

## Breaking Apart

“The most beautiful day of my life was when my mother and me left my father from one day to an other. We just did it. From this day our dreams started to return”, explains Aidana. She is 17 years old and just started to study in the capital Bishkek of Kyrgyzstan. Aidana is proud of her brave mother who shares her story: “How can you live without love? It is impossible to live with someone you don’t love and you didn't never love. But it took me almost 17 years to understand that not only I am as a person have been abducted, but also my dreams, my wishes and my personality. It’s impossible for love, friendship and respect to exist after a bride kidnapping. I was young when I was raped. At that time I even taught this is our tradition. This happens to many women in Kyrgyzstan, this is our normality. I even felt honored if someone would have chosen me as his wife. I saw my husband just one time before he raped me. I tried to live beside to him, tried to be a good wife. But I never couldn't. It was never enough. After the very difficult and also traumatic birth of my daughter I never couldn't get again pregnant. Today I know that not only my soul was suffering so much. Also my body refused to get again pregnant. And from one day to an other I realized that I am the one who can change the whole situation. And only I can avoid that my daughter might experience the same and could loose her dreams. I wanted her to continue always to dream. When we left, we went to my parents. It was difficult for them to understand my situation and first they tried me to convince to turn back. They had also to learn and to understand why we left. And slowly we all got used to our new life and they had to learn not to feel ashamed because I left my husband. And after a time slowly my dreams started to return. At first, they were only timid and inconspicuous. I had even forgotten how to dream. But then the dreams gradually came back. And I will do everything to protect my daughter. I hope no one will steel her dreams from one day to the next.”

Breaking apart tries to give voice to different persons, especially women who could break apart the strong and established practice of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan. Tries to show those persons who are brave and try to change this practice for the future of the next generation. Bride kidnapping, known as “alu kachuu” (to take and flee) is not a new practice. It has spanned several generations. But after the collapse of the Soviet Union the practice of the bride kidnapping raised again and got a huge problem. Approximately one third of all Kyrgyz marriages goes back to this practice against their willing through bride kidnapping. For many people it is wrongly interpreted as a Kyrgyz tradition, a sign of national identity, although it has not compatibility with the Islam or the nomadic tradition. Only in times of grazing when two young were in love and the groom could not pay the dowry to the family of the bride, the two lovers used to agree to organize a kidnapping for love.

But I there is also a growing awareness and increasing reflection also on the psychological implications of those affected. Women who suffered by themselves sometimes long life under this traumatic experience being raped like an animal and being forced to live not only with the man but mostly also with his family together. But each person that breaks apart this practice gives hope for further positive change in future generations. These work shall give voice not only to victims of bride kidnapping furthermore to those who have a glimmer of hope. Despite the stories of tragedy there are persons of different ages who believe that bride kidnapping will one day become a thing of the past in Kyrgyzstan.