of 2000, I collected data on bride kidnapping through the use of structured surveys and informal interviews. Because of the lack of previous research on this subject, I chose to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. While the qualitative data is critical for exploring local understandings of this practice, the quantitative data is useful for determining the prevalence of bride kidnapping, in general, and the prevalence of nonconsensual bride kidnapping, in particular, over time.

During the course of my research, I collected interview and/or survey data from 187 informants. I used a nested sample. From the total sample of 187 informants, 177 answered survey questions about how they met and married their spouse.[6] Fifty-four of the survey respondents were selected for additional open-ended interview questions about the practice of bride kidnapping. These qualitative interview questions were continuously updated in the field as I became more familiar with the kidnapping practices. Ten additional informants, mostly unmarried individuals, answered interview questions only.

All of the interviews and surveys were conducted in Southern-Kazakhstan Oblast, a region known for being more patriarchal and traditional than the rest of Kazakhstan. Although bride kidnapping occurs in other regions, it is considered to be more widespread in the southern oblasts of Kazakhstan. The survey sample was not specifically stratified along socioeconomic lines because this is difficult to measure. However, I attempted to get a broad spectrum of society by interviewing in both urban and rural areas. I collected data from one small city (Turkestan, with approximately one hundred thousand residents), one large village

6. Before starting the research for this project, I contacted Russell Kleinbach, who had previously conducted research on bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan with Sarah Amsler. Kleinbach generously provided me with a copy of his survey questions. Although I modified some questions and added others, and I used a different interview format, their survey was very helpful for my project.

TABLE 2.1. *Survey Sample by Location and Sex*

Location	Female	Male
Turkestan city	36	19
Shauildir village	39	37
Talapty village	23	17
Otyrar village	5	1
Total (177)	103	74

TABLE 2.2. *Survey Sample by Age and Sex*

Age	Female	Male
18–27	31	28
28–37	20	17
38–47	26	21
48–57	12	5
58–67	12	1
67 and older	2	2
Total (177)	103	74

(Shauildir, with approximately eight thousand residents), and two smaller villages (Talapty and Otyrar, with approximately fifteen hundred residents each) (see table 2.1).[7] Of the 177 survey respondents, 103 were women and 74 were men. The sample was also stratified by age (see table 2.2). Younger generations were intentionally oversampled because I was primarily interested in more recent trends. All of the survey informants had been married, but several were either divorced or widowed at the time of the interview.

Methodological issues arise in any ethnographic study. For example, informants may not be able to remember certain events in detail. Or, they may have some conscious reason to present a story from a certain angle. Both of these issues are relevant to this study of bride kidnapping. When it comes to the issue of memory, there is no guarantee that the men and women who were married twenty or thirty years ago remember the details

7. The population of Shauildir is about 96 percent Kazakh; the populations of Otyrar and Talapty are 100 percent Kazakh. In contrast, the population of Turkestan is ethnically diverse with a large Uzbek population. Bride kidnapping is limited to the Kazakh population in Turkestan. Though it is not unheard of for a Kazakh young man to kidnap an Uzbek girl, it is very rare for an Uzbek man to kidnap a bride. One informant mentioned an unusual case where an Uzbek young man had recently kidnapped an Uzbek girl.

as well as the men and women who were married more recently. And, when it comes to bias, there may be a number of reasons why people choose to exaggerate certain elements of a story or exclude other elements. In other words, my informants might have had certain agendas as they explained their version of how they got married and how they view nonconsensual bride kidnappings. In some interviews, several informants seemed eager to entertain me as they shared stories of nonconsensual kidnapping cases that they knew about. Other informants seemed just as determined to conceal the existence of nonconsensual kidnappings, possibly out of a concern that this would embarrass their nation. There might also be significant gender biases in the interpretation of a kidnapping case, as indicated by Amsler and Kleinbach's study (1999) of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. Although these methodological issues could be viewed as a weakness, they were often used as a vehicle for gathering more information. In other words, the particular difficulties that arose in the course of the survey revealed a number of interesting things about how people categorize the different paths to marriage and why it is not so easy to define "consent." Acknowledging the inherent biases in ethnographic and survey research, I do not set out to tell the "truth" per se. Rather, I set out to explore how different people describe their own experiences with bride kidnapping and other forms of marriage.

The Practice of Bride Kidnapping in Southern Kazakhstan

A General Overview of Bride Kidnapping

Bride kidnapping in its various forms is just one of several paths to marriage in southern Kazakhstan. The Kazakh word for bride kidnapping, *alyp qashu* (literally "to take and run"), is a general term used to refer to both consensual and nonconsensual bride kidnappings. Depending on the linguistic context, Kazakhs may choose to distinguish further the form of kidnap marriage: (1) *kelisimsiz alyp qashu* ("to take and run without agreement"), and (2) *kelisimmen alyp qashu* ("to take and run with agreement"). To emphasize the girl's consent, they might even state that the "girl ran away" (*qyz qashyp ketti*). Other paths to marriage include a modern variation of the arranged marriage and a marriage based on mutual consent and a civil ceremony. The modern variation of the arranged marriage (*quda tusu*) hardly resembles arranged marriages of the past. Young couples describe arranged marriages in which they have as much, or more, input in the marriage decision as their parents, who are mostly expected to deal with the formalities of "arranging" the marriage, which involves a series of exchanges between the new in-laws. In contrast, elderly women

describe arranged marriages in which they had little if no input in a marriage to a complete stranger. Besides arranged marriages, another alternative is for a couple to get married in a more simple fashion with an official yet simple ceremony at the civil registry (*ZAGS*) and perhaps a small celebration at home. This type of marriage is sometimes referred to as a Komsomol marriage.

Bride kidnapping varies from case to case in terms of the level of consent and the primary motive for kidnapping, yet there is a normative pattern of events at a general level. Each event represents a further step toward the completion of the marriage. Once all the events have taken place, the marriage is considered to be finalized.

The first event is the abduction. Traditionally, this was done on horseback. The potential suitor would sneak into the girl's encampment (*aul*), grab the girl and put her on a horse, and then ride off to his home. In contemporary times, it is more common for the abduction to be carried out with a car, and the groom is usually accompanied by a few male friends or relatives. In a few cases, the bride was kidnapped by tractor or train. The girl may be abducted from home or she may be kidnapped from another location, such as a workplace, a café, or a party.

Young men cite different and multiple reasons for kidnapping their wives. When asked to describe the possible origins of bride kidnapping, many Kazakhs suggested that the practice developed as an option for a besotted young man when the parents of a desired girl objected to a marriage. This motive is depicted by the Kazakh proverb: "If they give, take from the hand; if they don't give, take from the road" (*Berse qolynan, bermese zholynan*). Surprisingly, very few informants claim that this motive was relevant in their own kidnapping. Instead, one of the most commonly cited explanations is that the costs of an arranged marriage are much higher than the cost of a kidnap marriage. In particular, the bridewealth and dowry are expected to be more expensive and more elaborate in an arranged marriage, and there is the additional expense of a "girl leaving home" feast (*qyz uzatu toi*).[8] In addition to saving money,

8. The young men are not necessarily "marrying up," as they might have done in the past; rather, they are simply avoiding these extra expenses. In the 1990s, it is true that arranged marriages are more expensive than kidnap marriages, as the revival of the arranged marriage is clearly limited to those who can afford it. But, it is difficult to say whether this explanation can be projected back in time, when the expectations for feasts may have been different. Previous research on feasting (Werner 2000a) indicates that the costs associated with feasting increased in the 1970s when wedding feasts were transformed from intimate family affairs inside the home to large parties in a family courtyard. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that this is the time when kidnap marriages started to become even more popular.

many men cite the need to save time. With an arranged marriage, not only do the in-laws have to meet and agree to the marriage but both sides are also required to host an in-law feast (*qudalyq*) before the large wedding feast (*uilenu toi*). Because of these costs, the wedding (and thus consummation of the marriage) may be delayed for a long time. There are a number of reasons that the groom or his family does not want to wait a long time to complete a marriage. One reason is that another young man may kidnap the girl, especially if she is attractive and desirable. In other situations, the young man's parents might need a daughter-in-law to help with housework. It is also likely that some of the young men kidnap a girl simply because they don't want to wait several months to have sex with her. On a related point, there are cases in which the boy kidnaps a girl because he has already had sex with the girl and she is now pregnant. Virginity is expected before marriage, but unwed pregnancies are not considered to be too scandalous as long as the girl is quickly married to the father of the child.

When it comes to kidnap marriages that involve minimal or implicit consent, the motive for kidnapping is often based on a belief that the girl might otherwise refuse a marriage. When this is the primary motive, the young man is taking advantage of the fact that a girl, once kidnapped, will probably stay. In some cases, the boy is simply afraid to ask the girl if she is interested or he perceives that the girl is not interested in him. In other cases, the subject has come up and the girl has specifically told the boy that she does not want to marry him. Although this motive most often applies to nonconsensual kidnappings, it can also apply to situations in which the girl has told the boy that she is "not ready" to marry him.

Although some girls know the full plan ahead of time, deception is a recurring theme. Even in cases in which the girl is kidnapped with her consent, it is not uncommon for the young man to deceive her into being kidnapped. Forty-one of the 106 abduction stories I collected involved some form of deception. Typically, an acquaintance or boyfriend offers the girl a ride home (possibly from work or from a feast) and then proceeds to drive her to his own house. The young men I interviewed explained that it is more fun this way. One informant added, "If asked, the girls will always say 'I'm not ready yet,' so it's just better this way." Though Kazakh girls generally look forward to getting married, young girls are also apprehensive about the idea of leaving their familiar home and adapting to a new person and his family. Moreover, one of the conflicting messages they hear while growing up is that leaving their home to become a bride is a traumatic event. They are expected to be reluctant beforehand, and they

are expected to cry during their departure. So, even girls who are eager to marry a certain boy may hesitate to marry him immediately. I interviewed several girls who said that they were eager to marry their husband after they finished the university, but their husband was unwilling to wait and thus kidnapped her with the use of deception before she completed her studies. In cases like this, it is important to distinguish deceit from consent. From a Kazakh perspective, a kidnapping may involve deceit yet still be viewed as consensual. The young man, for example, may receive the girl's explicit consent by asking her if she is interested in marrying him or receive her implicit consent by noting her interest in him. Despite this consent, the kidnapping itself is a surprise because the girl does not know ahead of time when and how she is going to be kidnapped.

Only 9 percent of the kidnapping stories in my survey involved the use of physical force.[9] For example, I heard stories where the young men would physically grab the girl, force her into the car, and then restrain her while driving to his house. In one case, the young men put a sack over the girl's head before putting her into the car. When the girl is a willing participant, such physical force is obviously not necessary. When the girl is deceived into being kidnapped, physical force is less likely to occur, at least until the moment she discovers that she has been deceived.[10]

After the abduction, the boy takes the girl to his home. The boy's parents are almost always informed ahead of time, and thus they know to expect the girl. The second element of a kidnapping occurs when a female member of the groom's household presents the girl with a kerchief (*oramal*). This is the first opportunity for the girl to acknowledge publicly her willingness to marry the groom. The kerchief, which covers the hair

9. Although I did ask about the "use of physical force," I chose not to include a survey question about rape during kidnappings. I knew that understandings of what constitutes rape vary cross-culturally. I also knew that it would be even more difficult to get an honest answer to this question, and I did not want to offend or embarrass my informants. During the interviews, however, the issue of rape did come up a few times. Those who discussed rape indicated that it occurs very rarely with the kidnappings, despite the fact that the purity and virginity of a "girl who returns home" is put into question. I was told of two different cases of girls who were threatened with rape on the way to the groom's house as a way to force them to calm down and consent to the marriage. I also interviewed some impudent young men who boasted about how they would probably rape a girl they had kidnapped if she were to testify in court that the kidnapping was nonconsensual.

10. When it comes to questions like this, it is important to emphasize that the percentage refers to the reported number of instances, not the actual number. The "use of physical force" involves some ambiguity and it is likely that some of the survey informants did not answer this question honestly. Not surprisingly, women were more likely than men to report the use of physical force when asked to describe how they entered marriage.

but not the face, is a symbol of a married woman.[11] Even if the girl wants to marry the boy, she is expected to feign some reluctance and resistance to the marriage, and thus most girls do not want to appear too eager to put on the marriage scarf. Though there are no serious repercussions, older women do gossip about young brides who are "laughing and smiling" on the day they are kidnapped. To express her genuine or feigned resistance, the girl may refuse to take the kerchief or may simply refuse to wear it. Meanwhile, the groom's female relatives keep insisting over and over again that she put it on. If the girl is truly resisting the marriage, she might not put the scarf on for hours or even days. But, if the girl is excited about the marriage, she will probably put the scarf on within the first hour or two.

In the third element of a kidnapping, the girl is asked to write a letter to her family stating that she came of her own free will. By this time, she is sitting in a back room behind the white curtain that is used to decorate a new couple's bedroom. The letter is taken to her parents as evidence that the girl has not been harmed and that she has already agreed to stay. Although nobody could remember exactly when this tradition started, it certainly developed after literacy was achieved in the Soviet period as a way to avoid arrest for the crime of nonconsensual kidnapping. Similar to the kerchief, the writing of the letter theoretically provides the girl with another opportunity to decline the marriage. However, the girl's freedom to choose her own future at this point should not be emphasized. There is extreme social pressure "to stay" and most girls make this "choice" even if it goes against their true wishes. The groom's relatives often try to reassure forlorn brides that he loves her and that she will be able to adapt to this new life and new family. The girl also realizes that she and her family will be the subject of malicious gossip if she returns home. It is almost impossible to keep a kidnapping a secret and a "girl who returns" is labeled as such and thus becomes a less desirable marriage partner. Finally, in some kidnapping situations, the girl's family has some kind of tie to the groom's family that makes it difficult for her to renounce and disgrace his family.

11. In more traditional households, the daughter-in-law (*kelin*) is expected to wear the kerchief in front of her husband's parents and other older relatives. Actual practice and preference varies from one family to the next. In some families, not wearing the kerchief is considered to be a grave sign of disrespect. Some young women are uncomfortable wearing the kerchief, and others resent it as a symbol of their subservient status in the household. Acknowledging these issues, I met several families where the groom's parents have granted permission to their young daughter-in-law to make her own decision about when and where to wear the kerchief.

The amount of time that transpires before the girl writes the letter, rather than the fact that she does write the letter, indicates the extent to which she consents to the marriage. I listened to several stories of girls who were completely distraught for hours, screaming at anybody who approached them, throwing things around the room, and even breaking windows. One young woman described how she repeatedly wrote: "I don't want to stay here! I did not agree to this!" The groom's relatives kept telling her that they could not take this note to her parents. They kept bringing her a fresh piece of paper and dictated the words that they wanted her to write. Eventually, like the others, her will was broken and she wrote the letter.

The letter is usually a crucial precursor for the next event, when the groom's relatives send an official apology (*keshirim*) to the bride's house. By the time the apology arrives, the bride's parents may have already heard what happened to their daughter or they may at least have their suspicions. However, it is not until the informal apology delegation arrives that they know for sure. This event is usually postponed until the girl has prepared the letter. The delegation usually consists of two or three respected males from the groom's side. If the kidnapping is nonconsensual and the girl is stalling, her family has to wait longer before they find out what has happened to her. If the groom's family is concerned that the bride's family might contest the marriage, they will be very determined to send persuasive and powerful relatives (or close family friends).

The purpose of the apology visit is to explain what happened to the girl and to present an amount of money in lieu of the bridewealth. (When talking about this money, informants use the terms *keshirim* and *qalyn-mal* interchangeably.)[12] Families who kidnap a bride are not exempt from paying money to the bride's family. However, the standard amount for a kidnapped bride is less than the standard amount for an arranged marriage bride. The exact amounts vary according to the family's wealth, but in the late 1990s, less than the equivalent of two hundred dollars is generally considered to be low for a kidnap marriage, and less than five hundred dollars is considered to be low for an arranged marriage. The difference in part reflects the fact that arranged marriages are more common among the elite, who have more money to give in the first place. In addition to presenting the apology fee, the apology delegation tries to console the parents who might be upset that their daughter has been kidnapped.

12. Aware of Soviet bias against bridewealth, many Kazakh informants argue that the Kazakhs do not "sell" their daughters. They insist that this money is used to purchase dowry items, the total cost of which almost always exceeds the amount given for the bridewealth.

Some informants noted that it is not uncommon for the apology delegation to be met with angry words and physical violence.

The apology delegation is followed by another small delegation, called "the pursuers" (*qughynshy*), who are sent from the bride's house to the groom's house. The girl's parents do not go to the groom's house unless they intend to take their daughter back home. If the girl's parents believe that the girl wants to stay or they think that she should stay, they will organize a delegation of two to five relatives. They often send relatives who fit into the following categories: the bride's aunts, her uncles, her siblings, and her sisters-in-law. During this visit, the *qughynshy* delegation is able to check on the bride's condition. The delegation stays the entire night as honored guests, celebrating the union of the bride and groom. As they leave, they are presented with the first installment of in-law gifts (*kiit*).

On the following day, after the bride's relatives have departed, the groom's family arranges for the "face-opening" or *betashar* ceremony. The face-opening ceremony also takes place in the case of an arranged marriage, soon after the bride starts to live at the groom's house. The ceremony formally introduces the bride to the groom's family, relatives, and close friends. After the guests have gathered, the veiled bride is led in front of the guests where she stands next to two sisters-in-law. They assist her as she gives "one hello" (*bir salem*) after another to her husband's relatives, as an invited *dombyra* (a guitar-like instrument) player sings out their names. Each "hello" consists of a brief bow to the audience, as the named relatives place a small amount of money in a collection jar. When all of the names have been called, the bride is formally "unveiled." Until this time, the bride has been treated as a special guest in her new home. After this event, she starts to take on some of the duties of a new daughter-in-law. For example, she might help her mother-in-law prepare dinner and wash the dishes.

Variations in Bride Kidnapping Experiences

Despite the general sequence of events, kidnap marriages vary remarkably from case to case when it comes to the issue of consent and the motive behind each kidnapping. Sometimes the kidnappings are consensual, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes, they are something in between. To explore this issue, I am going to describe three different kidnapping cases, each representing a different level of consent. Each of these cases took place in the 1990s.

The first case (a consensual kidnapping) describes the marriage of Kairat and Zhamila in 1994. I was living with Zhamila's family in a Kazakh

village while doing research for my dissertation on post-Soviet economic and social change. Kairat and Zhamila were from the same village and they were both attending a university in the small city of Turkestan. They were dating regularly, and they often got together with friends in the dorm or they met at an outdoor café. They were clearly in love with each other and they hoped to get married. His family approved of the marriage, but Zhamila knew that her parents did not approve. They found out that she had been dating him, and they angrily warned her to stop seeing him. Her parents did not know Kairat's family very well, but they had heard some bad rumors about his family, including that his father was often drunk. More importantly, they had already discussed the idea of marrying her to the son of her father's college friend. That young man lived in another town, and she barely knew him. Against her parent's wishes, Zhamila continued to date Kairat in secret. One day, shortly after she heard her parents discussing the other boy, she and Kairat talked about the possibility of elopement. She agreed that kidnapping was their best option. They did not discuss the details. The kidnapping occurred about a month later while she was doing a summer internship in a nearby city. She was temporarily living at her uncle's house, and she simply didn't return from work one day. Kairat surprised her by arriving at lunchtime. They went out to lunch, they went for a walk in the park, and then without asking, he drove her to his family's home in the village two hours away. Though she didn't know ahead of time, she happily accompanied him. Kairat's parents and relatives were waiting for them. Kairat's mother offered a kerchief, the symbol of a married woman, and Zhamila accepted it. Meanwhile, Zhamila's aunt and uncle were concerned about her whereabouts, and eventually they alerted her parents in the village. Although they had not yet received the "apology," they were able to guess where Zhamila was. Still unwilling to accept this match, they quickly drove to Kairat's house and asked to speak to Zhamila. She came out of the house wearing the kerchief, and where before she was afraid of disrespecting her parents by speaking back to them, she was now willing to plead her case. She reminded her mother that she herself had been able to marry the man she loved, and she asked her why she wouldn't let her daughter do the same thing. Realizing that there really wasn't much they could do at this point, her parents reluctantly returned home without their daughter.

When I returned to the village several years later to conduct research on bride kidnapping, it was perhaps with a little irony that Zhamila recounted the details of a popular Kazakh film that seems to glorify the merits of a love-based "kidnap" marriage. The film, *Shangyraq*, was

produced and set in the 1970s. It tells the story of a young man named Aman who lives alone with his poor, widowed mother. He is in love with Maira, a girl who comes from a wealthy and powerful family. Maira is also in love with Aman, but the young couple faced opposition from her maternal uncle. To prevent the union, the uncle insists on an exorbitantly high bridewealth. Unable to pay this amount, Aman discusses the possibility of a kidnap marriage with Maira. Once she agrees, he informs her when and where to wait. On the appointed day, she happily accompanies him to his house, and his relatives warmly welcome her into their family. This, however, was not the happy ending of the film. When her uncle hears the news, he drives to the house with the police. They immediately arrest Aman and his "accomplices." The uncle then forces his niece Maira to sign a legal affidavit claiming that she was kidnapped against her will. When the case comes to trial, the judge asks her directly whether she had been kidnapped against her will. She sobs violently and does not answer for a long time. Aman pleads with her to tell the truth. Eventually, out of fear and respect for her uncle, she lies and tells the court that Aman had kidnapped her *against* her will. Aman is then sentenced to prison in Siberia for several years. While in jail, Aman befriends a Russian orphan girl who works at the prison. When he is released early for good behavior, he proposes marriage to her. While she considers the offer, he returns to his native town in Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, Maira has been unhappily married to a man she does not love. When she hears that Aman has returned, she goes to see him and begs him to forgive her and to run away with her. He does not say a word and refuses to make eye contact with her. In the end, the Russian girl arrives in the village and accepts his marriage proposal. And Maira throws herself over a cliff after witnessing their happiness.

Consistent with Soviet ideology, stories recounting the tragedy of arranged marriages were commonly portrayed in Soviet literary works (Allworth 1989). The film draws a definite contrast between the love-based kidnap marriage (where Maira was temporarily happy) and the non-consensual arranged marriage (where she was so unhappy that she chose to commit suicide). In so doing, the film defends the practice of bride kidnapping in situations in which the young people themselves are making the decision. At the same time, the film delivers a powerful message that runs counter to "traditional" Kazakh values: devastating results occur when relatives interfere in the matchmaking process!

Many of the kidnap marriages in Kazakhstan today occur in ways that resemble Zhamila and Kairat's marriage, and Aman's first marriage to

Maira. My survey data suggests that consensual kidnappings were a popular form of marriage by the 1960s and 1970s. It can be argued that kidnap marriages provided a solution to an intrinsic conflict between Kazakh and Soviet values. On the one hand, traditional Kazakh cultural values stress that girls should not appear overly eager to get married (and consequently to start having sex). Girls were expected to listen to their parents and their elders when it came to their marriage choices. Several elderly informants told me how it used to be really shameful if a girl "ran away" to marry a man for love, but now girls do it all the time without any social sanctions. On the other hand, Soviet values stressed that girls should play an active role in choosing their marriage partners. Young men who kidnapped girls with their consent did not violate any Soviet laws, while girls who were "kidnapped" did not appear to be "running away" and thus did not violate Kazakh customs. Further, because it is also shameful for the girl "to return home" after being kidnapped, this makes it difficult for the girl's parents to do anything after the fact.

In the second case (a semiconsensual kidnapping), Erlan was a young man from a prosperous family in Turkestan, and Raikhan was a girl from a modest family in Otyrar village. Erlan's mother had studied in the same village class as Raikhan's parents. She visited Otyrar regularly to keep up with her relatives and friends. On one visit, she ran into Raikhan's mother and asked about her family. During this conversation, she learned that Raikhan, the eldest child in a family of six, was studying to be a teacher at the university in Shymkent. Kazakhs have a proverb, "See the mother, take the daughter" (*Sheshesin korip, qyzyn al*), and this is exactly what Erlan's mother did. Knowing that Raikhan's mother was an honorable woman and a good housewife, she started to think that Raikhan might be a good match for Erlan. She even went to Raikhan's house to see for herself whether or not the girl's character resembled her mother's. When she returned home, she told her son that there was a girl that she wanted him to meet. Erlan trusted his mother and wanted to marry somebody that his parents approved of. About a month later, Erlan and his mother returned to Otyrar village where he first met Raikhan. Although she was shy about meeting him at first, they had a mutual attraction. Later, he visited Shymkent twice to take her out on "dates" with a small group of friends.

Erlan and his parents agreed that a kidnap marriage would be more appropriate because her family would have a hard time paying for an arranged marriage. At this point, he heard a rumor that another boy was planning to kidnap her. He didn't want to lose her, so on the third "date,"

he decided to kidnap her. He never asked her whether she wanted to marry him, but he felt he had received implicit consent from both Raikhan and her parents. He didn't think it was necessary to ask directly because she would just be afraid and say that she wasn't ready yet. His older sister added that it is better this way, because if a girl knows that she is going to be kidnapped on a certain day from a certain place, she will get "all weirded out."

So, he used deception to get her to his house. First, he invited Raikhan and her two girlfriends to Turkestan for a city tour, and then, after they had dinner at a café, he promised to take them to a discotheque. Instead of going to the disco, he drove them to his house where his relatives were waiting. His grandmother offered her the marriage kerchief, and she accepted it almost immediately. The apology delegation was sent to Raikhan's house a few hours later to deliver the good news that the young couple had been married.

While the first two stories involve kidnappings with happy endings, the next case reveals the other side of bride kidnapping. In this case (a non-consensual kidnapping), Marat and Aizhan were two youths from Shauildir who were both studying law at Turkestan University. Marat lived with his widowed mother and his divorced older sister. Aizhan, the daughter of the village police chief, was an attractive, intelligent, and well-disciplined girl. The story of this kidnapping was told by a young woman who had heard two different versions of the story: one version from Aizhan, who was her good friend, and one version from her husband, who was one of Marat's accomplices. As she explained it, Marat's mother and sisters decided that it would be useful if Marat married into a family with good connections. They decided that Aizhan was an ideal choice, as she would make a good daughter-in-law and her father had the appropriate connections. From their perspective, it was irrelevant that Marat was not terribly excited about the marriage and that Aizhan had her own boyfriend.

Marat's mother convinced her son that this was the right choice. So, one day, as Aizhan was returning from Shauildir to Turkestan on the train, Marat and three of his friends stalked her. They secretly watched her and an aunt get on the train in the village, and then they raced in their car to meet the train in Turkestan. At the train station, they politely offered the two women a ride. Aizhan and her aunt accepted the offer, and her fate was sealed. Cleverly, the young men dropped off the aunt first, and then, instead of driving Aizhan to her dormitory, they started to drive in the direction of Shauildir. Once Aizhan understood what was happening, she became very distressed and angry. She knew that she had to act fast. If

only she could avoid going to his house, then maybe she could get out of this situation and still manage to marry her boyfriend. At this point, the boys were holding down her arms so she couldn't get out of the car. Her feet were still free so she tried to get the boys to stop the car by kicking at the dashboard and damaging the stereo. Eventually, they stopped the car to get a drink. Although she was in an area with no houses for miles, she made a run for it. She took off her high-heeled shoes and ran off into the steppe. Maybe she would run into a shepherd tending his sheep? Unfortunately, in her bare feet, she was not able to outrun the four boys who came at her from two different directions. They grabbed her and forced her back into the car.

When the entourage arrived at Marat's house, the despondent bride was greeted by his extended family. They offered her the kerchief, which she refused, and then took her to a back room and asked her to write the letter, which she also refused. After a few hours, in an unusual move, his family decided to send the "apology" delegation to her house without the letter. About the same time that the apology delegation left for her house, Aizhan's parents received disturbing news from their friends who happened to live next door to Marat. The friends told them that Aizhan had been kidnapped, and that they suspected that she was kidnapped against her will because she was screaming and crying. When the apology delegation arrived without the letter, her parents knew that their fears had been confirmed. They angrily refused to accept the apology fee. Concerned for their daughter's happiness, they decided they would retrieve their daughter and deal with the possible shame. As chief of police, the father must have been surprised that anybody would dare to kidnap his daughter against her will. After all, there are severe penalties for committing this crime. So, they headed to Marat's house, hopeful that the situation could be resolved. When they arrived, they immediately understood why Marat's family had acted so brashly. Marat's paternal uncle, the very man who had mentored and assisted Aizhan's father during his studies, was now sitting on the front porch. Unaware of the circumstances, he had been invited from Almaty to celebrate his nephew's marriage. When Aizhan's father approached him, the uncle said that he thought Aizhan would make a fine daughter-in-law. Out of respect for this man, Aizhan's father decided that he could no longer rescue his daughter from this undesirable fate. Instead of taking her home, he asked to speak to her. As she begged him to take her home, he explained the circumstances and told her that it would be too shameful for her to return home. He later accepted the second apology fee, and the marriage was complete. Although Aizhan ended up staying, the couple was not happy. They stayed

together for seven years and had two sons, before they ended up getting a divorce.[13]

Kidnapping Trends over Time

These three case studies reveal the amount of variation in kidnapping practices. Using survey data, I tried to come up with a rough estimate of the prevalence of bride kidnapping in general and the prevalence of non-consensual bride kidnapping in particular. As these stories demonstrate, a number of ambiguities make it difficult to determine whether or not a kidnapping case is "consensual" or "nonconsensual." There is no single question that gets at this issue. For example, a question about whether or not a girl expressed resistance during the kidnapping could be misunderstood, as girls are expected to act a little upset. Similarly, the issue of implicit consent does not arise in questions about whether or not the girl knew the kidnapping plan ahead of time. Because of these issues, I decided to create an index of consensus, by compiling the answers to seven different survey questions.[14] And, because of cases like Erlan's, I decided that it would be more useful to think in terms of high consent, medium consent, and low consent.

The survey results represent 177 different marriages formed between 1946 (the year of the earliest marriage in the survey) and 2000. Based on the survey, 60 percent of the marriages were kidnap marriages, 14 percent were arranged marriages, and 26 percent were nontraditional marriages. Figure 2.1 illustrates how these trends have changed over time. During this period, arranged marriages experienced a sharp decline from the 1940s to the 1970s, and continued to decline slightly in the 1980s and 1990s. I believe the decline of arranged marriages reflects the efficacy of Soviet laws against

13. Though most brides stay when they are first kidnapped, it is not uncommon for divorce to occur after several years. Sometimes, the man initiates the divorce. But, I heard of several instances in which the woman initiated the divorce because her husband physically abused her or was an alcoholic. In these cases, her parents, who initially encouraged her to stay in the marriage, tend to favor her decision to leave the marriage and provide a place for her and her children to stay.

14. These are the questions that were used for the index: (1) Were the bride and groom acquainted before the marriage? If so, how well? (0–2 points); (2) Before he kidnapped her, did she know that he was going to kidnap her? (0–1 point); (3) Did he ask her if she wanted to marry him? If yes, did she agree? Did he tell her when and how he planned to kidnap her? (0–2 points); (4) Did he use deception to kidnap her? (0–1 point); (5) Did he use physical force to kidnap her? (0–1 point); (6) Was she upset when she was kidnapped? Did she resist the kidnapping? (0–1 point); (7) How long did she wait before she consented to the marriage? (0–2 points). Higher points were scored for items if the answer revealed greater consent.

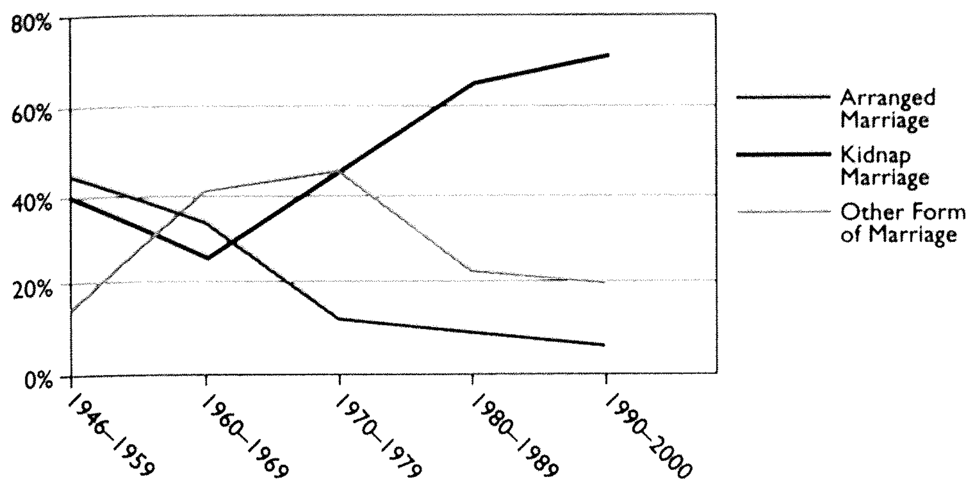

FIGURE 2.1. *Frequency of Marriage by Type in Ten-Year Intervals, 1946–2000*

traditional marriage practices. Interestingly enough, the practice of bride kidnapping did not experience a similar decline in the Soviet period. Although bride kidnapping did decline between the 1940s and the 1960s, the percent of kidnap marriages has been on a constant rise since the 1960s. The percentage of kidnap marriages was 25 percent in 1960s, 44 percent in the 1970s, 65 percent in the 1980s, and 71 percent in the 1990s. I believe that the resurgence of bride kidnapping in the 1970s reflects the state's acceptance of consensual kidnap marriages as a form of elopement that involves the girl's consent. At the same time, I argue that the subsequent rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping in the 1980s and the 1990s can be traced to political and economic change. Finally, it is important to note the appearance of nontraditional forms of marriage, such as the Komsomol marriages. As traditional forms of marriage declined in the 1950s and 1960s, nontraditional forms of marriage appeared to increase. By the 1970s, nontraditional marriages represented 44 percent of all new marriages. Then, in the 1980s and 1990s, as the percentage of kidnap marriages increased, the percentage of nontraditional marriages declined to a low of 26 percent and then to 21 percent of all new marriages.

Figure 2.2 illustrates how the level of consent in kidnap marriages has changed over time. From 1946 to 2000, the percentage of kidnap marriages with strong consent declined from 75 percent (1946–1970) to 35 percent. The percentage of kidnap marriages with moderate and minimal consent have correspondingly increased, especially in the 1980s and 1990s. In the 1990s, 35 percent of the kidnap marriages involved strong consent,

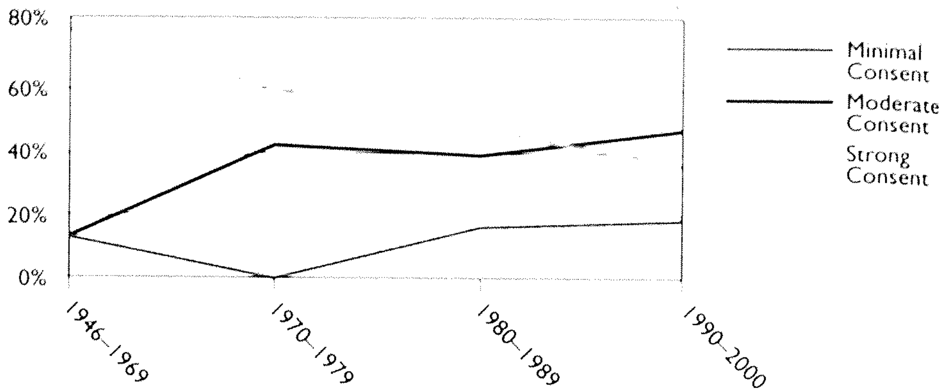

FIGURE 2.2. *Frequency of Kidnappings by Level of Consent in Ten-Year Intervals, 1946–2000*

47 percent moderate consent, and 18 percent minimal consent. These findings correspond to a popular perception that the percentage of nonconsensual kidnappings is on the rise. Informants who were married in the 1960s and 1970s point out nostalgically that the kidnappings in the past were almost always with the girl's consent, and she was typically informed where and when the kidnapping would take place. Today, consensual kidnappings still occur regularly, but people say that it is increasingly common for the young man to use deception to kidnap a girl who has only implicitly given her consent. In addition, an increasing number of cases involve girls who are kidnapped completely against their will.

The Post-Soviet State and the Rise of Nonconsensual Bride Kidnapping

The rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping provides an interesting lens for examining state-society relations in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. Nonconsensual kidnappings are not new. They existed in the pre-Soviet period and they did occur during the Soviet period. However, there seems to be a definite contrast between the 1970s, when the majority of kidnappings were completely consensual, and the 1980s and 1990s, when an increasing percentage of kidnap cases were nonconsensual and semiconsensual. The rise of nonconsensual kidnapping can be explained by looking at the transition from a socialist state, which sought to protect women's rights and to provide economic security for its citizens, to a postsocialist state, which has substantially reduced its provisions and promoted a nationalist agenda that is less concerned with women's rights. The changing nature of the state's social contract with its citizens has changed the social environment in which marriages take place. This transition started in the 1980s

with glasnost and perestroika, and accelerated in the 1990s after Kazakhstan achieved independence. Here I will point to three ways in which the post-Soviet state has helped foster new conditions that have contributed to the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping.

First, the introduction of state discourse that glorifies Kazakh traditional culture helps to explain the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping. As discussed above, postsocialist states throughout Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union are redefining national identities in the post-Soviet period (Gal and Kligman 2000; Graney 2001; Marsh 1998; Tohidi 1998; Verdery 1996). This process started in the late Soviet period, when glasnost policies allowed nationalists to criticize Soviet versions of history and traditional culture. No longer constrained by Soviet ideology, state discourse in post-Soviet Kazakhstan has introduced new attitudes toward traditional gender roles. In the post-Soviet context, there has been a plethora of newspaper articles and books describing Kazakh traditional culture, including marriage practices. These marriage practices were generally disadvantageous to Kazakh women, but, not surprisingly, these descriptions of Kazakh traditional culture do no contain harsh Soviet-style critiques of practices that are "feudal" and "patriarchal." Rather, these publications seem to suggest a need to return to some of these traditions in order to recapture the glory of the pre-Soviet past. The retraditionalization of Kazakh society goes beyond these publications. The issue of polygyny, for example, has been discussed in parliament in a new, positive light. Further, arranged marriages, once banned by the Soviet state, were given renewed status when the president of Kazakhstan and the president of the Kyrgyz Republic publicly arranged a marriage of their children to each other. In this light, the post-Soviet state is seen to be withdrawing from gender-sensitive social issues.

Though bride kidnapping is not explicitly condoned by the state, this public discourse has influenced local attitudes toward nonconsensual bride kidnapping because there is no ideological pressure to defend women's rights. When it comes to nonconsensual bride kidnapping cases, there is a paradoxical situation that mirrors the conflict between Soviet values and the nationalist return to "traditional" values.[15] Most Kazakhs believe that nonconsensual bride kidnapping is morally wrong, yet many also believe that a girl who is kidnapped against her will is obligated to stay. Inspired by the national return to "traditional" values, Kazakh grooms and their relatives actively manipulate the Kazakh belief that it is shameful for a kidnapped bride to return home. A few girls do return home, but

15. Bride kidnapping is viewed as a Kazakh tradition, not an Islamic practice.

most agree to stay. Girls who are kidnapped against their will often insist on returning home, and they refuse to write the letter expressing consent. But they are pressured by the groom's elders who remind her of the shameful consequences of returning home. Eventually, many girls succumb to this pressure. The girls know that it is almost impossible to keep a kidnapping a secret, and a "girl who returns" is labeled as such and thus becomes a less desirable marriage partner. In addition, in some cases, the girl's family has some kind of tie to the groom's family that makes it difficult for her to renounce and disgrace his family. The few girls who do return home experience psychological and social difficulties. And, unfortunately, there are no state organizations or NGOs that provide services to help these women cope with their decision.

Second, the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping is influenced by a growing perception that the legal system is corrupt and does not protect the interests of women. Many of the people I interviewed believe that lawlessness and corruption has increased in the late Soviet and post-Soviet period and that these processes contribute to the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping. Women in particular feel that the Soviet state did more to enforce laws that promoted gender equality. When it comes to bride kidnapping, they believe that the state does not regard this as an important issue. Young men are aware of these issues, and those who choose to kidnap girls know that the odds are good that there will be no legal repercussions from kidnapping a bride.

Although many of the men I spoke to are strongly opposed to nonconsensual kidnapping, I also encountered a few that did not think that there was anything wrong with this. I interviewed a small group of men with these attitudes in a dingy café within the Turkestan bazaar. They admitted that they had all acted as accomplices on a number of kidnappings, including some cases with minimal consent. When asked whether they ever thought of the girl's happiness, they laughed, and one said, "Oh, we don't worry about that, she'll be happy after one week." The others chimed in, "Yeah, let her be happy!" — a common refrain used in wedding toasts. They could probably tell that I was uncomfortable with their brazen manner, but this only seemed to encourage them to tell even more stories and perhaps to embellish some of the details. One of the things that came up in these conversations was the fact that they were not at all worried that they might be prosecuted and tried for kidnapping. In their estimates, only about 5 percent of girls would return home if kidnapped against their will, and fewer would take the case to court. One of the boys claimed that they were able to "talk to a girl and determine whether she was likely to return home." Then, they added that if a girl's family does take the matter

to court, the boy's family has the option of paying off the court or paying off the girl's family.

The final factor that helps explain the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping is the changing economic environment. Following the lead set by the Soviet state in the late 1980s, the post-Soviet state has introduced structural reforms that have substantially changed the economic security of Kazakhstan's citizens. Inspired by capitalist notions of economic management, the state has curbed its expenses by reducing the number of state employees and the magnitude of state subsidies. Employment is no longer guaranteed by the state. A substantial number of citizens, including state farm workers, have lost their state salaries and future pensions. Some have secured employment within newly established private enterprises while others have found employment in the informal economy, most notably the local bazaars. However, because of low wages, many of those who are employed in one way or another do not receive enough income to offset the effect of reduced subsidies for food, transportation, education, and consumer goods. Further, they cannot afford the cost of expensive imported goods that have flooded local markets and increased consumer desires. The problem of poverty is even worse for households without any employed adults (Bauer, Boschmann, and Green 1997; Bauer, Green and Kuehnast 1997).

Although the Soviet state certainly had its shortcomings, the state did provide Central Asian households with basic economic security after the 1950s. For this reason, families that are now experiencing poverty tend to remember the Soviet past with some nostalgia. In addition to guaranteeing basic survival needs, the Soviet state created a sense of expectation for a certain quality of life. Although the post-Soviet state is no longer honoring the economic promises made by the Soviet state, expectations of economic security persists in the popular conscience. These expectations affect marriage because marriage choices always involve economic considerations. Unmarried Kazakh girls and their parents want marriages with good families that can provide for the girl's economic well-being. When asked to describe the ideal marriage candidate, girls and their parents consistently hope for young men who have a secure form of employment. They don't want wealth so much as a sense of security. In the post-Soviet context, many young men and their families simply cannot offer girls the kind of economic security that they have learned to expect from their Soviet upbringing. Fear of rejection is one of the common motives for kidnapping a bride. Men who cannot offer as much economic security have more reasons to fear rejection. In addition to providing a less expensive alternative to an arranged marriage, kidnapping reduces

the chance that the young man will be rejected by the bride or her family. As discussed above, there is a heavy stigma attached to "girls who return home," so even reluctant brides usually agree to stay. This does not mean that men use kidnapping to marry girls from relatively wealthy families. In fact, most choose to marry girls from similar economic backgrounds. One of the advantages of kidnapping, however, is that a young man does not have to worry about the embarrassment of being rejected by a girl and her family because of his economic situation. All of these three factors contribute to the rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan.

In this chapter I have used ethnographic research to explain the practice of bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan. Bride kidnapping is a complex phenomenon that can be traced to the pre-Soviet period. In Soviet and post-Soviet Kazakhstan, this practice was and is more widespread in the southern regions where this research took place. The motives for kidnapping and the level of consent from the bride vary greatly from instance to instance. In addition, the practice of bride kidnapping has adapted and been transformed over time. In contrast to arranged marriages, which experienced a large decline in the Soviet period, kidnap marriages persisted and increased. By the 1970s, most kidnap marriages could be described as elopements that were staged as kidnappings. This practice corresponded to Soviet laws that banned forced marriages and Kazakh values that discourage girls from initiating their own marriages. In the 1980s and 1990s, the percentage of consensual bride kidnapping cases decreased as the practice of bride kidnapping was transformed yet again. By the 1990s, 35 percent of the kidnap cases involved strong consent, 47 percent moderate consent, and 18 percent minimal consent. The rise of nonconsensual bride kidnapping is attributed to the transition from a socialist state where women's rights were protected and economic security was provided to a postsocialist state where nationalist ideologies are more important than gender equality, perceptions of legal corruption are high, and economic security is uncertain.

This empirical study of bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan has several implications for understanding state-society relations in Central Asia. As Jones Luong (introduction) points out, previous studies of Central Asia offered two conflicting interpretations: while some scholars suggested that the Soviet state had succeeded in changing Central Asian society, in particular by creating strong national identities (Carrerre d'Encausse 1981; Rakowska-Harmstone 1970; Rywkin 1963), other scholars argued that the state was unable to change indigenous traditions and Islamic practices (Allworth 1989; Akiner 1995b; Fierman 1991). The second category of

studies typically assumed that traditional beliefs and practices persisted throughout the Soviet period and thus would play an important role in the post-Soviet period. Particular emphasis was placed on the revival of Islamic practices (Bennigsen and Broxup 1983; Bennigsen and Wimbush 1985; Rywkin 1982), as Islamic practices are often conflated with traditional practices (Saroyan 1997).

This study suggests that neither interpretation is valid for understanding bride kidnapping. The Soviet state did succeed in changing this practice, but not in the way intended. Rather than eliminating the practice altogether, the practice was transformed in a way that reflected Soviet ideology. Further, though the practice of bride kidnapping today bears some resemblance to that of the past, this practice should not be regarded as the revival of a practice that persisted throughout the Soviet period. The practice changed in the Soviet period, and in the post-Soviet period the practice is being transformed yet again in a way that reflects the state's withdrawal from gender-sensitive issues. The increase of nonconsensual bride kidnapping reflects the retraditionalization of society, a process that is influenced by new social attitudes toward Kazakh national tradition and by state policies that encourage traditional gender roles. These processes, however, have little to do with Islam. Bride kidnapping is considered to be a Kazakh practice, shared by other groups (such as the Kyrgyz), but not an Islamic practice. The post-Soviet state appears to have some interest in reviving Kazakh national traditions, but it has much less interest in reviving Islamic faith.

Other authors in this book suggest that state-society relations are increasingly characterized by regionalism and influenced by international organizations. On the one hand, my work suggests that the practice of bride kidnapping, which is more commonly found in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, illustrates the growing relevance of regional policies. Anecdotal evidence suggests that residents of southern Kazakhstan, including state actors, are more willing to accept the practice of bride kidnapping. Future research could assess whether the state's reluctance to crack down on instances of nonconsensual kidnapping is confined to the southern oblasts of Kazakhstan, thus demonstrating the increasing authority of regional leaders (chap. 6). On the other hand, the evidence here is that certain aspects of state-society relations have not been affected by international organizations. Although international NGOs are interested in women's issues (McMann, chap. 7) among other things, the existing NGOs have not paid much attention to the problem of nonconsensual bride kidnapping in Kazakhstan. It is likely, however, that this issue will receive more attention in the future, as knowledge of this practice becomes more widespread.