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Dagestan Court Rules in Mother's Favor in Controversial Custody Case

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Last summer, the Makhachkala city court found Tseretilova unfit for custody due to her appearance with short, dyed hair, piercings and tattoos, as well as what they called her "immoral lifestyle." **lovva.nina / Instagram**

The Supreme Court of Russia's republic of Dagestan has overturned an earlier decision that ruled a mother was unfit for custody of her three children due to her "immoral" tattoos and piercings, she said Thursday.

Nina Tseretilova, 33, had lived with her daughter and two sons in the predominantly Muslim, socially conservative region of southern Russia since her 2012 divorce until January 2020, when her ex-husband Magomed took them into his care. She then filed a lawsuit against him, claiming he kidnapped her children.

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appearance with short, dyed hair, piercings and tattoos, as well as what they called her "immoral lifestyle."

After the Dagestan Supreme Court ruled in her favor, Tseretilova said her ex-husband's lawyers threatened to take the children to the neighboring republic of Chechnya.

"Magomed's lawyers told me to look for the children in Grozny," Tseretilova said in an Instagram story Thursday. "They will try to open another case in Grozny and told me that if I try to take the children via the authorities, I will never see them again."

Traditional Chechen laws, which are typically upheld by the region's authorities, stipulate that children should remain with the father's side of the family after a divorce.

The case has gained notoriety as it highlights the cultural divide between Russia's conservative North Caucasus region and the rest of the country.

Tseretilova's story was made public in November 2020, when the independent Dozhd broadcaster aired a documentary centering on Muslim women from Dagestan titled "Those Who Take Off the Hijab."

In June 2020, Russian human rights groups warned the UN that the women's rights situation in the North Caucasus is critical, with domestic violence, so-called honor killings and female genital mutilation all persisting throughout the region.

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