Domestic Violence as Everyday Terrorism: Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan

Unpacking the Gendered Security Dynamics of Bride Kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan: Bringing the H*uman* Back into Security Studies

Discussing epistemological failures within Terrorism Studies scholarship, and more generally Security Studies, Caron Gentry (2015) foregrounds everyday terrorism as a vital field of study. Gentry makes a pivotal argument for recognising and addressing everyday terrorism globally, not just as the enterprise of non-Western Others (Ibid, 7-8, 12; Pain 2014, 537-8). While Western everyday terrorism is important, this paper has a different focus: I contend, seeking not to reify notions of Western exceptionalism or deflect from everyday terrorism's global reality, that bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is everyday terrorism. Using a feminist IR framework, I endeavour to bring the human back into security studies, arguing that: a) everyday terrorism demands attention, particularly with regards human security; and b) individuals' security utterances matter, be they explicitly articulated or not (Hansen 2000, 285-287). This paper seeks to rupture the essentialised assumptions of woman-as-victim/man-as-perpetrator, to assess how women, here, occupy perpetrator and victim, and perpetrator or victim roles simultaneously (Moser and Clark 2001, 3; Gentry 2015, 6). In so doing, I implement Queer IR theory to demonstrate the messiness of gender and security, and to eradicate monolithic significations, moving scholarship out of binary classifications of either victim or perpetrator. Ergo, this paper demonstrates the volatility of security and how it operates at the individual (gendered) level. This approach, using everyday-terrorism-as-concept, helps unpack gendered power dynamics at play within society and highlights security articulations. Consequently, this paper expounds that bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan is a microcosm, indicative of systemic misogynistic patriarchy, here enacted through everyday terrorism.

Feminist IR theory takes gender subordination as its point of analysis, exposing women's invisibility and forms of gender power relations in global politics using gendered lenses (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015, 11). Heidi Hudson argues that gender should be used "as a unit of analysis [that] is viewed as socially learned behaviour and expectations" distinguishing masculine/feminine (2005, 156). Queer IR theory is taken to mean the challenging of constructed binaries by disrupting, destabilising, queering that which is deemed essential and "the natural order of things" (Peterson 2014, 605; Weber 2014, 596-597). Queer classifications are intersectional, diverse, fluid, and both and/or; it is: "the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone's gender, of anyone's sexuality aren't made (or can't be made) to signify monolithically" (Sedgwick 1993, 8; Sjoberg 2014b, 608; Weber 2015, 2ff). Queer is, accordingly, a messy, unbound and limitless category (Browne 2006, 889). Given such a definition, intersectionality is defined as "the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination" (Davis 2008, 67). It must be acknowledged that normal and unnatural are co-constitutive and intertwined; statements about women's security is also a statement about men's (Peterson 2014, 604; Hudson 2005, 156).

'Sex' is often discussed in binary terms, and seen as pre-discursive and natural: one is either male (with a penis) or female (with a vagina) (Sjoberg 2014a, 12). Judith Butler reconceptualises 'sex': her concept of performativity posits sex as a fluid spectrum, rendering it neither pre-discursive nor an a priori categorisation governing on politically neutral ground (1990, 7; Wilcox 2014, 613; Weber 2015, 6). Gender is "an intersubjective social construction that constantly evolves with changing societal perceptions… describing socially constituted difference between [sexes]"

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comprising socially constructed behavioural expectations, stereotypes and rules, which support the 'naturalness' of dichotomous sex categories (Sjoberg and Gentry 2007, 5; Enloe 2004, 3-5; Hudson 2005, 156). Both sex and gender are socially constructed, therefore, cannot be separated. Gender fuels the assumption that sex is natural and a priori yet, "sex is not the natural, pre-discursive, pre-cultural realm of subjectivity opposed to gender as the cultural, social, discursive realm of subjectivity" (Weber 1998, 79). Heteronormativity is: "the normalisation of man/woman as [opposing, dichotomous sexes]" which facilitates notions of woman-as-victim and man-as-perpetrator (Browne 2006, 886; Moser and Clark 2001, 3; Sjoberg 2010, 54-55; 2014a, 64). Sex, however, cannot be adequately understood in established binary terms of male or female; it is inherently fluid, unique and queer.

Cynthia Weber's definition of the and/or concept is used throughout, meaning something/someone which cannot be constrained to monolithically signify as either one thing or another: it is both one thing and another, while simultaneously being one thing or another; it is, simultaneously, an "and" that is an "or," and is, duly, queer (Weber 2014, 597; 2015, 9).This paper invokes Natasha Marhia's critique that some humans are more human than others, that the category of "human" is inscribed with power relations, and is, thus, an exclusionary and gendered category (Marhia 2013, 20). Ergo, human security focuses on the abstract, heteronormative individual rather than the contextually, relationally and intersubjectively constituted being, that is often queer. This oversight subjugates everyday (in)security experiences, such as everyday terrorism, to the macropolitical, such as global terrorism, natural disasters and the like (Ibid; Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, 1; Pain 2014, 543).

For the purposes of this essay, domestic violence is understood as: repeated and long-term violence directed at an individual, causing profound physical and/or mental health repercussions for the individual experiencing it (Pain 2012, 6-7, 2014, 532). Domestic violence, henceforth, is referred to as a form of everyday terrorism, characterised by physical, social, sexual and psychological abuses as means of control, and global terrorism refers to terrorism with these characteristics in national or international settings (Pain 2014 533; Gentry 2015, 3-4). Both are located within the same structure, having similarities (exerting political control through fear) and disjunctures; neither is more important than the other, and both operate across scales (the global and the everyday), hence referring to domestic violence as everyday terrorism does not conflate it with global terrorism, rather allows a "remapping of the geographies of terrorism" by queering the boundaries between violence deemed public (hence political) and violence deemed "private, apolitical and mundane" to rectify malestream (masculinely gendered mainstream), heteronormative epistemological biases and show that everyday terrorism cuts across all sectors of society (Pain 2012, 8, 2014, 532-535; Wilcox 2014, 612; Moser and Clark, 2001, 5; Youngs 2004). By extension, bride kidnapping is a form of everyday terrorism: it has persisted since the twentieth century, causes physical and mental health issues for those experiencing it and political dominance/control is asserted using fear (Human Rights Watch 2015; Leonard 2015; Pain 2012, 6-8).

Kyrgyzstan (officially the Kyrgyz Republic) is a state in central Asia where bride kidnapping is legion1 and often argued to be a norm/tradition despite its illegality and minimal occurrence pre-twentieth century (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999, 1-2; Kleinbach et al. 2005, 191-2; Kleinbach and Salimjanova 2007; Criminal Code of the Kyrgyz Republic 1997). Bride Kidnapping is: "the act of abducting a woman to marry her and includes a variety of actions, ranging from consensual marriage to kidnapping and rape" (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999, 1; Kleinbach et al. 2005, 193). While Amsler and Kleinbach (1999, 2-3) discuss the importance of distinguishing between consensual (mock abductions) and non-consensual (abduction by force or deception, including violence) bride kidnapping, this paper argues that even in consensual cases, gendered power structures operate and are reified through the act. Given the scope of this paper, the focus is on the non-consensual form (as everyday terrorism) and its implications for security. Bride Kidnapping is not unique to Kyrgyzstan (it is important to note this, as per Gentry (2015)) and is linked to economic factors, social structures, family organisation, and gender stratification more globally, with fear infiltrating women's everyday: hence, I posit bride kidnapping as everyday terrorism (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999, 6; Marhia 2013, 24; Pain 2012, 2014, 533).1 Kleinbach et al. (2005, 198) estimate that 35-45% of all Kyrgyz women are married against their will as a result of Bride Kidnapping

Nazgul was working at a roadside café when she was "grabbed" by three men and taken to a neighbouring village; she was forced to put on a white wedding scarf and wed her kidnapper, having never previously met him or her kidnappers (Hughes 2013). As women, Kyrgyz women, like Nazgul, face the ever-present security threat of

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kidnapping in their everyday lives and fear is widespread (Handrahan 2004, 208). Bride kidnapping involves both physical and psychological violence: the kidnapped women face stigmatisation if they refuse to marry their kidnapper, and there is a high chance of rape on the evening of their kidnapping, ergo instilling fear through patriarchal coercive control mechanisms which are structurally underpinned by hierarchical gender relations (Ibid, 209; Pain 2014, 537). As such, women face a silent security dilemma whereby their ability to articulate insecurity in marriage/kidnapping is inhibited by fear of the social repercussions of leaving: speaking security may generate greater insecurity (Hansen 2000, 286-287; Handrahan 2004, 209; Pain 2012, 13). Bride kidnapping is thus a "product, producer and reproducer of gender stratification and inequality" whereby Kyrgyz women are inherently insecure because of their gender and nationality: it may be more fruitful, in this case, to (re)conceive of this everyday terrorism as "patriarchal terrorism" given its systematic and intentional nature and rootedness in assertion of masculinity (Amsler and Kleinbach 1999, 10; Hansen 2000, 287; Johnson 1995, 284). Doing so demands attention be paid to this phenomenon (Pain 2012, 2014).Accordingly, one could argue that Kyrgyz women face a double security threat where: a) their pre-kidnapping everyday security is almost non-existent given the state's refusal to enforce the law; and b) they are left in an unrelenting situation of (in)security within marriage — insecure because of domestic violence, the initial kidnapping and the social rejection faced if they attempt escape, and secure because they face no social stigmatisation for rejecting cultural 'norms' (Handrahan 2004, 209; Kleinbach and Salimjanova 2007, 218). It is in this vein that human security is inherently both and/or: Kyrgyz women (and individuals more generally) are neither secure nor insecure, they are both secure and/or insecure; Kyrgyz men are both the security threat and/or the security provider, hence security is incredibly contextual, uniquely experienced and messy, something security studies ignores through monolithic significations of victim or perpetrator, secure or insecure (Gentry 2015, 16; Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, 1). Kyrgyz women's insecurity is, thus, a result of what is deemed an essential norm that reifies (mimicking global hierarchies) feminine inferiority and global patriarchal misogyny, valorising masculinity (through kidnapping) (Steans 2013, 101; Gentry 2015, 16). Framing this as everyday terrorism exposes the political nature of bride kidnapping and queering it forces a redefinition of security, bringing the individual back into the picture given that, "the subject positions of abusers and abused may be multiple, messy and shifting" and because "power and resistance are not coherent or stable, but entangled together" (Pain 2014, 540, 543). The 'mundane,' thus, matters as it exposes how competing securities (here, kidnapper and kidnap victim) are prioritised on the basis of essentialised, androcentric, hierarchies (Enloe 2011; Pain 2012, 8; Marhia 2013, 24).

Everyday (in)security, therefore, ought to be higher on the security agenda given that "security takes place in, is impacted by, and impacts the everyday" and that everyday terrorism, if assessed by the criteria with which we asses global terrorism, is extremely effective: invoking fear by terrorising targets and those close to them while also exerting psychological control in the same way that global terrorism intends to (Sjoberg and Gentry 2015, 1; Pain 2014, 543). (Kyrgyz) Women's security matters and the gendered way in which their (in)security is conceived and articulated matters: there is a more significant terrorist threat at the everyday micro-level than in the macro-level, hence the human matters not the abstracted, gendered human (Marhia 2013, 32; Hansen 2000). Fundamentally, Kyrgyz men engaging in bride kidnapping, be that for themselves or another, and the police who refuse to address the issue are everyday terrorists, and effective terrorists at that, maintaining malestream political structures, reifying security as androcentric and the human in human security gendered, thus maintaining the gendered hierarchy by marginalising women and leaving the private sphere invisible: the personal is political and the political is hence personal(Enloe 2011, 447, Enloe 1998, 348; Hudson 2005, 171; Leonard 2015). To escape the dichotomous women-as-victim/man-as-perpetrator construction, it is fundamental to address the role of mothers of the groom in bride kidnapping. Across studies, it is noted that mothers often play a crucial role in the ceremony, placing the veil over the bride's head (which symbolises her new married identity), and actively encouraging their sons to kidnap a bride2 (Handrahan 2004, 209; Amsler and Kleinbach 1999, 13). It is easy to fall into the trap of homogeneously categorising these women as femininity gone awry, as mothers or monsters but this risks simplifying their motivations for complicity and reifies the gendered, essential way of talking about this phenomenon by focusing solely on women's supposed victimhood and innocence (Gentry and Sjoberg 2015; Gentry 2009). Given the significant percentage of mothers who wish their male children to kidnap a bride and their role in the ceremony, it is arguable that this is a security articulation and an active decision to participate in everyday terrorism; yet the argument can be made that these women are queer feminised victim and/or masculinised perpetrator by-products of patriarchal society. Using Parashar's argument that we need to address women's involvement in political violence regardless of its manifestation (2009), I argue that these Kyrgyz mothers are muddying gendered perceptions of victimhood and political agency, thus demonstrating that

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articulations of security are variegated and numerous and affirming that there is no monolithic identity: one can be both victim and/or perpetrator (Gentry 2015, 16; Weber 2015, 4). This analysis propounds that the patriarchal Kyrgyz society (and global patriarchal society) is effectively a "product, producer and reproducer" of everyday terrorism, which serves to maintain incumbent gendered power structures making women simultaneously secure and/or insecure (Amsler and Kleinback 1999, 10; Pain 2012). Everyday terrorism, in the form of bride kidnapping, serves to keep Kyrgyz society in a "state of chronic fear" of transgressing a socially constructed norm (Pain 2 Amsler and Kleinback (1999, 13) state that 34% of mothers in their survey wanted their sons to kidnap a bride 2012, 6). Perhaps this is why mothers encourage their sons to engage in the phenomenon and why men still kidnap brides — but this paper cannot speak for those engaging in the activity. However, bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan encapsulates the gendered subjugation and inherent insecurity of women globally.

This paper seeks not to homogenise the experience of all women who experience everyday terrorism, nor the experience of all Kyrgyz women, but rather to expose the gendered dynamics operating through bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, which I argue is a microcosm of global patriarchal misogyny. It seeks to show that women can be complicit and/or victims in political violence that reifies hierarchical gender structures. In the context of bride kidnapping in Kyrgyzstan, gender is complex: men are thought to be secure and strong; women are thought to be insecure as captured victims. This paper queers these assumptions, showing that security is intricate and messy: the human experiences (in)security in various ways and can be both secure and/or insecure simultaneously, and across scales. The private/everyday is argued to be a source of greater insecurity than the public, so-called political sphere. Ultimately, categorising bride kidnapping and domestic violence as everyday terrorism unpacks the political nature of these phenomena in reifying patriarchal society, and gives the everyday much needed attention. (In)security knows no boundaries, why does security studies?

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About the author:

Dean Cooper-Cunningham is an Assistant Professor of International Relations at the University of Copenhagen. His research intersects feminist and queer theory, critical security studies, and visual politics. His most recent work has focused on the international politics of sex, how powerful actors in global politics strategically adopt pro- or anti-queer agendas in domestic and foreign policy, and the way that actors use the visual and the body as modes of resistance to state violence. He is co-author of a project on 'Queering Atrocity Prevention' and the author of several articles on the subject of sexuality, gender, security, and visual and bodily forms of activism.