

Theses of Doctoral (PhD) Dissertation

**MULTICULTURAL DYNAMICS AND ETHNIC INTERACTIONS
IN THE TURKESTAN REGION**

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Dissertation supervisor: Dr. Elek Bartha



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IN THE TURKESTAN REGION**

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The undersigned Abdinassir Nazira, in full awareness of my liability, I declare that the dissertation submitted is my original academic work, which was prepared with attention to the international norms of copyright, and the references included in it are clear and complete. I further declare that I am not currently subject to a procedure aimed at revoking a doctoral degree, and that a doctoral degree already awarded has not been revoked from me in the past five years. I have not submitted the present dissertation to another academic institution before and it has not been rejected.



Debrecen
....., 2025

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Lastly, I am immensely grateful to my husband, family, colleagues, and friends, whose support and understanding have motivated me to persevere and achieve my goals.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved husband, Ulan Zhaparov.

ABSTRACT

Multicultural Dynamics and Ethnic Interactions in the Turkestan Region

This dissertation is based on field research conducted in five rural districts of the Turkestan Region: Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Kentau-Hantagy, and Sayram. The author undertook two separate visits to these research sites and employed an anthropological data collection approach. The study's primary objective was to observe, analyse, and document how key cultural, linguistic, religious, and national features evolve and manifest within interethnic marriages, focusing on the transformation and formation of these aspects within individual households.

Kazakhstan, one of the largest nations in Central Asia, has historically experienced significant socio-political and cultural processes that have shaped its identity as a multiethnic state. This diversity stems from historical migrations and displacements and the enduring legacies of these events, as many ethnic groups reside in Kazakhstan today. Although their numbers may vary, representatives of diverse ethnicities remain a feature of the nation's demographic landscape. This dissertation addresses these historical processes and their consequences from a cultural anthropological perspective.

The Turkestan Region, previously part of the South Kazakhstan Region, stands out as an area with a higher concentration of diverse ethnic groups compared to other regions of Kazakhstan. Despite its ethnic diversity, Turkestan remains a stronghold of Kazakh cultural and national values and is home to its spiritual capital, the City of Turkestan. This research aims to understand the factors contributing to this unique cultural dynamic by applying anthropological theories such as assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation. These theories are critically analysed and applied to the specific rural districts examined.

The research mainly employed a qualitative methodology, which included in-depth interviews, participant observations, and structured surveys as part of its data collection. Eighty-five interviews were conducted throughout two visits, focusing on everyday aspects of life such as language use, religious practices, traditions, and national values. These findings are interpreted from the perspective of several anthropological theories on the processes that offer a comprehensive understanding of interethnic marriages and their cultural dynamics within the Turkestan Region. This approach not only highlights the theoretical intersections of assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation but also contextualises these processes within the

experiences lived by the region's mixed-marriage families.

This analysis enhances our anthropological understanding of interethnic families in Kazakhstan. As such, the present study provided an understanding of how historical and sociological variables influence identity and coexistence in this multicultural setting.

ABSZTRAKT

Multikulturális dinamikák és etnikai interakciók a Turkisztáni régióban

A disszertáció olyan terepkutatásokon alapul, amelyeket a szerző a Turkisztáni régió öt vidéki körzetében Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Kentau-Hantagy és Sayram településeken végzett. Két külön alkalommal látogatott el ezekre a kutatási helyszínekre, és antropológiai adatgyűjtési módszereket alkalmazott. A kutatás elsődleges célja az volt, hogy megfigyelje, elemezze és dokumentálja a kulcsfontosságú kulturális, nyelvi, vallási és nemzeti jellemzők alakulását és megnyilvánulását az interetnikus házasságokban, különös tekintettel ezen aspektusok átalakulására és formálódására az egyes háztartásokban.

Kazahsztán, Közép-Ázsia egyik legnagyobb országa, történelmileg jelentős társadalmi, politikai és kulturális folyamatokon ment keresztül, amelyek sokszínű, multietnikus állammá formálták identitását. Ez a sokszínűség nemcsak a történelmi migrációkból és kitelepítésekből ered, hanem ezek tartós örökségeiből is, hiszen számos etnikai csoport továbbra is Kazahsztánban él. Bár ezeknek a csoportoknak a létszáma eltérő lehet, a különböző etnikumok képviselői továbbra is meghatározó részét képezik az ország demográfiai összképének. A disszertáció kulturális antropológiai szemszögből vizsgálja ezeknek a történelmi folyamatoknak és következményeiknek a hatását.

A Turkisztáni régió, amely korábban Dél-Kazahsztán régió része volt, a különböző etnikai csoportok magasabb koncentrációjával tűnik ki Kazahsztán más régióihoz képest. Az etnikai sokszínűség ellenére a Turkisztáni régió továbbra is a kazah kulturális és nemzeti értékek bástyája, valamint a régió spirituális fővárosának, Turkisztán városának az otthona. Ez a kutatás arra törekszik, hogy különböző, például az asszimilációról, akulturációról és disszimilációról szóló antropológiai elméletek alkalmazásával megértse azokat a tényezőket, amelyek hozzájárultak ehhez az egyedülálló kulturális dinamikához. A szerző az elméleteket kritikusan elemzi és alkalmazza a vizsgált vidéki körzetekre.

A kutatás elsősorban kvalitatív módszertanra támaszkodott, amely mélyinterjúkat, résztvevői megfigyeléseket és strukturált kérdőíveket foglalt magában az adatgyűjtés részeként. Összesen 85 interjú készült a két tereplátogatás során, amelyek a mindennapi élet aspektusaira, például a nyelvhasználatra, vallási gyakorlatokra, hagyományokra és nemzeti értékekre összpontosítottak. Az eredményeket különböző antropológiai elméletek szemszögeből értelmezi, amelyek átfogó képet nyújtanak az interetnikus házasságok kulturális dinamikájáról a Turkisztáni régióban. Ez a megközelítés nem csak az asszimiláció, akulturáció és

disszimiláció elméleti metszéspontjait emeli ki, hanem ezen folyamatokat a régió vegyes házasságú családjainak élettapasztalataihoz is kontextualizálja.

Az elemzés révén a disszertáció hozzájárul az interetnikus családok kulturális antropológiájának mélyebb megértéséhez Kazahsztánban, és árnyalt feltárását nyújtja annak, hogy a történelmi és társadalmi-kulturális tényezők miként formálják az identitást és az együttélést ebben a multietnikus közösségben.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Kazakhstan, the ninth-largest country in the world by territory, is strategically located in the middle of Central Asia and is home to diverse ethnic groups. Its vast expanse spans four primary regions – southern, northern, western, and eastern – each distinguished by unique geographical and cultural attributes, where various ethnic communities have coexisted and interacted for centuries. Kazakhstan stands out for its extraordinary ethnic diversity, home to over 130 ethnic groups shaped by a turbulent and transformative history. Key events such as political repressions, forced deportations, the devastating 1930s famine, two World Wars, and the Soviet Virgin Lands campaign, among others, have significantly altered the country's demographic structure, leaving a lasting impact on its ethnic composition and social fabric.

Inter-ethnic marriages in Kazakhstan mirror these historical and demographic shifts. These unions are not solely personal choices; they also stem from the broader forces of migration, cultural interaction, and adaptation that have characterised the country's past. They embody a unique synthesis of identities, influenced by the blending of traditions and the resilience of communities navigating intricate historical legacies.

Beyond that, inter-ethnic marriages are important for understanding how ethnic borders are upheld, negotiated, or destroyed in daily life. According to Hungarian scholars, inter-ethnic marriages represent a unique social space where personal relationships intersect with broader cultural and political dynamics. These unions not only challenge traditional notions of ethnic identity but also serve as active sites for negotiating belonging, cultural transmission, and social boundaries. As Eróss, Tátrai, Kovály, and Opióła (2018) argue, ethnically mixed families often navigate complex processes of identity formation, where individuals—especially children—experience both the pressures of assimilation and the reinforcement of distinct ethnic boundaries. Their study highlights that inter-ethnic families are not passive receivers of societal norms but are deeply engaged in shaping how ethnicity is practiced, taught, and redefined across generations.

Within the scope of this research, these events provide essential context, which offers an understanding of how Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic landscape evolved. While this overview is not the central focus of the research, it emphasises the significance of these transformations. It acknowledges the contributions of esteemed scholars, nationally and internationally, who have analysed these defining moments. For example, among foreign scholars, S. Cameron and M. Olcott stand out. Cameron's work on the 1930s famine illustrates the devastating demographic and cultural impacts of Soviet policies, showing how these events disrupted traditional ethnic dynamics (Cameron, 2018). Olcott's research examines the historical

evolution of Kazakh society and focuses on the transition from traditional practices to the Soviet system. Her insights into kinship networks and collective identities provide a deeper understanding of how political and economic upheavals shaped social structures (Olcott, 1995). Other significant contributions come from N. Pianciola and J. Sahadeo, who have studied migration and ethnic policies in Central Asia. Their studies show how these policies influenced inter-ethnic relationships and identities (Pianciola, 2009; Sahadeo, 2013). Meanwhile, scholars such as Z. Katz and B. Dave have investigated ethnographic and sociopolitical issues, which address various cultural and contemporary challenges. R. Kindler's research on the human costs of collectivisation further deepens the understanding of Kazakhstan's complex Soviet-era history (Katz, 1975; Dave, 2007; Kindler, 2018).

Kazakh researchers have made significant contributions to the field of ethnodemography as well. Key individuals include M. Asylbekov, M. Kozybaev, M. Tatimov, Zh. Abylkhozhin, G. Azimbay, A. Alekseenko, N. Alekseenko, T. Omarbekov, G. Mendikulova, B. Zhanguttin, and others who are well-known for their pioneering work on demographic shifts, migration patterns, and sociopolitical upheavals, notably during the Soviet period. Their research has provided insights into the historical processes that have shaped Kazakhstan's ethnodemographic evolution and the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages. Their contributions offer a practical framework for investigating inter-ethnic connections in areas like Turkestan, illustrating the breadth and significance of their academic achievements (Kozybaev, 2001).

This dissertation builds upon this broad research foundation into Kazakhstan's ethnodemographic and cultural history, refining its scope to focus on the southern region of Kazakhstan, specifically five villages within the Turkestan area. These communities, home to a mosaic of ethnic groups, serve as microcosms for exploring inter-ethnic marriages and their implications for coexistence and cultural interaction. By analysing these villages, the study highlights how localised dynamics contribute to comprehensive national trends and offers a multifaceted perspective on inter-ethnic relationships and the processes of cultural exchange.

Furthermore, considering that this study explores inter-ethnic marriages, it makes sense to utilise the perspectives of local scholars who have been directly involved in examining these processes, rather than relying solely on foreign interpretations. This research highlights the contributions of several local scholars. These scholars have investigated how Soviet policies influenced Kazakhstan's ethnodemographic and cultural landscape and provided meaningful insights into the historical and social factors that impacted inter-ethnic unions. Their contributions aid in our understanding of how these marriages fit into Kazakhstan's unique sociocultural dynamics. For example, scholars like V. Kozlov and O. Komarova have

demonstrated how inter-ethnic marriages represent the intersection of ethnic identity, cultural adaptation, and societal transformation. These unions reflect complex processes of acculturation and assimilation, often characterised by shifts in language, traditions, and social values. In regions like Turkestan, they offer a glimpse into how ethnic communities maintain their distinct identities while adapting to a shared cultural context. Such marriages exemplify negotiation and integration, bridge ethnic boundaries, and foster cultural hybridity (Komarova, 1980).

Integrating Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic groups into the republic's socioeconomic, political, and cultural systems highlights the complexity of its interethnic relations. These relationships, forged through varied social interactions, significantly influence the country's social and cultural development. The contribution of the nation's ethnic groups extends far beyond their traditions and fosters growth and understanding in interfaith and interethnic relations. As Shaukenova (2013) emphasises, these dynamics are intricate and necessitate historical and contemporary analyses to assess their nature fully. This approach provides unique insights into how these connections have been negotiated and continue to evolve in Kazakh society.

In other words, this research focuses on the dynamics of interethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan and explores how these unions reflect wider interethnic and interfaith relations in the country.

It is needed to clarify here that Turkestan City and the Turkestan region in Kazakhstan are two distinct entities, each with its own significance and characteristics. Turkestan City serves as the administrative centre of the Turkestan region and holds immense historical and cultural importance. It is a relatively small area within the larger region, known for its rich history spanning over 1,500 years and landmarks such as the Mausoleum of Khoja Ahmed Yasawi, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The city is a centre for administration, history, and culture, drawing visitors for its spiritual and historical significance (Abai.kz, 2009).

In contrast, the Turkestan region is a vast administrative territory in southern Kazakhstan. Formerly known as South Kazakhstan Region, it was renamed in 2018 when Turkestan City became its centre (Qazaq Geography, 2022). The region encompasses a much larger area than the city, including numerous districts, towns, and rural communities. While Turkestan City is a focal point, the region is notable for its agricultural, industrial, and trade activities, which bolster Kazakhstan's economy. The region also includes other significant locations such as Shymkent, which previously served as the administrative centre. It is now a separate city of republican significance (Baipakov, 1986).

Turkestan City is seen as a smaller, historically significant part of the larger Turkestan

region. The city is a cultural and administrative core, while the region represents a broader administrative and economic unit that includes diverse areas and communities. This study was conducted in five small villages located near Turkestan City, within the territory of the Turkestan region.

Drawing on anthropological and sociological theories, the study examines mixed marriages' cultural, social, and ethnodemographic implications and offers insights into assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation processes. Given the extent to which the ethnic groups of Kazakhstan are entrenched in the country's socio-political and cultural systems, these marriages serve as an evaluative viewpoint for understanding the changing nature of interethnic interactions. Through these frameworks, this research offers a deeper interpretation of how interethnic marriages shape Kazakhstan's social, cultural, and demographic landscape.

The core of my motivation comes from my birthplace, located in the southern part of Kazakhstan, the Shymkent region. Although it is not technically part of the Turkestan administrative region, it shares a similar cultural landscape as both have a rich ethnic diversity. Growing up in a predominantly Kazakh community, my early life was shaped by Kazakh national values and the Muslim religious environment of the region. However, my mother's childhood home—the house of my maternal grandparents, where we spent most of our school holidays—had an intriguing story, as it was originally purchased from a Christian family. The previous owners left behind several belongings, including portraits of Christian figures, which sparked my curiosity about other cultures and beliefs.

Raised in a Muslim household, I was naturally intrigued by the remnants of a different cultural and religious heritage. I often turned to my grandfather, a well-read individual with extensive knowledge of other people's cultures and beliefs. His stories, filled with historical and cultural insights, profoundly shaped my understanding of diversity and left a lasting impression on me. This early exposure to different cultural traditions led me to pursue my current academic endeavours: to study the interactions between ethnic and religious groups, particularly within interethnic marriage and cultural exchange.

As I grew older, I became increasingly curious about the Turkestan region, which has rich historical and cultural significance. I wanted to understand how different ethnic groups in this region interacted with one another, especially in their relations with ethnic Kazakhs. Those from Turkestan are often referred to as "Yujane" (southerners) in other regions of Kazakhstan. This term, originating from Russian, carries a specific cultural connotation and often implies that individuals from this area are more conservative and traditional than those from other parts of the country. This distinction from those of other regions, particularly with ethnic Kazakhs, reflects a perception that southerners adhere more strictly to traditional values, language,

religion, and social practices. Such context sparked my interest in the region.

This focus on regional differences, both in terms of cultural practices and attitudes, has deeply influenced my research. For this study, I set out to understand the factors that shape the identities of Turkestan's inhabitants and how these cultural distinctions contribute to social dynamics within Kazakhstan. In particular, I am interested in exploring how anthropological processes manifest within a multiethnic society and how individuals from various ethnic backgrounds navigate cultural differences while maintaining their own identity.

This research focuses on interethnic marriages and their role in shaping multicultural dynamics in the Turkestan region. It focuses on the cultural, social, and familial interactions between different ethnic groups, exploring processes such as assimilation, cultural preservation, and identity formation within the context of mixed-marriage families. By examining the lived experiences of interethnic couples, these endeavours aim to understand how interethnic unions influence and reflect broader patterns of ethnic relations and cultural diversity in the region.

The following hypotheses examine the multifaceted dynamics of inter-ethnic marriage within the diverse cultural landscape of the Turkestan region. They foreground the interplay between cultural adaptation, language choice, and evolving familial identities. Drawing on anthropological perspectives, they highlight how acculturation, assimilation, dissimilation, linguistic negotiation, and religious integration reshape family life and reflect broader shifts in ethnic identity and sociocultural cohesion.

Hypothesis 1: In the multicultural context of the Turkestan region, the processes of acculturation and assimilation coexist and significantly influence inter-ethnic family dynamics, particularly through the adaptation and integration of traditions, customs, and rituals. These processes guide how individuals in inter-ethnic marriages navigate their cultural identities as they blend and negotiate their inherited cultural practices within the shared cultural and geographical space.

Hypothesis 2: Interethnic marriage can result in the erosion of an ethnic group's core values and culture. Rooted in the framework of dissimilation theory, this hypothesis suggests that those who marry outside of their ethnic or cultural background distance themselves from their ethnic group as they forge a new identity within their interethnic relationship.

Hypothesis 3: In inter-ethnic marriages, language is a communication tool and a marker of ethnic identity. It is hypothesised that one language dominates daily interactions, with the choice of the dominant language influenced by factors such as family traditions, gender roles, education, social integration, and the sociolinguistic environment.

Hypothesis 4: Integrating religious practices and ethnic values is important in shaping family dynamics in inter-ethnic marriages. Couples navigate the coexistence of different

religious beliefs and ethnic identities through the negotiation, adaptation, and fusion of traditions, contributing to family stability and cohesion.

The hypotheses act as guiding principles that help us understand the key aspects of how interethnic families function. They explore ideas like how people adapt to new cultures, how traditions are blended or preserved, how language shapes communication and identity, and how religious practices contribute to family life. For instance, the first two hypotheses look at the blending of cultures and the potential loss of cultural roots, offering insights into how interethnic couples balance these dynamics. The third hypothesis focuses on language's ability to connect people and determine their identities, whereas the fourth emphasises how shared and modified religious practices can promote family stability and unity.

The research questions built on these hypotheses are shaped by examining real-life experiences: (1) How do individuals from diverse ethnic groups coexist peacefully within the multi-ethnic society of Kazakhstan? (2) How do individuals in inter-ethnic marriages negotiate and navigate cultural differences in their day-to-day interactions? (3) How do individuals from different ethnic groups coexist in the Turkestan region?

These questions aim to uncover how interethnic couples and communities deal with cultural differences, find ways to live harmoniously, and define their identities. For example, the question about peaceful coexistence in a diverse society ties closely to the ideas of cultural adaptation and integration (Hypothesis 1). Similarly, questions about how couples manage cultural differences in daily life connect directly to the roles of language (Hypothesis 3) and religion (Hypothesis 4) in shaping their shared lives. Together, the hypotheses and questions create a thoughtful and human-centred approach to understanding the complexities of interethnic marriages.

All information presented in the dissertation without explicit citations is derived from findings obtained through fieldwork and participant observation conducted during the study.

This dissertation relies on a range of research methods to deeply examine how language use, religion, national values, and key anthropological concepts on assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation processes influence the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan. Research was conducted in five villages: Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Kentau-Hantagy, and Sayram. Although I was born in South Kazakhstan, my hometown and the villages currently under study differ significantly. Each region in South Kazakhstan is known for its unique mentality, making every village in my research both new and somewhat familiar.

The first fieldwork was conducted during the summer of 2022, specifically in the country's southern regions, amidst the scorching heat and peak summer vacation period, from

June to August. Gaining the trust of the local population and collecting interviews immediately proved challenging. Therefore, the primary goal of the initial visit was to familiarise myself with the internal and external dynamics of the five targeted villages, including their people, surroundings, and general socio-cultural environment.

During this initial visit, the residents approached the research with scepticism, fear, and an assumption that it might be politically motivated. To overcome these barriers, I relied on the support of individuals who personally knew my family, including acquaintances of my grandfather and father. These individuals helped establish connections with trusted members of the targeted villages. Through their assistance and the cooperation of village administrations, facilitated by local leaders, I was granted access to the communities and their residents.

The village administrators facilitated my research by compiling a list of relevant families based on local "village passports," which included statistical and demographic data. Additionally, they assigned staff from the administration to assist me during the research process. In some instances, they even provided additional transportation. When such resources were unavailable, my husband and family offered their unwavering support, accompanying me day and night to gather the necessary data for the study.

Due to the extreme heat, which often exceeded 40 degrees Celsius, walking on some days was nearly impossible. Despite these challenges, I conducted approximately 45 interviews in over three months during my initial visit. I observed and documented over 30 different types of families, which gave me a chance to have a comprehensive overview of the target communities.

The second fieldwork phase was conducted between November 2023 and early January 2024. During this visit, I once again relied on the assistance of individuals who had supported me during the previous fieldwork. However, their capacity to provide support was limited in certain villages. This was particularly evident in the case of the Azerbaijani and Meskhetian Turk communities in Kentau, where data collection proved especially challenging.

As I was unfamiliar with them, I sensed significant scepticism from the community members despite introducing myself and explaining the research. They often refused to allow the use of recording devices, notebooks, or even pens during our conversations. Consequently, I had to rely on memory and quickly document observations and conversations in an electronic or alternative format immediately afterwards.

This difficulty was compounded by historical challenges, as highlighted by Savin's research, which notes that even during official population censuses in southern Kazakhstan, distinguishing between Azerbaijani and Meskhetian Turk communities was problematic. The recorded identities were often based solely on self-declared oral information, with individuals

choosing to identify themselves as Azerbaijani or Meskhetian Turk depending on their preference. This historical ambiguity further complicated my attempts to determine the precise ethnic identities of the families in the region.

Another notable challenge was that the information of Azerbaijani and Meskhetian Turk families was often remarkably similar. This reinforced the difficulty in distinguishing between the two groups and understanding their unique cultural dynamics. Sometimes, husbands explicitly forbade their wives from engaging with me or sharing information.

Given these obstacles, I could only collect data from 20 of 50 families in the small village cluster in Kentau, where Azerbaijani and Meskhetian Turk communities reside along two or three streets. All data collection had to be conducted without recording devices or written notes, requiring reliance on discreet, immediate documentation of observations. These factors, along with the historical complexities noted above, underscore the complex and delicate nature of ethnographic work in such settings.

By examining the aspects highlighted above, the study aims to understand how differences in culture, religion, nationality, and language intersect and influence family dynamics, gender roles, and ethnic identity within inter-ethnic unions by incorporating the previously-mentioned anthropological theories as well as other related concepts to frame the experiences of individuals in mixed-ethnicity marriages (Berry, 2005; Gordon, 1964). Qualitative and quantitative methods were used to gather in-depth, context-rich data about participants' lived experiences, especially regarding their religious and cultural practices. Semi-structured interviews were used as the primary data collection tool, allowing flexibility in exploring how participants navigate the intersections of religion, national identity, and language in their family context. These interviews detailed how participants balance and integrate religious beliefs, national values, and ethnic identities in their marriage and family life. Additionally, participant observation was utilised to observe everyday routines and religious observances within the community, particularly during family events, religious celebrations, and other significant cultural practices. This ethnographic approach provided valuable insights into cultural integration's natural, unspoken aspects (Spradley, 1980).

Two extensive fieldwork trips were conducted to collect qualitative and quantitative data. The first trip focused on establishing relationships with village administrators, gaining the necessary permissions, and building trust with the local communities, while the second focused more deeply on these issues. This groundwork was essential for facilitating smooth data collection and ensuring the study's success.

This research on inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan focused on understanding the lived experiences of families navigating cultural diversity. While collecting demographic

information such as education, occupation, and age helped establish a baseline, the qualitative data brought depth and meaning to the study. Through interviews and participant observations, the voices and stories of these families revealed how they balanced the challenges and opportunities of blending different cultural backgrounds.

The interviews often uncovered personal reflections on how cultural practices were preserved or adapted within inter-ethnic families. Participants shared their experiences with raising children in multilingual households, negotiating which holidays to celebrate, or deciding whose traditions to follow when preparing meals. These narratives showed how families deliberately honoured their cultural roots while creating shared traditions that worked for their unique situations.

Observing families in their everyday lives added another layer of understanding. Watching how they prepared traditional dishes, interacted during celebrations, and engaged with their communities revealed the subtle, unspoken ways culture influences family life. For instance, observing how children learned to navigate dual cultural identities from their parents, or how grandparents imparted their wisdom, highlighted the quiet yet powerful role of family dynamics in cultural adaptation. This qualitative approach allowed the study to transcend mere numbers and statistics, capturing the humanity behind inter-ethnic marriages. It provided a glimpse into the hearts of these families, showing how they preserve their identities while forging connections between cultures in their daily lives.

The research targeted families from several ethnic groups: Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tatars, Azerbaijanis, Meskhetian Turks, and Russians. They represent the main ethnic communities in the Turkestan region. Key areas of exploration included religious observances in daily routines, the integration of national values and ethnic identities, language use in family interactions, and the interplay between religious and ethnic values. The study also examined the influence of religious beliefs on gender roles, sexual education, and marital dynamics, particularly in cases where the spouses' religious beliefs and ethnic backgrounds differed (Seidman, 2013; Rubin, 2012).

Moreover, the semi-structured format of the interviews provided a balance between consistency and flexibility, allowing for comparative analysis and the collection of detailed personal accounts. This method facilitated a deeper understanding of how individuals navigate the complexities of identity within mixed-ethnicity marriages. All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed, and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights within the data. Through this process, the study was able to generate context-rich data that reflected the refined dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages and could contribute to a deeper understanding of cultural integration and the intersections of religion,

national identity, and family life (DiCicco-Bloom, Crabtree, 2006; Patton, 2002).

2. CONTEXTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SOCIOCULTURAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE TURKESTAN REGION

2.1. Theoretical background of the research

The analysis of interethnic marriages in the multicultural Turkestan region draws on various sociological and anthropological theories to understand how cultural identities are negotiated, preserved, and transformed within these unions. Integrating concepts such as assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation, alongside theories addressing the role of language use, national values and religion, offers a multifaceted insight into the dynamics at play in interethnic marriages, with assimilation and acculturation particularly relevant to this context. The theory of assimilation highlights cases of intercultural interaction in which individuals adopt the customs and values of another group. This bidirectional process, as Joseph Fichter emphasised, involves reciprocal cultural exchange. In interethnic marriages, assimilation highlights the creation of unified family identities, and the dominant culture frequently dictates people's experiences. Milton Gordon's structural and cultural assimilation models are especially relevant here, illustrating how shared practices and societal integration shape family dynamics.

The acculturation theory complements the abovementioned concept of assimilation, focusing on cultural interactions that lead to mutual exchange and hybridisation. John W. Berry's bidimensional acculturation model establishes a structure for understanding how couples reconcile preserving their ancestry with absorption into a dominant culture. This model explains how interethnic couples navigate their cultural differences in the Turkestan region through hybrid practices that blend traditions.

In contrast, dissimilation theory emphasises the preservation of cultural distinctiveness (Linton, 1936; Berry, 1980). Initially formulated by Ralph Linton and expanded by John Milton Yinger, dissimilation highlights how interethnic couples may reinforce boundaries to maintain cultural identity (Yinger, 1981). This is particularly evident in families such as the Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis in Turkestan, where relocation or selective integration led to the retention of unique national values. Theory on dissimilation also addresses the dynamics within interethnic families where cultural distinctiveness is intentionally preserved; for example, some families may adhere to specific rituals or linguistic practices to sustain their ethnic identity, even within a broader multicultural context.

Language is key in interethnic marriages. It influences communication and cultural identity. According to the interview results, Kazakh frequently emerges as the dominant language in Turkestan, particularly in interethnic families. This dominance is affected by social

institutions such as schools and kindergartens, which facilitate the unconscious acquisition of cultural norms. Despite this dominance, multiple languages within families preserve cultural heritage and foster a deeper connection to diverse cultural backgrounds.

Religion considerably impacts the dynamics of interethnic marriages, notably in Turkestan, where Islamic traditions coexist with various cultural and social customs. Barth's Theory of ethnic boundaries (1969) highlights how religious practices are key mechanisms for maintaining group identity. According to the research fieldwork database, in the context of Kazakh-Uzbek marriages, for example, these boundaries are preserved and negotiated through adapting Islamic traditions.

The role of religion in interethnic marriages has long intrigued scholars, as it touches on some of the most fundamental aspects of human identity: culture, community, and personal belief. Adrienne Edgar (2022) looks at how Soviet policies and Islamic traditions shaped interethnic unions in Central Asia. By weaving together historical and sociological perspectives, Edgar shows how religion and ethnicity intersected to affect marriage practices, revealing both the challenges and opportunities for integration in a politically charged environment.

Darren E. Sherkat's work (2004) gives an original viewpoint by focusing on the United States. Sherkat investigates how religious connection and engagement influence who people marry and draws on concepts such as religious homogamy and social limits. His work highlights how religion can connect and separate people and how it influences the decisions people make about their partners and the stability of their relationships. Nancy Netting (2011) explores the dynamics of navigating religious differences within inter-ethnic and interfaith marriages. She discusses how couples deal with cultural diversity by finding common ground, combining traditions, and establishing "bridges" between their religious rituals. Netting's work is particularly engaging because it emphasises the creativity and adaptability required to make these relationships work.

Stephen Sharot (2001) supplies a larger theoretical framework by investigating how religion and ethnicity interact in various circumstances. Rituals such as circumcision and other shared religious practices help mediate cultural differences, affirming common values while acknowledging ethnic distinctions. Nancy Ammerman's concept of *lived religion* (2007) is particularly relevant in this context, as women in interethnic marriages actively negotiate religious and cultural expectations in their daily lives, which influences their child-rearing practices and family roles. Religious integration plays a significant role. Islamic values offer a common framework for interethnic families. Specific practices are adapted to align with dominant cultural norms that demonstrate hybridization. National values and religious beliefs

are selectively transmitted across generations, with the dominant culture often prioritized. Broader societal attitudes in Turkestan favour same-ethnic marriages, yet interethnic unions demonstrate the potential for cultural integration and mutual respect.

Cultural practices, including rituals and celebrations, yield valuable insights into the dynamics of interethnic marriages and were thoroughly investigated through a study of key literature. This included works like Rahimov, who explored Uzbek wedding customs and highlighted their symbolic significance in fostering unity and cultural preservation. Traditions such as the *fatiha*¹, *nikah*² ceremonies are frequently adapted in interethnic marriages, and incorporate elements of both partners' cultural backgrounds (Rahimov, 2024: 8-9).

Similarly, *Navruz*³, a spring festival that transcends ethnic boundaries, illustrates how shared celebrations strengthen communal ties (www.advantour.com/uzbekistan/holidays/navruz.htm). Preparing traditional dishes such as *bashbarmak* serves as both a cultural bridge and a site of negotiation within interethnic families.

Furthermore, life-cycle rituals serve an important function in cultural integration. Masharipova (2024) investigates the *Aqiqah*⁴ ceremony in Uzbek culture, which commemorates the birth of a child. In interethnic marriages, such rituals often synthesise traditions, with Islamic principles providing a unifying framework while allowing for cultural specificity. The significance of material culture in these ceremonies is further illustrated by Nygmanova (2022), who examines the Kazakh ornaments, especially hairdresses, from a historical point of view as symbols of Kazakh identity. These items, often incorporated into weddings and other life events, symbolise the blending of cultural practices within interethnic unions.

As analyzed by Schneider (1984) and Lee (2008), kinship and marital patterns provide further insights into interethnic unions. Schneider critiques traditional kinship studies and emphasises the family structures' fluid and adaptive nature. These characteristics are evident in Turkestan's interethnic families. Lee highlights how cultural values and societal influences establish partner selection, underscoring the role of familial expectations in interethnic

¹ **Fatiha** - wedding is a small wedding held in connection with the engagement of a girl and a boy, and in some places it is also called an engagement wedding. This wedding is a ceremony that takes place after both parties have inquired about each other (where they grew up, who their parents are, origin, whether they are worthy or not), and after obtaining the consent of their parents. On the day of the "Fatiha wedding", guests gather at the bride's house, they are mainly the groom's family, some relatives and a representative of the local community or an old man-honorary elder.

² **Nikah** - is an Arabic word and is a union formed based on the consent of representatives of two sexes. That is why it is based not only on the legal obligations of two young people to each other, but also on the love and great responsibility for the family, society, and, moreover, the country where they live.

³ **Navruz** - (also spelled Nowruz) has its roots in the ancient cult of sun worship and Zoroastrianism, which were once widespread in all of Persia and Central Asia. Navruz first received official status under the Achaemenid Dynasty in the 4th-5th centuries BC, at which time it evolved from an agricultural ritual into a Zoroastrian holiday.

⁴ **Aqiqah** is a ceremony held in connection with the arrival of a "new guest" in the family, i.e. a baby, 7, 14 or 21 days after his birth. Sometimes they spend the time before the child reaches adulthood. Aqiqah is a custom in Muslim families that involves naming a newborn child and clipping the "belly hair" (the baby's hair at birth).

marriages. Moreover, Tursynbayeva (2016) discusses celebrations such as National Unity Day, which exemplify how communal narratives and shared values promote cohesion in diverse communities.

Education and social systems further reflect the historical and cultural transmission of national values within the Turkestan population. By exploring these interconnected dynamics, it becomes clear how religion and cultural practices significantly determine the formation and evolution of interethnic marriages. These insights present a deeper understanding of identity, integration, and the delicate balance between cultural preservation and adaptation within the Turkestan region (Abdinassir, 2022).

Nancy Ammerman's concept of lived religion expands on this perspective. She focuses on how everyday religious practices are dynamically experienced. In the context of interethnic marriages, women often hold a significant position in harmonising religious and cultural expectations, particularly in areas such as child-rearing and familial traditions. This dynamic aligns with Redfield's theory of acculturation (1936), which underscores the hybridisation of cultural and religious practices through prolonged interaction.

Paul Vermeer's research on parent-child religious transmission (2014) further enriches this analysis. In mixed marriages, the negotiation of religious values across generations fosters either singular or fluid religious identities. Vermeer's emphasis on the dynamic nature of religious socialisation is evident in how families in Turkestan adapt Islamic principles to reflect both partners' cultural heritage.

Preserving and transmitting national values are integral to interethnic marriages, functioning not in isolation but through interconnected theoretical perspectives. Rather than applying cultural theories separately, a more holistic analytical approach reveals how these frameworks complement and reinforce one another in explaining the nuanced dynamics of interethnic unions.

Bourdieu's cultural capital theory (1986) offers a foundational understanding by framing national values as cultural assets that enrich familial identity and social standing. In the context of Turkestan, interview data and participant observation show that shared language, traditions, and customs act as key instruments of cohesion in multiethnic communities, functioning as cultural capital that sustains social ties within families and neighbourhoods.

This interpretation is further strengthened through a structural-functionalist lens, as proposed by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. Their theory helps elucidate how cultural rituals and familial roles within interethnic marriages contribute to societal stability. Here, the theoretical insights of cultural capital and structural-functionalism align, demonstrating that the continuity of family values also serves collective societal functions.

Simultaneously, social identity theory (Tajfel, Turner, 1986) adds depth by emphasising how individuals derive self-concept from group affiliations, particularly ethnic identities. This identity is often negotiated within interethnic marriages, resulting in hybrid cultural expressions. For instance, in Kazakh-Uzbek unions, families may prioritise Kazakh traditions while selectively incorporating elements of Uzbek heritage, which illustrates how identity is continuously shaped and redefined.

This evolving cultural landscape aligns with Stuart Hall's theory of cultural hybridity (1990), which captures identity's fluid and dynamic nature in mixed cultural contexts. In interethnic marriages, couples often co-construct new traditions that embody the cultural legacies of both partners. This hybridity is especially evident among younger generations in Turkestan, who increasingly embrace multicultural values. Practices such as combined religious and national celebrations not only symbolize this transformation but also serve as markers of a generational shift toward cultural inclusivity.

The integration of these frameworks becomes particularly visible in ethnographic cases such as interethnic families in Shornak village. Fieldwork indicates that Kazakh cultural norms often dominate daily family practices, especially within patriarchal family structures. Yet, interviews also highlight mutual adaptation, where spouses learn to navigate and respect each other's traditions. Even in households where the wife is of Uzbek origin, family rituals and language usage often reflect a negotiated identity, balancing ancestral customs with emerging shared values.

Furthermore, theories of assimilation, acculturation, dissimilation, and hybridity provide a comprehensive lens through which these processes can be examined. Interethnic marriages in the Turkestan region thus represent more than private unions—they are dynamic sites of cultural negotiation, blending, and preservation. By synthesising these theoretical perspectives rather than treating them in isolation, the present study offers a more multifaceted understanding of identity formation, cultural integration, and social cohesion in complex multicultural societies.

2.2. Understanding Turkestan: Geography, history, demography and population

The Turkestan region in southern Kazakhstan stands out as a unique area rich in cultural diversity, historical significance, and geographical variety. Formerly known as the South Kazakhstan region until 2018, Turkestan has long been a principal point of sociocultural and administrative transformation. Following a presidential decree in 2018, the region was renamed and restructured, with Turkestan City designated as its administrative centre. Shymkent attains

the status of a city with special administrative status and separates from the region's jurisdiction (QazaqGeography, 2022).

Turkestan covers an area of 116,280 square kilometres, comprising 4.3% of Kazakhstan's total area. It shares borders with Karaganda in the north, Zhambyl in the east, Kyzylorda in the west, and Uzbekistan in the south. The region is characterised by a diverse topography that includes the Betpak Dala desert in the north, the Myrzashol plain in the south, and prominent mountain ranges like Karatau, Talas Alatau, and Ugam, with the region's highest peak, Sayram, rising to 4,299 meters. Hydrographically, Turkestan is traversed by major rivers such as the Syr Darya and Shu, which play an important role in sustaining its ecosystem and agricultural activities. Its sharply continental climate shapes its inhabitants' lifestyles and economic practices (Picture 1).



Picture 1. *Kazakhstan and the Turkestan Region.*

Source: <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/30611190.html>

The region was established on March 10, 1932, under the Kazakh ASSR and was initially named the South Kazakh region before officially becoming South Kazakhstan in 1936. Its boundaries were adjusted over the decades, with portions ceded to the Kyzylorda region in 1938 (<https://qazaqgeography.kz/en/turkestan-oblast-22103343>).



Picture 2. Administrative map of the Turkestan Region.

Source: <https://ru.sputnik.kz/20180621/karta-kazakhstan-izmneniya-6112704.html>

As previously mentioned, in 2018, when the Turkestan region was renamed South Kazakhstan, its population stood at 2,950,554 (Picture 2). As of 1st October 2024, the population of Turkestan is 2,153,600, with 540,300 residents (25.1%) living in urban areas and 1,613,300 residents (74.9%) residing in rural areas. The Turkestan region comprises a diverse mix of urban and rural settlements, organised into 14 administrative districts and three cities under regional jurisdiction. In recent years, significant investments in infrastructure and cultural development have transformed the city of Turkestan into a spiritual and cultural hub of Kazakhstan, with state-funded modernisation projects totalling 175,902.2 million tenge in 2021 alone (<https://stat.gov.kz/region/turkestan/>). The observed discrepancy in population figures may be attributed to administrative and territorial restructuring within the region, which can notably influence statistical reporting. It is also important to note that this study focuses on a limited number of rural settlements near the regional centre, Turkestan city, and does not aim to represent the entire region. (<https://qazaqgeography.kz/kz/turkistan-oblysy-211650>).

Turkestan is home to a diverse population representing various ethnicities, including Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Russians, and others. These physical and demographic traits support the region's reputation as a cosmopolitan hub, which offers ideal conditions for studies on

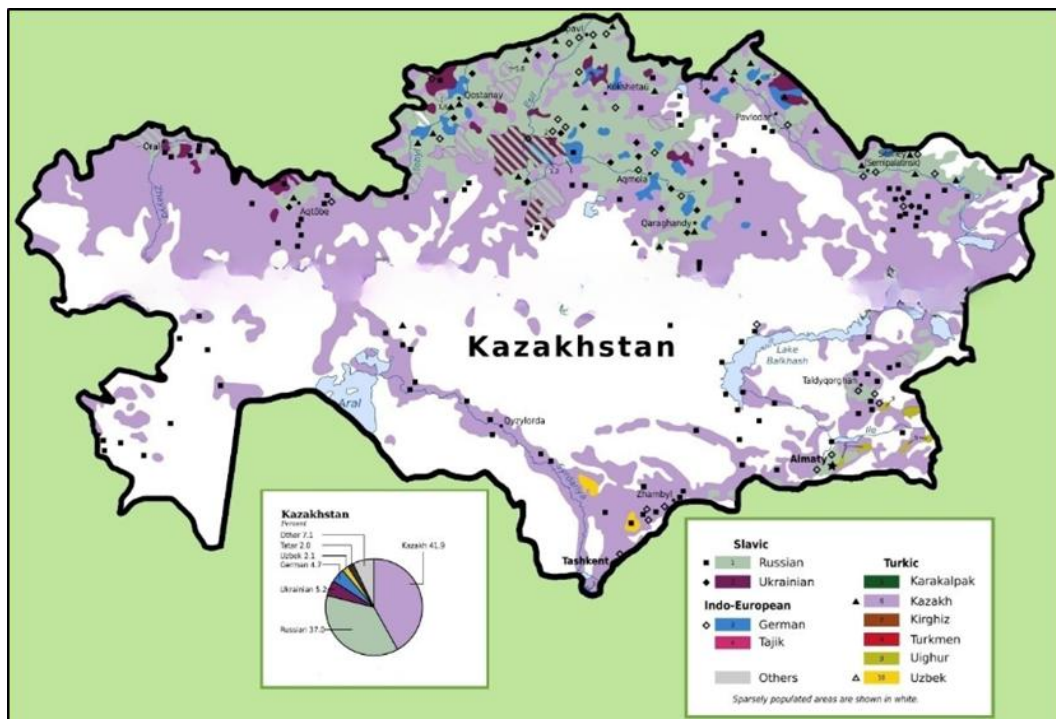
interethnic marriages, integration, and cultural interaction. These aspects also make it an ideal setting for studying the intersections of historical legacy, social structures, and cultural integration. The Turkestan region is home to many ethnic groups, including 24 Turkic peoples.

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of the population of different ethnic groups in the region between 2019 and 2020. As can be seen, the total population increased from 1,983,967 in 2019 to 2,016,037 in 2020. Among the groups, Kazakhs constitute the majority, followed by Uzbeks, with both experiencing consistent population growth. Smaller groups such as Russians, Azerbaijanis, and Turks show slight variations in their numbers, while Ukrainians and Germans, being the smallest communities, experienced minor declines. The data reflect the region's diversity and demographic dynamics during the observed period.

Table 1. *Population Data by Ethnic Group (2019 and 2020)*. Source: Stat.gov.kz, 2020.

Ethnic group	Population (2019)	Population (2020)
Kazakhs	1508219	1531716
Uzbeks	336645	344937
Russians	35523	34968
Azerbaijanis	18539	18707
Tajiks	36831	37640
Tatars	7892	7817
Turks	16438	16638
Ukrainians	904	785
Germans	1296	1275

The comparison of these figures highlights the notable changes in the demographic composition of the region. Notably, the populations of Kazakhs and Uzbeks saw significant growth, while those of Russians, Ukrainians, Germans, and other groups decreased. Among Turkic-speaking peoples, fluctuations were also observed in the numbers of Azerbaijanis and Turks. These trends reflect evolving ethnic dynamics within the region. (www.eurasian-research.org/publication/turkistan-bolgesinin-etno-demografik-durumu-yonleri-ve-donusumu/?lang=mn) (Picture 3).



Picture 3. *Map of Kazakhstan's Ethnic Composition.*

Source: <https://ontheworldmap.com/kazakhstan/map-of-ethnic-groups-in-kazakhstan.html>

Table 2 presents the population distribution in the Turkestan region and the City of Turkestan at the beginning of 2021. It illustrates a diverse demographic composition with distinct patterns of ethnic representation. The region is predominantly populated by Kazakhs, who represent a clear majority both in the broader region and within the city. This demographic dominance underscores the region's profound historical and cultural alignment with Kazakh identity.

Uzbeks represent the second-largest ethnic group in the region and the city. This highlights their significant role in shaping the area's social and cultural fabric. Their proportion in the city is particularly notable, suggesting an urban connection and a concentrated presence within Turkestan.

Other ethnic groups, including Russians, Azerbaijanis, and Tatars, contribute to the diversity of the population. Though smaller in number, these communities maintain a presence in both the region and the city. Their relatively lower numbers in the urban centre compared to the rural areas may reflect variations in settlement preferences shaped by historical, cultural, or socio-economic factors.

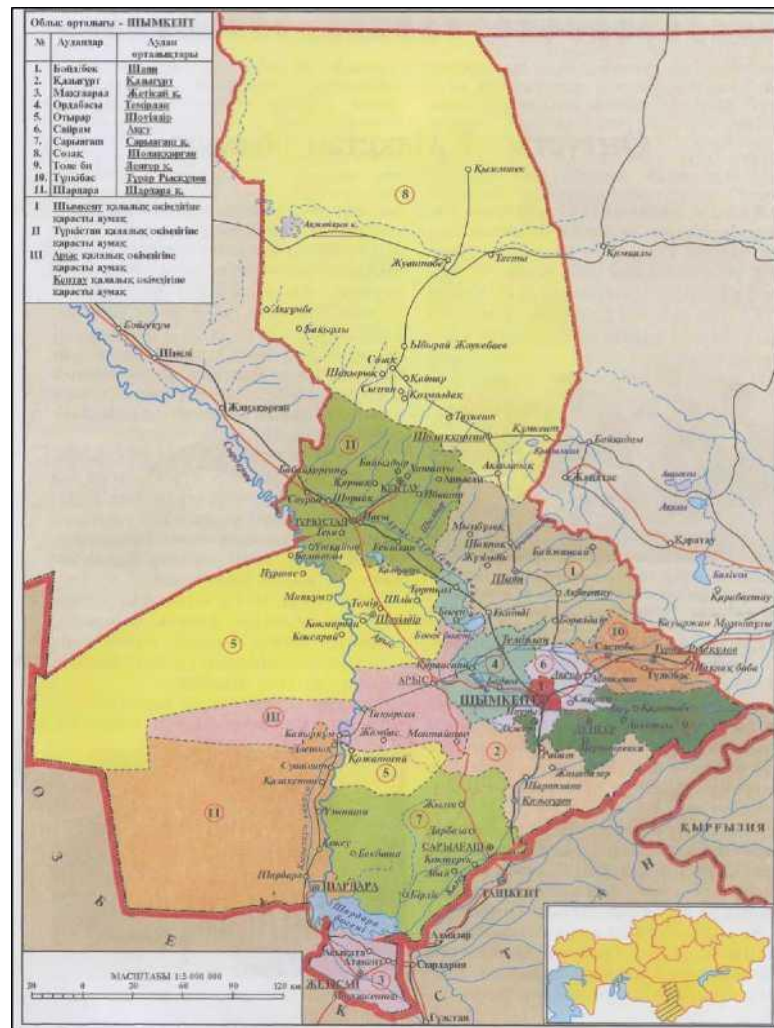
Table 2. *Individual ethnic groups will determine the population of the Turkestan region and Turkestan city at the beginning of 2021.* Source: www.stat.gov.kz

N	Nationalities	Turkestan region	Turkestan city
1	All nationalities	2 044 742	179 742
2	Kazakhs	1 550 594	125 425
3	Uzbeks	353 946	49 170
4	Russians	34 583	1 506
5	Azerbaijanis	18 857	408
6	Tajiks	38 508	97
7	Tatars	7 698	698
8	Turks	16 887	1 852
9	Koreans	1 967	42
10	Ukrainians	691	10
11	Kurds	6 725	15
12	Germans	1 252	1
13	Uighurs	2 391	60
14	Persians	3 745	16
15	Chechens	948	1
16	Kyrgyz	1 764	92
17	Greeks	397	26
18	Bashkir	330	5
19	Others	3 459	318

Typically, interethnic relations within large communities are characterised by members' alignment with a shared set of values such as speaking a common language, identifying with a shared homeland, adhering to the same religion, and observing specific cultural traditions. Members of an ethnic group engage in practices rooted in their historical culture in their daily lives.

Description of research villages. Turning to the basic description of the research settlements, the first village examined is Zhana Iqan (Жаңа Иқан ауылдық округі), which serves as an administrative unit within the Sauran district of the Turkestan region (Picture 4). According to the 2009 census, the population of the district was 6,253. The Uzbeks in the area live in close contact with the local Kazakh population. The village is also called the "Uzbek

village” (Nysanbayev, 1998). The residents of Zhana Iqan in Turkestan mainly live in crop cultivation and livestock farming. In recent years, an increasing number of rural inhabitants have taken loans from the state to support their agricultural activities (Kazakh Encyclopedia, 2005).



Picture 4. Map of Turkestan region.

Source: https://www.neweurasia.info/archive/wh_is_wh/47.html

The second research site was the *Shornak* rural district, an administrative unit of the Sauran district of the Turkestan region. According to the 2009 census, the population of the district was 11,102. The rural district is often called the "Kazakh-Uzbek village" among the locals. Historically, Shornak became a site for agricultural activities and served as a center for cotton-picking, a supply point for the Turkestan ginning plant, and a grain receiving station. Farms were later established based on this infrastructure (Census, 2009).

The third research site was a rural district in the Turkestan region known as "Turkish settlement" (Түркі поселкасы), which Turkic people, specifically Meskhetian Turks, primarily

inhabit. Although the official name of the area is Bekzat, it is locally referred to as the "Turkish settlement" due to the predominant presence of Turkic populations. While the settlement is home to various ethnic groups, Turks comprise most of the area. Information about this rural district is scarce in online and territorial databases; however, fieldwork research, including data from the village's administrative sources, offered insights into the settlement's demographic and geographical characteristics.

Kentau served as the fourth research site. A city under the regional jurisdiction of the Turkestan region, it is located at the southern foot of the *Karatau* ridge, 24 km northeast of the city of Turkestan and 190 km from Shymkent, and has a population of 67,713. The administrative jurisdiction of the city includes several villages, including Achisay (2176 residents), Bayaldyr (1528 residents), Hantagy (6364 residents), and Karnak, which possesses the central village of Karnak and the village of Kushata (11,703 residents) (Ayagan, 2005). Among the locations mentioned, our focus will be on Kentau-Hantagy, as this area has a higher representation of ethnic Tatars and Russians than the other villages under study, making it particularly relevant for our research. Kentau stands out from the rest as it is a larger urban settlement – a city of regional significance in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan. Situated at the southern foothills of the Karatau Range, it is located 24 km northeast of Turkestan. Hantagy, in turn, is a small village within the administrative boundaries of Kentau. The combined designation "Kentau-Hantagy" is used in this research for simplicity.

The decision to focus on this area stems from its demographic diversity, which aligns closely with the study's objectives. The significant presence of Tatars and Russians in Kentau-Hantagy offers a unique opportunity to examine inter-ethnic dynamics in a setting that combines urban and rural characteristics.

The last research site, Sayram, formerly classified as a village within the Sayram district of the Turkestan region, is approximately 10 kilometres east of Shymkent along the Sayram Su River. With over 40,000 residents, Sayram holds significant historical importance as one of Kazakhstan's notable cultural and historical centres (www.fergananews.com/articles/8294). The inclusion of Sayram in this research, despite its distance from the city of Turkestan, is due to its relevance to the study's focus. According to information obtained from the administration in Turki Poselkasy, some Turkish individuals who married into other ethnic groups later relocated to Sayram. Upon learning that certain families had initially resided in Turki Poselkasy before moving to Sayram, seeking them for interviews became necessary.

Furthermore, interviews with additional Turk Meskhetian families in Sayram provided rich and valuable data and offered more profound insights into the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages within this community. This inclusion enhances the study's scope and connects

broader regional patterns with the specific experiences of relocated families.

2.3. Key information about the interview participants

Following the provision of essential details such as the study area, its geography, population, and other key statistical data, it was deemed appropriate to present the findings derived from the conducted research in this section. The demographic and socio-educational profiles of the participants are one of the basic key parts of understanding the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region. This analysis employs a mixed-methods approach and integrates quantitative data, such as numerical breakdowns of gender, age, and education, with qualitative insights gathered during interviews. This combination allows for a holistic examination of the participants' lived experiences and the broader socio-cultural dynamics.

This section draws on two phases of fieldwork conducted in diverse communities and highlights important details about the participants, such as their gender, age, ethnic background, marital status, socioeconomic conditions, and educational levels. These profiles present a rich and layered view of how generational differences, cultural traditions, and access to education shape participants' perspectives on cultural adaptation and inter-ethnic relationships.

The study links participants' reactions to real-life surroundings by examining these narratives, demonstrating how social and demographic aspects influence their experiences. This approach reveals the important roles that education, employment, and religion play in informing and guiding the process of identity creation in shaping identity, fostering integration, and negotiating cultural values within inter-ethnic marriages. Together, these insights provide a deeper and more holistic understanding of the region's family life and cultural adaptation.

The first phase of fieldwork, involving 45 participants, provides critical insights into the demographic and educational characteristics of individuals engaged in inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region. This section analyses the collected data and emphasises patterns that reveal the intersection of age, education, and cultural adaptation within these unions.

The participant pool included 23 women and 22 men, which reflected a near-equal gender balance. However, one participant was represented solely by the wife, as the husband declined to participate in the interview. This underscores the potential influence of gender dynamics on willingness to engage in research on sensitive topics like inter-ethnic marriages. The balanced gender representation facilitates a comprehensive understanding of perspectives from both male and female participants, enriching the analysis of inter-ethnic marital practices.

The ethnic composition of participants was diverse, including Uzbeks (10), Kazakhs (15), Russians (5), Azerbaijanis (4), Tatars (6), and Turk Meskhetians (4). This diversity

highlights the multi-ethnic fabric of the Turkestan region and its influence on inter-ethnic marriage trends. The predominance of Kazakh and Uzbek participants reflects the larger demographic makeup of the region, while the inclusion of smaller ethnic groups like Tatars and Turk Meskhetians points to the long-standing coexistence of various communities in the area. These dynamics underscore the region's historical and cultural interconnectedness, where inter-ethnic marriages often serve as a bridge between communities.

The participants' ages ranged from 21 to 70 years. They encompass a broad generational spectrum. However, the majority (34 participants) fell within the 25–40 age group, representing 17 families. This concentration in the younger and middle-aged cohort aligns with the life stages of active engagement in marital and familial responsibilities. The age distribution also suggests that younger generations are more open to inter-ethnic unions, potentially influenced by modern educational opportunities and exposure to diverse cultural practices. Conversely, the older participants (48–65 years) are more likely to reflect traditional perspectives shaped by earlier sociopolitical contexts.

Out of the 45 families studied, only nine were homogeneous (both partners from the same ethnic group), while the remaining 36 families were inter-ethnic. This high prevalence of inter-ethnic marriages underscores the region's unique sociocultural dynamics, where cross-cultural unions are accepted and actively practised. The data further reveals a pattern of integration and adaptation among families, as inter-ethnic marriages necessitate negotiation of cultural identities and values.

Employment data indicates that over 30 participants were employed in various sectors, reflecting a stable socioeconomic profile. However, a significant proportion of women (13 out of 23) were unemployed. This highlighted gender disparities in workforce participation. Such a pattern suggests that while men may contribute more visibly to household income, women often play a critical role in maintaining cultural and family practices, including those within inter-ethnic unions. The socioeconomic diversity among participants points to varying degrees of access to resources and opportunities, which likely shape their experiences of inter-ethnic marriage.

Religious identity is another significant factor influencing inter-ethnic marriage dynamics. This distribution reflects the region's historical Islamic influence, with smaller Christian and secular minorities (Table 3). The high proportion of Muslim participants is consistent with the demographic composition of the Turkestan region. The coexistence of different religious identities within inter-ethnic marriages highlights the potential for cultural and spiritual negotiation, particularly in households with differing religious practices.

Table 3. *Participants information from the fieldwork of 2022.* Source: Author.

Category	Details
Gender distribution	23 women, 22 men; one participant represented only by the wife due to the husband's non-participation.
Ethnic background	Uzbeks: 10, Kazakhs: 15, Russians: 5, Azerbaijanis: 4, Tatars: 6, Turk Meskhetians: 4.
Age range	21–70 years old; majority (34 participants) aged 25–40, representing 17 families.
Marital status	Of 45 families, 9 were homogeneous; the rest were inter-ethnic marriages.
Socioeconomic status	30+ employed participants; 13 of the 23 women were unemployed.
Religious affiliation	Islam: 36, Christianity: 6, Atheism: 3.
Educational background	Secondary School Graduates: 5 (ages 48–65); High School Graduates: 9; College Graduates: 8; University Graduates: 23.

The educational distribution underscores how generational and regional disparities in access to education shape participants' attitudes toward inter-ethnic relationships. Higher education appears to correlate with greater openness and adaptability, while lower education levels are associated with stronger ties to traditional practices. The demographic and educational profiles derived from the first fieldwork phase provide a foundational understanding of the participants' contexts. The data highlights key patterns, including the predominance of interethnic marriages. This emphasises regional cultural integration. Generational and educational divides shape attitudes toward cultural adaptation and identity negotiation.

To complement the initial findings, the second phase of fieldwork, conducted in 2024, provided additional demographic and socio-educational data about the participants and offered a comprehensive understanding of their contexts. This section presents the key characteristics of the interview participants, focusing on gender, age, ethnic background, educational attainment, and other factors that influence their perspectives on cultural adaptation and inter-ethnic relationships.

Examining these profiles aims to uncover how age, gender, and education shape participants' views and responses. This approach highlights the socio-cultural dynamics within

Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian communities and reveals broader integration and identity negotiation patterns in the Turkestan region. The detailed exploration of these factors facilitates a deeper understanding of the complex realities underpinning inter-ethnic marriages, which enriched the study's anthropological perspective.

In this phase, the gender distribution was balanced with 20 women and 20 men among the 40 participants. This parity supports the continuation of a well-rounded exploration of perspectives from both genders, which is critical for understanding family roles and dynamics in inter-ethnic marriages. However, it was noted that older women, particularly from Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian families, were less likely to be employed as they reflected traditional gender roles and familial expectations.

The ethnic composition of participants highlighted a strong presence of Kazakhs (16), Azerbaijanis (10), Turk Meskhetians (8), and Uzbeks (6). This diversity underscores the rich multi-ethnic fabric of the Turkestan region, with Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian participants playing a prominent role in this phase. These groups bring unique cultural dynamics to the study and offer further evidence of the region's deeply interconnected communities (Table 4).

Participants ranged in age from 23 to 65 years, with a noticeable concentration in the younger and middle-aged cohorts. This aligns with the findings of the first fieldwork, where participants predominantly fell within active marital and familial life stages. Including younger participants provides insights into evolving attitudes toward inter-ethnic marriages, while older participants reflect more traditional perspectives shaped by historical and socio-political contexts.

Of the 40 families studied, 10 were homogeneous (same ethnicity), while 30 were inter-ethnic marriages. This distribution reaffirms the prevalence of inter-ethnic unions in the region, particularly within Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian communities. The high proportion of inter-ethnic marriages illustrates the ongoing cultural integration and adaptation processes central to the Turkestan region's social fabric.

Among the participants, 12 of the 20 women were unemployed, predominantly older Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian women. This reflects the influence of age and traditional gender roles within these communities, where women often prioritise household responsibilities over external employment. Employed participants were typically younger and more likely to come from families with higher educational attainment, indicating a shift toward broader socioeconomic participation in the younger generation.

Table 4. *Participants' information from the fieldwork of 2024.* Source: Author

Category	Details
Gender distribution	20 women, 20 men.
Ethnic background	Kazakhs: 16, Uzbeks: 6, Azerbaijanis: 10, Turk Meskhetians: 8.
Age range	23–65 years old; most participants were younger or middle-aged.
Marital status	10 homogeneous marriages, 30 inter-ethnic marriages.
Socioeconomic status	12 of 20 women were unemployed, predominantly older Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian women, due to traditional gender roles.
Religious affiliation	All participants identified as Muslim.
Educational background	University Graduates: 15; College Graduates: 9; High School Graduates: 12; Secondary School Graduates: 4 (3 older women and 1 older man).

All 40 participants identified as Muslim, consistent with the religious demographics of the Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian communities. This unanimity highlights the significant role of Islamic values in shaping marital practices and inter-ethnic relationships. It offers a lens through which to examine shared cultural and spiritual frameworks across diverse ethnic groups.

The educational attainment of participants in the second phase presents an intriguing contrast to the first fieldwork: university graduates, 15 participants, indicating a moderate level of higher education among the group. College graduates include 9 participants. They represent those with vocational or specialised training. There are also 12 high school graduates. They reflect the foundational educational level prevalent in rural areas. The remaining are secondary school graduates, with 4 participants comprising three older women and one older man, highlighting limited educational opportunities for previous generations. Participants' educational backgrounds reflect generational and geographical inequalities, with younger participants having higher levels of education. This suggests that younger generations benefit from expanded educational access and are more likely to embrace adaptive and integrative approaches in inter-ethnic marriages.

The combined results of the two phases highlight consistent patterns and unique distinctions: inter-ethnic marriages dominate. Both phases demonstrate the prevalence of inter-

ethnic unions, with a higher proportion observed in the second phase (75% versus 80% inter-ethnic marriages). This emphasises the region's dynamic cultural integration. For gender roles, traditional gender roles continue to influence employment patterns, particularly among older women in Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian communities. These roles remain a significant factor in shaping familial dynamics and cultural preservation. Concerning educational attainment, the second phase reflects slightly lower levels of higher education than the first. This is potentially influenced by focusing on the Azerbaijani and Turk Meskhetian communities. However, the trend toward increasing educational opportunities for younger generations is evident in both phases. About cultural adaptation and identity, the religious and ethnic diversity observed in both fieldworks underscores the importance of cultural adaptation and identity negotiation within inter-ethnic marriages. These processes remain central to integrating different traditions and values within family units.

2.4. Marriage and family dynamics in Turkestan

Interethnic marriages have long played a significant role in shaping Kazakhstan's social and cultural identity. During the Soviet era, these unions were viewed as instrumental for the creation of a unified "Soviet people" to integrate diverse ethnic groups under a shared set of values and traditions. The Soviet model of multiculturalism promoted mutual respect and cooperation among different ethnicities, which contributed to the widespread acceptance of interethnic marriages (Zhumamurat, 2022). However, following the collapse of the USSR and the subsequent rise of Kazakh nationalism, there has been a noticeable shift towards preserving ethnic "purity" and traditional cultural values. As a result, inter-ethnic marriages began to attract more scrutiny, particularly from those with stronger nationalistic sentiments toward preserving ethnic boundaries and identities rather than promoting multiculturalism. James Clifford's concept of the "predicament of culture" (1988) is beneficial for understanding these dynamics. Clifford examines individuals' challenges when negotiating multiple cultural identities, particularly in hybridity and cultural exchange contexts. This is especially relevant in Turkestan, where the ongoing negotiation of ethnic identity within inter-ethnic marriages mirrors Clifford's observations on the complexities of belonging and alienation. Despite growing nationalistic sentiments, the ongoing integration of diverse ethnic groups in regions like Turkestan suggests an ongoing process of cultural negotiation wherein shared identity and mutual respect are maintained through intermarriage. This reflects Clifford's assertion that identity is fluid and subject to continuous negotiation, particularly in multi-ethnic and multicultural settings (Clifford, 1988).

Kazakhstan's status as a multiethnic state is closely tied to its commitment to fostering interethnic harmony and ensuring the well-being of all its citizens. This is especially evident in the enduring sense of community and shared identity observed in regions like Turkestan, where ethnic groups such as Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, and Russians have coexisted for centuries. A structural-functionalist perspective highlights the key role of such marriages in maintaining social cohesion. Although their numbers have diminished compared to previous years, a portion of the community continues to reside here. Many residents regard the ethnic groups in the Turkestan region as members of a unified community, reflecting a regional identity that transcends ethnic boundaries. This shared ethos aligns with the hospitality and openness for which Kazakh society is widely recognised (Kymlicka, 1995).

Despite this inclusive position, the dynamics of interethnic marriages are undergoing significant changes. While such unions were historically encouraged as a symbol of unity, especially during the Soviet era, a growing emphasis on preserving national identity has led to diverging attitudes across generations and social groups. In Turkestan, for example, the perception of mixed marriages is influenced by factors such as age, cultural background, and social status.

To enhance understanding of the broader context of this study, this section of the dissertation brings vivid descriptions and an exploration of the general characteristics that define local practices and traditions within mixed marriages in the southern part of Kazakhstan, particularly in the research sites. In this subchapter, the author focuses on these identified aspects; in contrast, subsequent sections of the dissertation will delve into detailed case studies and specific examples to provide further depth and context to the findings.

Characterized by its multiethnic composition, the region reflects the diverse cultural backgrounds of its inhabitants, each with distinct characteristics and daily practices. Central to this diversity is the marriage system, which shows how various ethnic groups have coexisted and shaped one another's cultural traditions and social structures.

This perspective resonates with Adrienne Edgar's (2022) study on Soviet Central Asia, where she demonstrates that inter-ethnic marriages served as both expressions of ideological unity and sites of private cultural negotiation. Through oral history research in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, Edgar shows that families in mixed marriages often internalised Soviet ideals of "friendship of peoples," yet simultaneously reinterpreted them through household-level practices of cultural blending, resistance, and adaptation (Edgar, 2022).

According to V. L. Kozlov's research, mixed marriages reflect the evolving ethnic processes within a society, leading to language changes, shifts in lifestyles, cultural transformations, and shifts in identity. Over time, the children of mixed marriages may identify

with only one parent's ethnic background, which demonstrates the gradual dissolution of ethnic lines within communities (Kozlov, 1982).

Moreover, the present study identifies rituals and traditions that are shared across ethnic groups, while also recognizing variations in their expression within different societal contexts. National values, historical legacies, and cultural beliefs unique to each group may impact these distinctions. This is echoed in the research of Pelkmans and Umetbaeva (2018), who argue that in Kyrgyz–Russian marriages, ethnic boundaries are not static but are performed and redefined depending on social context. They emphasise that inter-ethnic couples often strategically highlight or suppress aspects of their cultural identity to navigate social expectations, gender roles, or political environments—patterns that are similarly observable in southern Kazakhstan.

Drawing on van Gennep's research, which underscores how these rituals serve as important transitions in an individual's social life and mark significant stages such as marriage or childbirth, an individual moves through the separation, liminality, and incorporation phases. Although social norms and local beliefs often overlap among ethnic groups, there are instances where they diverge, especially in how rituals are performed or understood. Another important goal of this study is to investigate and understand the underlying causes of these similarities and differences, considering how they are affected by shared human experiences and culturally specific values (Gennep, 1960).

Having explored the historical trajectories of marriage, we now turn to the current legal framework and institutional procedures governing marriage in Kazakhstan. We will examine how these norms are interpreted and practised in everyday life across different regions.

In Kazakhstan, marriage is legally recognised as a union between a man and a woman, established through mutual and voluntary consent. It must be officially registered with civil authorities to be valid. The legal framework emphasises equality between spouses: men and women have equal rights and responsibilities, and any restriction of women's rights is prohibited. This ensures that women are not confined to domestic roles and can pursue education, careers, and business activities alongside their partners.

Marriage decisions must be free from coercion, deception, or pressure. The legal minimum age for marriage is 18, although it may be lowered by up to two years with parental consent under specific circumstances, such as pregnancy or military service. Couples are also encouraged to undergo voluntary medical consultations on reproductive and genetic health before marriage.

While the law guarantees freedom of partner choice regardless of ethnicity, religion, or language, traditional norms remain influential, especially in rural areas. Moral and cultural expectations, such as respect for elders, kinship solidarity, and male leadership in the

household, often shape family structures. These cultural values coexist with state law, shaping how families function and forming and negotiating interethnic marriages.

This duality—between legal equality and enduring traditional roles—plays a significant role in the motivations and social dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages, particularly in regions like Turkestan, where Kazakh cultural identity holds a dominant position within multiethnic communities (https://adilet.zan.kz/kaz/docs/P070001269_).

While Kazakhstan’s national legal framework guarantees equal rights and responsibilities for men and women in marriage, the actual interpretation and implementation of these laws often differ across regions. In southern Kazakhstan, particularly in areas bordering Uzbekistan, traditional norms surrounding marriage continue to play a significant role in shaping family practices and expectations, sometimes diverging from official legal principles.

A prominent example of this divergence is the strong cultural emphasis on early marriage for girls. Although the minimum legal age for marriage is 18, families in the region often encourage daughters to marry shortly after reaching this threshold. In local perception, the most desirable age for women to marry is typically between 19 and 25, which is believed to reflect the optimal balance between physical attractiveness, reproductive health, and suitability for family life. Parents and community elders frequently view early marriage as securing a "good" husband and ensuring the daughter’s future stability and respectability.

Cultural ties with neighbouring Uzbekistan often explain this tendency, wherein similar marriage patterns prevail. Early marriage is seen not only as a social ideal but also as a preventive measure against the stigmatization associated with delayed marriage. As girls grow older, the chances of finding a “suitable” match are perceived to diminish, leading to standard societal labels such as “left behind” (*otyryp qalğan*) or “old maid” (*käri qyz*), which carry strong negative connotations in the local context.

J. Cole’s (2020) analysis of kinship and marriage in Botswana provides a compelling framework for understanding the layered nature of marital arrangements—not only as emotional or familial bonds but as deeply embedded in state structures and national ideologies. As Cole asserts, “marriage is neither an entirely individual matter nor an entirely familial one. Rather, marriage has long been central to how states regulate their populations and constitute national belonging.” This insight resonates strongly with the dynamics explored in the present study, where inter-ethnic marriages are shaped by both intimate choices and broader cultural-political forces. However, in the context of this research, the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriage are shaped not only by the state’s general stance on marriage, but also by local mentalities and forms of social pressure that emerge from the influence of neighboring ethnic groups and the territorial specificities of borderland regions (Cole, 2020).

In addition to these social pressures, early marriage is often justified on biomedical and reproductive grounds. Young women are taught that early childbirth ensures better health outcomes and preserves fertility, while delaying childbirth is viewed with suspicion. These beliefs are deeply embedded in family upbringing and shape generational attitudes toward female life trajectories.

During fieldwork, this was reflected in an interview with a 52-year-old woman from a Kazakh-Uzbek mixed family, who explained:

“My daughter is still young and does not fully understand life yet, so if she marries the man we recommend, into the family we choose, the chances of her happiness are much higher. That is why we teach our daughters to trust our judgment and accept the partner we suggest. Sometimes, our close family friends ask to match their sons with our daughters. If the girl is very young, some even perform the ‘qulaq tisteu’ [‘ear-biting’] ceremony — a symbolic ritual of engagement practised while the children are still infants. This custom of besik quda — cradle matchmaking — continues today” (interview, 2023).

Such practices illustrate the persistence of customary systems in shaping marital decision-making. Legally, individuals have the right to choose a partner. Despite this, familial and cultural authority often remain central in determining the outcome of a marriage, especially for daughters. These patterns reflect the interplay between national legislation and regional mentalities, highlighting how legal rights are often mediated through local cultural logics, religious values, and gendered expectations.

Ultimately, the coexistence of state-based legal equality and culturally sanctioned early marriage norms underscores the complexity of marital life in southern Kazakhstan, where tradition, family authority, and evolving notions of identity intersect in dynamic and sometimes conflicting ways.

2.5. Some types of marital practice in Southern Kazakhstan

One of the general characteristics of a marital practice in the southern part of Kazakhstan was bride kidnapping, a custom that symbolises a transition in marital status. This practice can be divided into two categories: cases in which the bride consents, often due to economic or social constraints that prevent a more formal wedding, and cases in which the woman initially

does not consent but, out of respect for local customs and elders, agrees to the marriage. In both scenarios, the woman undergoes a social transition from her previous role to her new status as a wife, illustrating the liminal phase in van Gennep's model, in which she is no longer considered single but is not yet fully incorporated into married life until the marriage is formalized. Despite the custom's controversial nature, many families formed in this way have flourished, and it remains a part of the personal histories of many. However, its prevalence has decreased in recent years, signalling a shift in societal norms and values that suggest a changing perspective toward marriage rituals in the region.

The practice of bride kidnapping (*qyz alyp qashu*) has historically been prevalent in southern Kazakhstan, particularly in rural areas of the Turkestan region. Often described as a form of "forced consent," this custom involved young women being pressured to accept marriage offers post-abduction due to familial expectations and fear of social shame. Testimonies gathered from older generations—including parents and grandparents—indicate that during the Soviet period, such marriages were socially normalized, even in cases where the bride had not initially consented.

However, recent decades have witnessed a significant decline in the practice. Since the early 2000s, and particularly among youth born after 2000, there has been a growing rejection of this tradition in favour of consensual, legally recognised marriages. Even in rural communities, many young people now emphasise autonomy, romantic love, and personal compatibility when choosing a life partner. This shift reflects changing cultural attitudes, increasing legal awareness, and broader transformations in gender norms.

Official statistics confirm the reduced prevalence of bride kidnapping. In 2019, 210 cases were reported nationwide, with 102 of these incidents occurring in the Turkestan region alone (Prosecutor's Office of Turkestan Region, 2019: <https://www.gov.kz/memleket/entities/prokuratura-turkestan/press/news/details/85554>).

Although the practice has not disappeared entirely, its frequency and social acceptability have significantly diminished.

This section of the dissertation will incorporate these findings into the broader discussion on marriage customs in Kazakhstan. Integrating ethnographic accounts with legal and statistical data makes it possible to offer a more complex and critical understanding of how cultural practices are evolving in response to shifting legal standards and generational values.

Similarly, the Uzbek practice of *sovchilar*⁵, a pre-marital tradition in which the groom's

⁵ There are two types of matchmakers among Uzbeks: "Katta **Sovchilar**" ("Big Matchmakers") and "Kichik Sovchilar" ("Small Matchmakers"). The "Kichik Sovchilar" ("Small Matchmakers") are primarily women who conclude the matchmaking process. The "Katta Sovchilar" ("Big Matchmakers"), on the other hand, are predominantly men who handle discussions about wedding expenses and present the "Kalin" (a monetary gift) to the bride's family as a symbol of gratitude for raising a respectable bride.

relatives assess the character and reputation of the bride, also functions as a rite of passage. This investigative phase signifies the separation of the potential bride from her previous social status. At the same time, the confirmation of her suitability initiates her transition toward her new role in the family. This practice reflects the strong role of community and tradition in Uzbek matrimonial practices. This emphasizes the collective rather than individualistic approach to marriage. Only after the bride is deemed suitable do the groom's family members approach her family with a marriage proposal, signalling her incorporation into the new family and community once she agrees to the marriage.

The analysis of the said attributes demonstrates the shared function of these rituals in marking social transitions while recognising the variations in their expression affected by cultural, historical, and social factors. It also provides a deeper understanding of how ethnic customs influence family life and shape social identities, which demonstrates how traditions can evolve in response to changing societal norms.

According to the collected data, in Turkestan, the life of a new bride is subject to strict expectations, with particular emphasis placed on her behaviour and responsibilities. Compared to other parts of Kazakhstan, the role of the daughter-in-law, in particular, is notably regulated in this region, which may be attributed to the region's proximity to Uzbekistan, where a significant portion of the population is of Uzbek descent. Respect and modesty are crucial virtues in this context, and brides are expected to serve the household and contribute to the family's welfare. Rituals such as *Betashar*⁶, practiced by both Kazakh and Uzbek ethnic groups (while absent in Russian and Tatar marriage traditions), exemplify these expectations. *Betashar* emphasizes the bride's respectful conduct and the reverence shared between the families of the bride and groom. Another important tradition is *Salem salu*,⁷ which is part of *Betashar* and later the morning greeting of the groom's parents. This custom, widely practised by Kazakhs and especially by Uzbeks, symbolises the respect that the new bride must show toward her in-laws (<https://kzvesti.kz/newspaper-articles/vekovaja-tradicija-betashar-66376/>).

According to the participant observation during the research fieldwork, despite the longstanding coexistence of Kazakhs and Uzbeks within the same geographic region, significant differences exist between the two ethnic groups in traditions related to childbirth. An aspect that reflects their cultural subtleties. Aside from the marital system, childbirth rites

⁶ **Betashar** - *Betashar* translates to "the unveiling of the bride's face." Anyone who has attended a Kazakh *toi* (celebration) has likely witnessed this ritual, where the bride, with her face covered, stands in the center of the hall as the *tamada* (master of ceremonies) leads the ceremony accompanied by a song. This tradition is performed for the groom's relatives, who have never seen the bride before, marking their first introduction to her.

⁷ The bride bows (*salem salu*), thereby expressing her respect and reverence to the groom's relatives. In return, the relatives place money in a special dish as a gesture of gratitude. The bride's face is unveiled only after all of the groom's relatives have been introduced by name. This is typically done by the mother-in-law, who gives her blessing to the new daughter-in-law and wishes happiness to the young couple.

play an important role in the region's cultural life. For instance, in the settlements researched, the Uzbek *Aqiqah* tradition holds significant cultural and religious importance, intertwining Islamic values with local customs. This practice involves the ceremonial slaughter of an animal, usually a goat or sheep, as an act of gratitude to Allah for the blessing of a newborn. The meat is distributed to relatives, neighbours, and the needy. The aim is to promote community solidarity and charitable values. The *Aqiqah* is often accompanied by a celebratory gathering that includes reciting prayers, blessings for the child's health and future, and a communal feast. This event serves as both a religious observance and a social occasion, which is seen to strengthen familial and community bonds (Rahimov,2024).

In comparison, Kazakh traditions surrounding childbirth carry spiritual and communal significance, but are distinctly shaped by Kazakh cultural values. One such tradition is the *holiday of the womb*⁸, which celebrates the bride and her unborn child. The tradition emphasizes their well-being and the anticipation of the family (<https://www.muslim.kz/vi/article/qursaq-shashu>). Following the birth, the *shildekhana*⁹ is conducted to protect the newborn from evil influences during the critical first forty days. This practice highlights the community's concern for the safety of the child and mother during this vulnerable period (<https://assembly.kz/ru/analitika/shildekhana-shchit-novorozhdyennogo/>).

While both Kazakh and Uzbek traditions emphasise family and community, their specific rituals and symbolism differ. The Uzbek *aqiqah* tradition, as depicted in Abdulla Qodiriy's work and subsequent translations, reflects a deep connection to Islamic principles of gratitude and charity. The ceremony involves animal sacrifice, typically rams, as an act of thanks and a gesture of generosity, and is usually performed 7, 14, or 21 days after the child's birth. As Carol Ermakova notes in her translation, while rooted in religious significance, *aqiqah* also symbolizes the arrival of a "new guest" in the family. This tradition is rich in linguistic and cultural layers, exemplified by the challenge of translating terms such as "*oyi tug'moq*," which captures the anticipation and preparation associated with childbirth (Masharipova, 2024).

In contrast, Kazakh rituals such as *shildekhana* focus more on protective and celebratory customs that intertwine with broader Kazakh cultural heritage. These traditions, distinct from the Islamic framework of *aqiqah*, emphasise safeguarding the mother and newborn from

⁸ If a young bride is observed to have a diminished appetite, frequent nausea, or vomiting, Kazakhs refer to this condition as "zherik bolu" (cravings associated with pregnancy). During this time, she develops a strong and specific desire for certain foods. In response, her mother-in-law hosts a gathering, inviting local women from the community for a meal to honor and support the bride during this significant period *and* it calls 'күрсақ шашу' - **holiday of the womb**.

⁹ The term "**Shildekhana**" originates from the Persian word "chile" (pronounced "chelle"), which refers to a forty-day period following the birth of a child. During this time, tradition dictated that no one, not even family members, was allowed to enter the room where the newborn stayed, except for the grandmother and the mother. The primary purpose of holding a "Shildekhana" was to protect the child from impure forces, evil spirits, and the evil eye, as the period from birth until forty days was considered dangerous for both the mother and the infant.

harmful forces while celebrating the joyous occasion with a festive gathering of family and friends. Such variations highlight how each ethnic group integrates shared values into distinct practices shaped by historical, cultural, and spiritual influences (Masharipova, 2024). These traditions illustrate the interplay between communal bonds, religious beliefs, and cultural identity in Central Asian societies.

These unions highlight differences in traditions impacted by religion, history, language, and geography. This was observed in the case of a Ukrainian woman and her Russian husband living in a rural district near Turkestan, where cultural backgrounds intersect daily. While the husband demonstrates care and respect by valuing his wife's thoughts and decisions, the wife adheres to Uzbek traditions, which emphasise respect for the husband by agreeing with his decisions and seeking his permission before expressing her opinions. These processes demonstrate the negotiation of cultural standards inside a family, which promotes mutual understanding and coexistence.

A unique aspect of Uzbek culture in daily life is its profound connection to ancestral faith and practices. For instance, it is customary for women to wake early, often around five in the morning, to perform household chores such as cleaning and opening the courtyard door. This routine is believed to bring blessings to the household and reflects the spiritual values deeply embedded in Uzbek traditions. Similarly, the preparation of meals also adheres to cultural conventions, with the wife primarily cooking Uzbek dishes. In contrast, Kazakh or Russian meals are typically reserved for special occasions or prepared at her husband's request. In line with Uzbek norms, husbands typically do not participate in kitchen tasks, which reinforces the idea that gender roles are tied to cultural identity.

Hospitality is another domain where cultural differences become apparent. In Uzbek households, guests are received warmly, regardless of whether they have announced their visit in advance. This stands in contrast with Russian customs, where prior notice is expected. For Uzbeks, the guest is considered sacred. As such, the hosts strive to present their best, often going to great lengths to ensure their comfort, even at the expense of personal inconvenience. This principle aligns closely with Kazakh values, particularly in the Turkestan region, where the proverb "Respect the guest as your father" underscores the cultural importance of hospitality.

Attitudes toward relatives also differ significantly across ethnic groups. In Uzbek culture, maintaining strong familial ties is paramount, and respecting and caring for relatives is integral to daily life. This often involves self-sacrifice to ensure the comfort and happiness of relatives and guests. In contrast, Russian customs may exhibit less emphasis on familial obligations in day-to-day interactions. These differences underscore how cultural traditions

shape interpersonal dynamics within and beyond the family.

Mixed marriages in Turkestan bring perspectives on the merging of several traditions. The observed case of an Uzbek-Russian family illustrates the delicate balance between preserving cultural identities and adapting to shared experiences. While Uzbek practices dominated household routines, the family seamlessly integrated Kazakh and Russian elements, reflecting their extended residence in Kazakhstan. However, as Ismailbekova (2019) shows in her study of Uzbek families in Osh following the 2010 ethnic conflict, such integrations are not always feasible or safe. In times of heightened ethnic tension, families may retreat into endogamous practices to preserve social cohesion and avoid external threats. Her findings remind us that inter-ethnic marriage is not merely a cultural exchange but a strategic response to historical memory and socio-political vulnerability – dimensions that must be considered even in more stable contexts like Turkestan.

This integration is evident in their use of both Kazakh and Uzbek languages in daily life, which facilitates interaction with the local community and showcases their cultural adaptation's fluidity.

These examples illustrate the complex web of traditions in Turkestan – spanning language, religion, marriage, and hospitality – and offer invaluable insights into how multiculturalism (the term is used descriptively to reflect lived experiences in multiethnic communities) functions in everyday life. Mixed marriages, in particular, constitute an aperture to explore the negotiation and growth of these customs while revealing the rich tapestry of interwoven cultural influences that create the region's identity.

2.6. Parental perspectives on children's marital choices across nationalities and Kazakh-Azerbaijani inter-ethnic marriages

This section focuses on parents' attitudes regarding their children's future marital choices, specifically regarding the hypothetical situation that their child was to marry someone of a different nationality. This question offers profound insights into the region's broader societal and cultural dynamics, with these parental opinions serving as a barometer for understanding how traditions, identity, and evolving norms shape attitudes toward interethnic unions.

By analysing these perspectives, we can understand the future trajectory of interethnic relationships within Turkestan and assess their impact on local communities. Parents' attitudes reveal not only their values, but also their aspirations for their families' social and cultural continuity. These viewpoints also show how future generations might balance preserving their

ethnic heritage and embracing a more multicultural society. Such an understanding is important in predicting the evolving dynamics of the region.

The researcher encountered challenges in identifying Kazakh-Azerbaijani interethnic marriages. Such unions were relatively rare and primarily localised to specific areas. Most inter-ethnic Azerbaijani marriages were with Uzbek partners rather than Kazakhs. Among the few cases identified, two families comprised Kazakh husbands and Azerbaijani wives, while more than three involved Azerbaijani husbands and Uzbek wives. Linguistic barriers further complicated data collection, as Azerbaijani respondents predominantly spoke Azerbaijani or a mix of Uzbek, Azerbaijani, and Kazakh languages. Additionally, some individuals identifying as Azerbaijani were, in fact, Meskhetian Turks, adding to the complexity of data interpretation. Despite these challenges, the data were carefully analysed to ensure accurate findings.

The findings revealed specific dynamics in Kazakh-Azerbaijani marriages. For instance, the husband maintained a dominant role in one family with a Kazakh husband and an Azerbaijani wife. This family had five children, two of whom were married and continued to live with their parents. These married children followed local traditions, with one son marrying an Uzbek woman from a mixed-ethnicity family. The parents generally expressed openness to inter-ethnic marriages for their remaining unmarried children, viewing such unions as a natural extension of their diverse community. However, perspectives within the family were not entirely uniform.

Given the shared language and cultural practices, the mother noted that her Azerbaijani cultural influence might encourage her children to marry other Azerbaijanis. On the other hand, the father preferred his children to marry Kazakhs, citing advantages regarding their grandchildren's future integration and cultural continuity. He expressed concerns over his children adopting too much of his wife's Azerbaijani heritage, including language and lifestyle, through frequent interactions with her relatives. Despite his efforts to preserve Kazakh cultural traditions and values, he acknowledged that raising children in a multiethnic society inherently involves blending cultural norms and values, reflecting the diverse nature of the local community.

The mother's perspective aligns with cultural hybridity, which asserts that cultural identities are not static but evolve through ongoing interactions between different cultural groups. Hall argues that cultural identities are fluid and are continuously constructed and reconstructed through social interactions and shared experiences. In this context, the mother believes that shared language and cultural practices can facilitate marriages within the Azerbaijani community. Such underscores the malleability of cultural identity as shaped by these interactions. Hall's hybridity theory supports the notion that cultural boundaries are not

fixed but negotiated, which may lead to new and hybrid identities (Hall, 1990). In this case, the children of this intercultural household retain elements from both Azerbaijani and Kazakh cultures, enabling them to adapt and identify with both heritages. This fluidity of cultural identity demonstrates the hybridisation process described by Hall, where cultural practices and identities blend and transform within multicultural contexts.

On the other hand, the father's preference for his children to marry Kazakhs reflects an adherence to structural-functionalism and emphasises the role of cultural norms and practices in maintaining social stability and cohesion. The father's concerns about adopting Azerbaijani cultural practices, particularly language and lifestyle, echo Radcliffe-Brown's (1952) view that social structures (e.g., family units, cultural practices) serve to perpetuate societal order. By prioritising Kazakh marriages, the husband aims to preserve the cultural continuity and stability of Kazakh identity and ensure that future generations maintain a strong connection to their ethnic roots – a prime example of the structural-functionalist perspective on social integration and stability.

Moreover, the father's acknowledgement of the blending of cultural norms in their region reflects aspects of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which suggests that individuals' behaviours and attitudes are influenced by their group membership. His awareness that his children are inevitably adopting aspects of Azerbaijani and Kazakh cultures illustrates how socialisation within a diverse society can lead to hybrid identities that transcend traditional ethnic boundaries.

The parents' ages significantly influenced family dynamics and their children's outlooks. In the example above, the parents were over 50 years old; their children displayed more traditional behaviours and adhered strictly to parental expectations. The parents restricted the children's use of gadgets, which fostered a conservative upbringing. The two married sons upheld the family's traditional lifestyle by engaging in cattle breeding, following in their father's footsteps. In contrast, another Azerbaijani-Kazakh inter-ethnic family, with parents aged between 28 and 32, reflected more modern values. This younger family demonstrated a greater openness to contemporary practices, suggesting that generational differences significantly shape family norms and attitudes toward interethnic marriages. Both of the young parents expressed a progressive outlook regarding the potential marriages of their children, stating that if their children chose to marry someone of another nationality, it would be entirely acceptable to them. They emphasised that the primary consideration would be the happiness and well-being of their children in the marriage. Furthermore, the couple believed that mutual respect and understanding between spouses, regardless of ethnic background, were crucial for a harmonious family life.

This openness is profoundly influenced by globalisation, which has led to greater cultural interconnectedness and exposed families to various perspectives and lifestyles. Through media, technology, and enhanced mobility, younger generations are more attuned to values such as individual choice and emotional compatibility, increasingly rejecting traditional considerations like ethnic or cultural preservation. The attitudes of young parents reflect this globalised mindset, which prioritises children's happiness while embracing a wider acceptance of diversity within familial structures.

This chapter forms an integral part of the broader investigation addressed in this dissertation by discussing the intricate relationship between national identity and inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region. Focusing on the role of national values within mixed marriages, the study contributes to the broader exploration of how ethnic identity, cultural practices, and family dynamics interact in a multi-ethnic society. Specifically, it examines the influence of national values on family life and the intergenerational transmission of cultural traditions, particularly how these values are negotiated within the context of inter-ethnic unions.

The research presented in this chapter employed several sociological and anthropological methodologies to comprehensively understand the historical and contemporary factors that shape national identity. In doing so, the study provides valuable insights into the significance of national values in inter-ethnic marriages. It contributes to the broader discourse on ethnic cohesion, cultural adaptation, and the transformation of national identity in post-Soviet Kazakhstan.

The study revealed the complex dynamics in the Turkestan region by examining families with Kazakh, Azerbaijani, Russian, and Uzbek backgrounds. It also highlights a detailed perspective on how national values are preserved and transformed in modern, multi-ethnic households. The research emphasizes the adaptive nature of national values within changing social realities, illustrating how families navigate cultural blending while maintaining their connection to national identity.

The study's methodological diversity and empirical findings enhance our understanding of Turkestan's evolving cultural landscape, providing a solid foundation for future research into the role of national values in shaping family and social life in multiethnic societies. As Kazakhstan continues to navigate the complexities of modernisation and globalisation, the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages are likely to evolve, reflecting broader transformations in national identity and societal norms.

3. ASSIMILATION AND ACCULTURATION CONCEPTS IN INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES IN THE TURKESTAN REGION

3.1. Theoretical frameworks of assimilation for understanding inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region

Inter-ethnic marriages are a dynamic junction of cultures and provide insight into how people negotiate their unique cultural identities. Theories of assimilation and acculturation serve as essential frameworks for investigating how individuals in such unions adapt, share experiences, and construct shared cultural spaces. In this regard, the Turkestan region of Southern Kazakhstan presents a compelling case study, as unique cultural adaptation and integration processes characterise its multicultural environment.

This chapter examines the assimilation and acculturation processes of inter-ethnic marriages in various communities within the Turkestan region, exploring how couples interact, adapt, and forge blended cultural identities. The research highlights the interplay of traditions, customs, and rituals within a typical geographical and cultural context and reveals how these marriages enrich the region's vibrant multicultural landscape. In addition, this chapter analyses the adaptation techniques employed by the selected couples to illustrate the transformative effect of inter-ethnic unions on cultural interactions and the establishment of a sense of belonging in a diverse societal setting.

The present research specifically targets inter-ethnic marriages in Zhana Iqan, Shornak, and Hantagy (Kentaу), as these villages exhibit distinct cultural dynamics. In Shornak, despite the statistical majority of Uzbeks over Kazakhs in the local population, Kazakh culture exerts dominant influence. This dominance is evident in the widespread use of the Kazakh language, adherence to Kazakh traditions, and the integration of Kazakh cultural norms by other ethnic groups. Factors contributing to this “Kazakhization” include shared religious practices, inter-ethnic marriages, and the social prestige associated with the Kazakh identity in the region. In contrast, Zhana Iqan represents a balanced cultural setting where Kazakh and Uzbek traditions coexist harmoniously, with residents deliberately trying to preserve both heritages. Hantagy, however, features a different dynamic, with the acculturation process being more pronounced. Russians, an ethnic group with distinct origins, history, and national values, have undergone significant acculturation within Turkestan's predominantly Turkic cultural landscape. The data gathered from these three villages demonstrates varied levels of cultural integration, which afforded me insights into the mechanisms of acculturation and assimilation in a multicultural setting.

Drawing on empirical findings from interviews conducted in the villages, this research aims to test Hypothesis 1, which asserts that acculturation and assimilation coexist and contribute significantly to shaping inter-ethnic family dynamics. By examining the experiences of individuals in mixed marriages, this study seeks to provide concrete evidence of how these processes influence the negotiation and adaptation of cultural identities, offering broader insights and implications for understanding inter-ethnic relationships in a multicultural society.

As noted, two major field studies were conducted during the research. This section presents an in-depth analysis of data collected during the first round of fieldwork in three villages of the Turkestan region. Given the enormous volume of data gathered, it was impossible to include the data from all of the interviews in this section. As a result, the analysis centres on Zhana Iqan, Shornak, and Hantagy (Kantau) - villages identified as having undergone more pronounced processes of acculturation and assimilation.

The focus is placed on key aspects of daily life (i.e., family structure and gender roles, food and culinary traditions, clothing and dress codes, social norms and etiquette, celebrations and holidays, rituals, and parenting styles and child-rearing practices) to understand better the effect of these processes on the social fabric of the observed communities. These elements are essential for understanding how cultural identities are negotiated and maintained within inter-ethnic marriages, reflecting the complexities of acculturation and assimilation. Family structure and gender roles, for example, may vary across ethnic groups and may shape the division of labour and household expectations (Bornstein, 2015). Similarly, food and culinary traditions hold importance in cultural integration, as meals often serve as expressions of identity and cultural heritage (Fischler, 1988). Clothing and dress codes, as well as social norms and etiquette, also reflect broader cultural patterns and can vary significantly across ethnic groups, changing daily interactions and societal expectations (Harris, 2015). Celebrations, holidays, and rituals provide insight into how traditions are preserved or adapted. These represent a rich space for cultural expression and reinforcing communal identities. Whether religious or cultural, these events are key practices that maintain cultural continuity and foster a sense of belonging within families and communities (Cohen, 1985). Lastly, parenting styles and child-rearing practices, shaped by cultural values, further reflect the blending or preservation of different ethnic customs within a family unit (Berry, 2005). The above aspects offer a holistic understanding of how cultural practices and values shape daily life, interactions, and integration within multicultural societies.

The research employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques to explore cultural practices, values, and traditions within inter-ethnic marriages (Migiro; Magangi, 2011). Data collection methods included surveys, interviews, and

participant observation to identify patterns of adaptation and the extent to which acculturation or assimilation occurred within the studied communities.

In line with the research aims, after collecting the necessary demographic and personal background information about the interviewees, particular emphasis was placed on investigating the participants' social surroundings. The interview questions were divided into the following two groups: (1) questions for families representing couples of different ethnicities (mixed marriages) and (2) questions for families representing couples from the same ethnic group. Each group of questions addressed several core topics, including language, religion, family, and community circumstances. Questions were also included regarding national clothing styles, the preparation of national dishes, holiday celebrations, and social norms. The responses were based on the interviewees' personal experiences within the Turkestan region. The collected data was analysed to uncover themes related to cultural adaptation.

The findings offer a detailed perspective of how cultural practices are integrated into daily life, decision-making, and family routines. The concept of selective adoption is highlighted, whereby certain cultural elements are assimilated while others are preserved. This empirical approach reveals the complex interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation in inter-ethnic families within the Turkestan region, aligning with the theoretical perspectives of selective cultural adoption (Alsaawi, 2016).

The study of interethnic marriages in Turkestan is deeply rooted in the expanded theoretical frameworks of assimilation and acculturation, concepts that have evolved to provide subtle insights into cultural integration and interaction. Research by scholars such as Milton Gordon and John Berry has explored the processes of cultural assimilation and their impact on individual and group identities within these unions. M. Gordon (1964) contributed foundational theoretical explanations and analyses regarding the definitions of assimilation, acculturation, and other essential terms in studying society (Gordon, 1964). An early and influential definition of "assimilation" by sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest W. Burgess describes it as "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and, by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in ordinary cultural life." In a later refinement, Park, one of the most prolific pioneering thinkers in American sociology, narrowed the scope of assimilation to cultural behaviour. He defined it as "the name given to the process or processes by which peoples of diverse racial origins and different cultural heritages, occupying a common territory, achieve a cultural solidarity sufficient at least to sustain a national existence" (Park, Burgess, 1921).

The theory on assimilation has undergone continuous development and refinement,

informed by numerous studies, observations, and personal experiences from researchers. Despite its ongoing evolution, it remains a foundational framework for understanding cultural integration. Joseph Fichter defines assimilation as a social process through which two or more individuals or groups accept and perform each other's behavioural patterns (Fichter, 1971). While this concept is often discussed in the context of a person or minority group being assimilated into a larger group or society, Fichter emphasises that it should not be viewed as a "one-sided" process. Instead, assimilation represents a reciprocal relationship in which both parties interact and influence each other, albeit with varying degrees of impact.

Park and Burgess defined assimilation in 1921 as a process of “interpenetration and fusion,” where individuals and groups adopt shared cultural attitudes and experiences from others to achieve cultural solidarity. While this perspective emphasised interaction, it underscored the dominant group's role in shaping the norms that are exchanged. Milton Gordon expanded on assimilation theory by introducing a framework of stages, including cultural assimilation (acculturation), structural assimilation (integration into social institutions), and marital assimilation (intermarriage). His work formalised the distinction between cultural and structural aspects of assimilation. In contrast, John Berry focused on acculturation as a bidirectional process, in which both groups influence one another and emphasized individual and group-level psychological adaptations. Berry's model outlined strategies such as integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalisation, reflecting the diversity of outcomes in intercultural interactions. These perspectives complement earlier definitions by offering a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of cultural integration.

Classical assimilation theories, such as those proposed by Robert E. Park, Ernest W. Burgess, and Milton Gordon, primarily conceptualised assimilation as a unidirectional process in which minority groups adopt the traits of the dominant culture. However, recent studies have challenged this linear view, emphasising assimilation's multidirectional and context-dependent nature. For instance, in their work *Remaking the American Mainstream*, Alba and Nee (2003) argue that assimilation is not solely about cultural loss among minority groups. Instead, it involves mutual adaptation, with dominant groups incorporating elements from minority cultures (Alba & Nee, 2003).

3.2. Concepts of assimilation within acculturation and supplementary comprehension of the theories

In cultural anthropology, assimilation is increasingly understood through hybridity and intersectionality. Scholars like Aihwa Ong (*Flexible Citizenship*, 1999) and Steven Vertovec

(Transnationalism, 2009) emphasise how global migration has diversified assimilation pathways, leading to transnational identities that challenge traditional models. These findings are particularly pertinent to interethnic marriages, where partners often combine cultural aspects in unique, context-specific ways.

In recent writings, several sociologists have equated "assimilation" with "acculturation" or defined it as an advanced form of acculturation. Acculturation emphasises the continuous interaction between cultures. This interaction leads to transformations in one or both cultures involved. In inter-ethnic marriages, acculturation theory provides a framework to analyse how couples navigate and reconcile cultural differences. John W. Berry's influential work on acculturation offers valuable insights into individuals' strategies for maintaining their cultural identity while integrating aspects of their partner's culture. In his 1997 study, Berry introduced key concepts in acculturation and emphasised the psychological and social adaptations individuals undergo when interacting with a new cultural environment. His bidimensional acculturation model categorises individuals' strategies based on their orientations toward their heritage culture and the dominant culture. This model identifies four main strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization. It offers a nuanced understanding of cultural adaptation processes (Berry, 1997). In his later work (2003), Berry expanded this framework by addressing the complexity of acculturation through a broader theoretical lens. He revisited unidimensional models of cultural change, critiquing their limitations and advocating for a more dynamic, bidimensional perspective centred on the balance between cultural maintenance and adaptation. Accommodating diverse outcomes across varying contexts, Berry's bidimensional structure remains a cornerstone in acculturation studies. Contemporary research builds upon it and incorporates concepts of cultural fluidity and the adaptability of individuals in evolving social and cultural landscapes. These advancements allow for a richer understanding of how individuals and groups navigate intercultural dynamics in contexts such as inter-ethnic marriages (Berry, 2003).

Rudmin critiques the static nature of the aforementioned acculturation categories and advocates for a more dynamic understanding in which individuals' strategies evolve (Rudmin, 2006). This evolution is further explored by Benet-Martínez et al. (2018), who introduce the concept of bicultural identity integration (BII), which describes how individuals harmonise multiple cultural identities. Their approach is particularly relevant to inter-ethnic marriages, where cultural negotiation is ongoing. Anthropological research also underscores how power dynamics, gender roles, and intersectionality shape acculturation processes (Benet-Martínez, 2018). For instance, cultural anthropologists such as Faye Ginsburg and Lila Abu-Lughod have demonstrated how broader societal structures, such as patriarchy and socio-political

inequalities, influence acculturation and assimilation. In inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan, these factors are evident in negotiations over gender roles, family dynamics, and religious practices (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod; Larkin, 2002).

Recent contributions to assimilation and acculturation studies offer further insights into inter-ethnic marriages in multicultural contexts. Jasinskaja-Lahti et al. (2021) examine acculturation stress in inter-ethnic families and underscore the importance of emotional resilience and social support in navigating cultural differences. Complementing this perspective, Kim (2017), in *The theory of cross-cultural adaptation*, presents a systems approach that integrates both individual (micro) and societal (macro) factors to explain how inter-ethnic couples adapt to their environments. Building on these guidelines, Vertovec (2022) introduces the concept of super-diversity, which highlights how inter-ethnic unions mirror and contribute to increasingly intricate cultural landscapes. This perspective resonates with inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region, which are characterized by the interplay of Kazakh and Uzbek influences. Anthropologists Homi Bhabha (*The Location of Culture*, 1994) and Arjun Appadurai (*Modernity at Large*, 1992) expand on this discourse by framing cultural blending in interethnic marriages as a process of hybridisation rather than mere assimilation, resulting in the emergence of unique cultural forms.

Arnold Rose defines acculturation as “the adoption by a person or group of the culture of another social group. Alternatively, the process is leading to this adoption.” He then goes on to characterise assimilation as a more complete form of cultural adoption, in which a person or group takes on the culture of another social group to such an extent that they lose all identifying characteristics and loyalties to their former culture. John Cuber expands on this concept by introducing the variable of group rivalry and its reduction to his brief definition of assimilation. As such, assimilation may be defined as the gradual process whereby cultural differences (and rivalries) diminish over time (Gordon 1964: 65-66).

Assimilation, as discussed earlier, involves individuals or groups from one culture adopting the customs, values, and behaviours of another, often resulting in the blending of identities. In inter-ethnic marriages, assimilation theory examines how partners from different cultural backgrounds adapt to one another's norms and practices, creating a shared or unified family culture. The case of Shornak village in the present study exemplifies this process. Here, the adaptation of cultural elements by inter-ethnic couples reflects the principles of assimilation theory when partners navigate and integrate diverse cultural influences into their everyday lives.

Shornak, a village under the administration of Turkestan City and a key agricultural and industrial area, creates a unique system for learning inter-ethnic relations. Located 22 km northwest of Turkestan along the Arys-Turkestan canal, Shornak is known for its cotton ginning

plant, grain-receiving facility, and extensive farming activities. According to a 2022 statistical report from the local Shornak administration, the village has a population of 13,184, comprising 7,156 Uzbeks, 5,978 Kazakhs, and 25 individuals from other nationalities. As one of the Turkestan region's key agricultural and industrial hubs, Shornak is home to a processing centre for the Turkestan cotton ginning plant and a grain-receiving nucleus. Residents of Shornak are mostly engaged in agriculture, producing a substantial share of cotton and vegetables in southern Kazakhstan. Despite the Uzbek majority, Kazakh cultural values such as patriotism, Islam, respect for elders, and male dominance within the family remain dominant in the community. These likely stem from the social structure and integration patterns of the region.

As we can observe, the demographic and cultural dynamics of Shornak show an intricate interplay of ethnicity, history, and socio-economic structures. Between 2009 and 2022, the village experienced significant population growth, reflecting its role as a key agricultural and industrial hub in the Turkestan region. Despite the Uzbek majority in 2022, Kazakh cultural values such as respect for elders, Islamic practices, and patriarchal family structures remain dominant and shaped by national integration policies and historical socio-cultural patterns. The village's economy revolves around agriculture and processing industries and is rooted in its historical significance as a hub for cotton-picking and grain supply.

Shornak's evolution, from an ancient city to a modern rural district, highlights the continuity of traditional livelihoods amidst gradual modernisation. Its identity as a "Kazakh-Uzbek village" underscores a history of coexistence, where shared spaces foster integration and cultural exchange, reflecting both resilience and adaptation to broader state policies and economic shifts. Notably, the second dataset obtained from the local administration during fieldwork is not reflected in publicly accessible statistical data websites. This reminds the importance of on-ground research for understanding local realities.

The following section investigates the dynamics of interethnic marriages in Shornak, where Kazakh men, often perceived as dominant figures, have a substantial part in instilling Kazakh cultural values in their families. Interviews with couples aged 35–65 reveal that in long-standing marriages, non-Kazakh wives exhibit an adherence to Kazakh cultural norms and display an ongoing impact of national ideals over the last decades. The data show how gender roles, age, and socio-cultural expectations determine assimilation in inter-ethnic marriages.

Moreover, this section will analyze the integration between diverse cultural elements and the acceptance of Kazakh national values in Shornak families. The data collected from ten Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriages in Shornak was categorized into three groups to reflect the complex dynamics of the region's assimilation and acculturation. This structure highlights the complex nature of interactions in interethnic marriage while emphasizing cultural

negotiation, identity blending, and adaptation within multicultural contexts. These categories presented below provide a framework for exploring how inter-ethnic couples navigate cultural integration while balancing individual traditions with shared family values: (1) Cultural adaptation: Examines how individuals and families adapt to one another's cultural norms, customs, and gender roles, illustrating the negotiation of a shared family culture; (2) Identity negotiation: Refers to how individuals and groups balance their identities through assimilation, acculturation, and the preservation of cultural markers such as food, language, and traditions; (3) Communication and social norms: Processes through which language, gender-based treatment of children, and etiquette reinforce prevailing cultural practices, social cohesion, and family dynamics, with an emphasis on adapting to common norms.

3.3. Kazakh-Uzbek mixed marriages in Shornak

Cultural adaptation. In inter-ethnic marriages between Kazakh and Uzbek individuals, the extent to which couples incorporate elements of each other's cultures is important in developing a shared family culture. Among the ten families interviewed, the age range of the participants is from 35 to 65 years old. Two families had been married for over 35-40 years, while the others had been married for 10-25 years. One interview examined the experiences of a family where an Uzbek woman has been married to a Kazakh man for over forty years, demonstrating that cultural adaptation is an ongoing, complex process. Although Uzbek at birth, she identifies spiritually as Kazakh and reflects her deep integration into her husband's culture. She speaks both Uzbek and Kazakh fluently, using Kazakh exclusively with her husband and his family, and Uzbek with her relatives. This bilingualism serves as a clear indicator of the cultural blending occurring in inter-ethnic marriages. Her experience reflects the challenges of adapting to the family structure and gender roles within a new cultural context. Early in her marriage, she faced resistance from her husband's family when attempting to follow her Uzbek traditions. Over time, to maintain harmony and unity within the family, she adapted Kazakh customs while striving to preserve her own cultural identity. This negotiation between the two sets of traditions, especially about gendered family roles, highlights how cultural assimilation and adaptation manifest in inter-ethnic marriages.

The family structure highlighted above also reflects broader social patterns in interethnic marriages, where gender roles may shift or blend. For example, in Kazakh culture, there is a strong emphasis on the patriarchal structure of the family, with men typically assuming the dominant role in decision-making. At the same time, women often take on responsibilities related to child-rearing and domestic tasks. Among the ten families interviewed,

six indicated that their husbands generally prefer their wives not to work outside the home, expecting them to focus on managing household duties and ensuring the smooth operation of the household. This traditional expectation positions the husband as the primary breadwinner and head of the family ("еркек ретінде отбасын асырауға" – [erkek retinde otbasyn asyrauga]). The wife's experience described above illustrates her adaptation to these gendered expectations while maintaining her cultural practices. Such negotiations reveal how family dynamics and gender roles evolve in response to cultural integration (Kim, 2017; Bornstein, 2015; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2021).

Identity Negotiation. Assimilation and acculturation theories elaborate on the complex processes involved in negotiating and constructing shared cultural identities within inter-ethnic marriages, where individuals balance their cultural heritages while embracing a cultural common ground (Berry, 2003). According to the interviewees, Uzbek cultural values are primarily preserved in the household through food, as the wife continues to prepare Uzbek dishes, especially when hosting Uzbek relatives. However, Kazakh cultural practices dominate everyday life and significant events. For instance, during holidays and special celebrations, the family wears traditional Kazakh clothing, especially the women, who typically adopt Kazakh dresses, such as *kamzol*¹⁰ (a traditional Kazakh robe: <https://central-asia.guide/kazakhstan/kazakh-culture/kazakh-clothing/>) or the *saukele*¹¹ (a wedding headdress) to participate in cultural ceremonies (Nygmanova, 2022, p. 318).

This integration of Kazakh traditions and clothing reflects a broader trend of cultural assimilation within the family. Although the wife maintains her Uzbek identity in some areas, such as cooking, she has largely embraced Kazakh practices daily. This shift is particularly evident during family events, where decisions and rituals are guided by Kazakh traditions, such as those associated with significant milestones like weddings, birthdays, or circumcisions (*sundet toy*¹²: <https://tinyurl.com/28jr5nmn>). Despite her Uzbek heritage, the wife has become thoroughly “Kazakhized,” submitting to the preferences of her husband and his relatives but limiting her nationalistic identity expression confined to interactions with Uzbek relatives. This process of identity negotiation exemplifies how interethnic marriages can lead to a blending of cultural markers such as food and dress, while also reflecting the social pressure to adopt dominant cultural norms in family and social life (Kim, 2017; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2021;

¹⁰ **Kamzol** is the long vest without sleeves with embroidered national ornaments. Its lens is usually below the hips and its sewn mainly from the bright velvet.

¹¹ Hats such *ayirkalpak*, *murak*, *saukele* resemble the pointy hats of ancient Sakas – Kazakh's ancestors. **Saukele** - ethnic, a cone-shape headwear of a bride decorated with gem stones.

¹² Circumcision (**Sünnet**) is a ritual in Islam involving the removal of a portion of the foreskin on a boy's genitals. Originally, circumcision was a customary practice of the Arab people. While the Qur'an does not mention the practice of circumcision, it is referenced in ancient Arabic poetry and Hadiths.

Vertovec, 2022).

Communication patterns within inter-ethnic marriages provide insights into how cultural differences are expressed, understood, and resolved. In Shornak village, it is common for children, spouses, and extended family members to speak exclusively in Kazakh, compelling the wife to adopt Kazakh in her daily communication. This represents more than just a linguistic shift – it reflects broader social norms in the region, with Kazakh language and cultural expressions prioritized in family life to align with the husband’s identity and his family. Social norms in Shornak, similarly to the rest of the country, favor Kazakh cultural practices over others, such as the Uzbek background of the wife mentioned above. The use of Uzbek is reserved for communication with the wife’s Uzbek relatives to maintain a boundary between the two cultures.

Etiquette plays a significant part when it comes to communication habits. As is common in many inter-ethnic marriages, family and community expectations frequently influence language acquisition, behavior, and cultural traditions. In this case, the wife’s decision to use Kazakh in the household and for important family matters aligns with prevailing social norms prioritizing Kazakh identity. Over time, this transition towards Kazakh norms reflects not only the natural course of cultural assimilation but also the expectations of family and community etiquette, where the husband's ethnic identity is viewed as central to the family’s social cohesion (Berry, 2003; Jasinskaja-Lahti et al., 2021).

Following social etiquette in Kazakhstan, dominant social practices, such as the pressure to use Kazakh in mixed households, demonstrate how cultural assimilation is both supported and even expected. Such norms dictate that the wife, though Uzbek by birth, adopts the Kazakh language and associated cultural practices. This dynamic demonstrates how language use extends beyond communication, becoming a means of integrating into established social structures, with the wife’s choice to use Kazakh representing a broader negotiation of cultural identity within the family and society (Vertovec, 2022).

In inter-ethnic marriages, particularly between Kazakhs and Uzbeks, cultural and religious norms that differ between the two groups influence how sons and daughters are treated. Interviews with couples in Shornak reveal that parenting practices often reflect these deeply rooted cultural expectations. In Uzbek families, sons who traditionally represent the family's future are responsible for continuing the family name, providing for the family, and caring for their parents as they age. This view aligns with Peshkova's ethnographic findings, which highlight the sacred role of male children within Islam and Central Asian familial structures (Peshkova, 2014). Sons are considered essential not only for maintaining the family lineage but also for upholding family honor. In the absence of a son, families often face societal

pressure, with divorce or remarriage sometimes pursued to meet this expectation. On the other hand, daughters are normally considered 'temporary guests' within their families, given that their behaviour and conduct are strictly controlled. Fathers, in particular, are heavily invested in protecting their daughters' reputations, often going to great lengths to limit their freedom, such as restricting their movement and interactions with strangers, especially with men, as Peshkova discusses in her study of women's roles within Uzbek communities.

In contrast, Kazakh families tend to adopt a more egalitarian approach to treating sons and daughters, with both genders receiving similar care and attention. However, parallel to Uzbek families, sons are still viewed as the future providers and successors of the family. The key distinction lies in the greater degree of freedom that Kazakh daughters experience compared to their Uzbek counterparts. Kazakh daughters, while still subject to some degree of gender differentiation, are generally allowed more opportunities to participate in public life, a freedom that is more restricted in Uzbek households due to stricter gender norms.

Peshkova's work presents an understanding of Uzbek women. However, as they face a more limited religious and cultural milieu, women negotiate their identities and public roles, gently undermining established gender stereotypes through their agency. This shows that, even within the patriarchal family structure of Uzbek inter-ethnic marriages, there is space for individual agency as women navigate and adapt to socio-cultural expectations.

While both Kazakh and Uzbek families reinforce values related to gender roles, Kazakh families in particular seem to encourage equal responsibilities and opportunities for sons and daughters to a greater degree. This reflects a more contemporary and balanced perspective on gender roles. This difference in parenting styles can be attributed to historical and socio-political influences, with Kazakhstan's more diverse and cosmopolitan environment promoting more inclusive family values.

The data analysis reveals the complexities of gender roles shaped by both ethnic traditions and religious influences in inter-ethnic marriages between Kazakhs and Uzbeks. This is reinforced by Peshkova's research on gender and identity within the context of Islam in Central Asia, which highlights the tension between traditional gender expectations and individual agency, especially for women in more restrictive environments, such as the Uzbek context. Peshkova's work provides a framework for positioning gender roles in the present research, not just in terms of ethnic or familial norms but as components of a broader discourse on religion and culture in Central Asia.

The gender dynamics within inter-ethnic marriages in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan reflect the larger influences of both Islamic practices and regional customs on the roles of sons and daughters within family structures. While Uzbek culture places greater emphasis on male

children as bearers of the family name and honour, Kazakh families tend to adopt a more balanced parenting style, although sons retain an integral role in the family's future. Deeply rooted cultural beliefs shape these contrasting styles in child rearing, but are also subject to shifting social and religious landscapes.

The fundamental distinction between the two categories is the modernising impact on Kazakh families. In particular, younger generations have changed parenting strategies and communication styles to reflect contemporary trends. Today, many Kazakh families have moved toward more progressive practices, with a more egalitarian approach to their children's education, opportunities, and family responsibilities. These developments reflect a broader societal shift toward modern values and practices.

Young families today are adopting modern perspectives on family life. These are evident in their parenting practices and communication patterns. Such shifts foster a more open, flexible, and progressive family environment where responsibilities are shared more equally between parents. This way, the traditional, more rigid gender roles exert less influence. Today, Kazakh families are evolving toward a model that promotes mutual respect and equal opportunities among their children.

Moreover, current efforts in Kazakhstan, such as the "Concept of Family and Gender Policy," promote gender equality across multiple sectors, advocating for equal rights for both genders. The policy aims to strengthen family life, improve economic conditions, and encourage gender equality in public and private spheres. Key strategies outlined in the policy include legislative reform, economic empowerment initiatives, and expanded support for women's entrepreneurship. It also seeks to combat gender discrimination, promote equal access to social and economic opportunities, and increase women's participation in decision-making, while also addressing the gender wage gaps (www.fao.org/faolex/results/details/en/c/lex-faoc192054/).

3.4. Theoretical frameworks of acculturation for understanding inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region and a case study from Zhana Iqan

To maintain a consistent research design, the study used the above categories (i.e., cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and communication patterns) to analyse assimilation. This allowed for a systematic study of acculturation and assimilation processes, which captures the shared cultural dynamics and local variances in the villages of Zhana Iqan and Hantagy. The emphasis on acculturation arises from its importance in reflecting the bidirectional cultural interchange that defines inter-ethnic marriages. Unlike assimilation, which typically implies a

one-sided absorption of cultural norms, acculturation focuses on adaptive mechanisms and mutual impacts among partners. This dynamic is especially relevant in mixed marriages in Turkestan, where families actively negotiate and reinterpret cultural customs rather than simply absorbing them.

Shornak aligns more closely with the assimilation theory and exhibits fewer acculturation instances than Zhana Iqan and Hantagy. It demonstrates the area's greater degree of cultural exchange and adaptation. Acculturation is a dynamic process whereby individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds engage in continuous interaction, which leads to mutual adjustments. This system is particularly relevant for investigating inter-ethnic marriages, as it illustrates how partners navigate cultural practices, traditions, and identities. This process results in varying outcomes including assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalization.

Assimilation involves completely adopting the dominant culture, often at the expense of abandoning original cultural practices and traditions. Integration, on the other hand, allows the preservation of one's cultural identity while embracing aspects of the dominant culture. Both coexist harmoniously. Separation occurs when an individual or group retains its cultural identity and minimises contact with the dominant culture. Marginalisation, in contrast, arises when an individual or group experiences a failure to identify with both their original and dominant culture, often leading to feelings of social alienation. These varied outcomes reflect the diverse ways in which individuals and groups adapt to multicultural settings.

The study focuses on seven key cultural phenomena categorized into cultural adaptation (family and social structures and ceremonial rituals), identity negotiation (celebrations of holidays, traditional clothing and culinary traditions), and communication patterns (language use, social norms, traditional music, and dance). This structured framework provides a nuanced understanding of how inter-ethnic families in the Turkestan region adapt to and engage with the dominant cultural environment while preserving their cultural heritage.

In the villages of Zhana Iqan and Hantagy, the daily lives of Kazakh-Uzbek, Uzbek homogeneous, Kazakh-Russian, and Russian homogeneous families were observed to uncover shared cultural dynamics. These interviews were conducted to analyse several key phenomena, including family and social structure, ceremonial rituals, holiday celebrations, traditional clothing, language use, music and dance, and culinary tradition. These findings clarify how traditions shape inter-ethnic marriages and offer valuable insights into cultural adaptation and interchange. For example, shared family values and ceremonial rituals are the foundation of cultural adaptation in all three villages. While families in Shornak demonstrate assimilation, with Kazakh traditions dominating ceremonial practices, families in Zhana Iqan exhibit a more

balanced integration of Kazakh and Uzbek elements in significant life events such as weddings and births. In contrast, families in Hantagy preserve distinct ethnic traditions with minimal blending and reflect a unique acculturation dynamic.

This comparative analysis, guided by Berry's (1997) acculturation theory and Giles's (2008) communication accommodation theory, investigates how inter-ethnic families navigate cultural exchange, identity negotiation, and communication. By situating these findings within the above theoretical models, the research highlights shared and divergent acculturation outcomes across these villages. This emphasizes a comprehensive perspective on inter-ethnic relationships in Turkestan. Such an approach aligns with the earlier findings on assimilation and ensures a coherent analytical framework for exploring cultural dynamics in mixed marriages (Gile, 2008).

As a prime example of cultural adaptation, Kazakh and Uzbek families' kin and social structures in Zhana Iqan provide a compelling context for exploring how traditional values are preserved and modified in mixed marriages. In mixed and same-ethnic marriages, Kazakh and Uzbek customs intersect and influence familial roles, responsibilities, and social interactions. This analysis explores the family dynamics of Kazakh-Uzbek and Uzbek homogeneous households by drawing on interviews with five Kazakh-Uzbek and three Uzbek families from Zhana Iqan. The aim is to highlight their similarities and differences.

An exemplary application of the said concepts can be found in the outcomes of the field study, which highlights Kazakh-Uzbek mixed marriages in Zhana Iqan as a compelling case. Traditional practices are important in shaping family life and kinship roles in Kazakh-Uzbek families where the wife is Uzbek and the husband is Kazakh. A newlywed Uzbek wife typically lives with her husband's family, including his parents and brothers, for at least three years before setting up their household. During this time, she is expected to serve and show deference to her parents-in-law, a prominent feature of Uzbek cultural practices. This expectation differs from Kazakh traditions, which do not place exact requirements on the new daughter-in-law. The family dynamic may shift once the couple has a child, especially if a new daughter-in-law joins the household when the husband's brother marries. In such cases, the eldest son traditionally moves out to establish his household, and the parents assist him in purchasing and furnishing a home.

When a daughter-in-law joins her husband's family, the belongings she brings with her, such as furniture, appliances, and other household items, are often intended for her new home. These items are typically separated and taken with the couple when they establish their household. While this practice is more characteristic of Uzbek culture, it shares similarities with the Kazakh tradition, where the eldest son is expected to leave and establish a new household.

In contrast, the youngest son remains in the family home to care for the ageing parents. This traditional family structure, where the youngest son stays with his parents and inherits the family property, is called *Ake Murasy* and is particularly significant in the Turkestan region (<https://tinyurl.com/mr2avk7b>).

In addition to these traditions, a unique case was observed in the case of a Kazakh-Uzbek mixed marriage in Zhana Iqan involving an Uzbek wife who claimed to possess a special gift of healing passed down from her ancestors. She believes that abandoning this practice would lead to illness and thus continues to practice healing in line with her family tradition. This example demonstrates the deep cultural ties that can be maintained within families and the personal significance of various traditions.

Over time, the cultural distinctions between Kazakh and Uzbek families in Zhana Iqan have become less pronounced. The values of both ethnicities are now closely aligned, and couples in mixed marriages report that it is becoming increasingly difficult to distinguish between the two nationalities. This unique cultural blend, distinctive to Zhana Iqan and the broader region of southern Kazakhstan, represents a shared cultural identity reflecting the interwoven traditions of Kazakh and Uzbek peoples.

In Zhana Iqan, the shared traditions of Kazakh and Uzbek cultures reveal a deep connection between the two peoples, particularly in hospitality, family structure, and ceremonial rituals. Hospitality stands out as an important element. In Kazakh and Uzbek households, it is considered impolite not to offer guests food or drink, regardless of circumstances. This tradition symbolises respect and care for visitors and reinforces special bonds between hosts and guests. Guests, in turn, typically bring sweets or small gifts to strengthen these social ties.

Family dynamics in both cultures strongly emphasise respecting elders and typically position men as the head of the household. This hierarchical structure influences rituals surrounding important life events, such as childbirth or the transition to adulthood. In both Kazakh and Uzbek communities, these ceremonies honour various stages of life and emphasise the value of familial respect. While specific traditions may vary, such as the Kazakh *betashar* ceremony, where the bride is greeted with a special song and given advice, the underlying respect for the bride and her family remains consistent. Shared national instruments are used during these rituals, and both families demonstrate cultural continuity through their similar roles in the wedding process.

Kazakh nomadic traditions historically involved setting up a newlywed's yurt behind the groom's family home. This custom features symbolic rituals, such as entering the yurt with the right foot first and drinking water, sugar, and salt to signify harmony. These rituals reflect

family values of continuity and respect for tradition, which are also shared between Kazakh and Uzbek cultures.

An important aspect of family rituals in Kazakh and Uzbek cultures is the seating arrangement at meals, where the most respected or elderly individual is seated closest to the head of the table. The hosts aim to prepare grand meals for their guests to emphasize their generosity. Meals typically begin and end with tea, a culturally significant ritual in both societies. These everyday practices – from seating arrangements to the ritual of tea drinking – underscore the closeness of the two cultures, with shared rituals highlighting mutual respect, family unity, and hospitality that form the foundation of both cultural traditions.

In one of the Kazakh-Uzbek families interviewed, the wife emphasised that their family dynamics reflect traditional male dominance in line with traditional Kazakh cultural values. She explained that she had been drawn to Kazakh culture since childhood, especially how Kazakhs dress and treat their brides. This admiration for Kazakh traditions played a significant role in her decision to marry a Kazakh man and showcased how cultural appreciation can result in inter-ethnic marriages. These cultural exchanges enrich the marital relationship and blend the values of both cultures, bolstering deeper cultural integration.

3.5. Cultural traditions and identity in Kazakh and Uzbek families

This chapter on acculturation is grounded in data collected from the villages of Zhana Iqan and Hantagy. It aims to explore the multifaceted processes of cultural adaptation and integration in these specific contexts. The chapter's structure reflects the interconnected cultural and social dynamics observed during fieldwork and presents an integrated perspective rather than isolating each subtopic. Based on the firsthand observations and data gathered during the research, the focus is on analysing the cultural interplay in Uzbek-Kazakh marriages in Zhana Iqan and Uzbek-Russian marriages in Hantagy.

To deliver a clear macrostructure, the chapter begins with a discussion on the cultural traditions and identity of Kazakh and Uzbek Families. This provides a general overview of cultural preservation and adaptation within these communities. It also serves as a foundational context for understanding the broader acculturation processes and prepares the reader to grasp the specific dynamics in subsequent sections.

The following section, “Homogeneous Uzbek families in Zhana Iqan,” delves into social integration within a predominantly Uzbek environment. This analysis explores how cultural homogeneity supports the preservation of traditions while simultaneously facilitating subtle forms of adaptation and interaction with broader societal influences. The focus here is

on understanding the level and mechanisms of social integration in a relatively uniform ethnic setting.

Finally, the chapter examines Uzbek-Russian Mixed Marriages in Hantagy and highlights the complexities of cultural exchange in a more diverse and heterogeneous community. Here, the emphasis is placed on how differing factors such as religion, language, and national values are negotiated and integrated within the community. This comparison with Zhana Iqan illuminates the distinct pathways through which acculturation manifests and demonstrates how similar processes can yield different outcomes depending on the social and cultural context.

Evidence of acculturation emerges throughout both villages. However, these have varying forms. In Zhana Iqan, the process appears more contained within ethnic boundaries, while in Hantagy, inter-ethnic interactions foster deeper cultural blending. This chapter will showcase and illustrate the differences in how acculturation operates under distinct conditions while highlighting its multifaceted nature.

Celebrating holidays in Kazakh and Uzbek families reveals valuable insights into the rich cultural traditions and values of these Central Asian communities. Key festivities such as Eid al-Bayram, Nowruz, Kazakh National Unity Day, Kurban Ait, and various family-related celebrations serve as vital expressions of cultural identity and collective memory.

In both Kazakh and Uzbek families, Eid is marked by communal prayers, festive meals, and gift exchanges, with traditional dishes such as *plov*¹³ taking center stage (www.bbc.com/travel/article/20240222-plov-uzbekistans-rice-dish-with-sexual-power). These celebrations emphasise hospitality, togetherness, and spiritual renewal. They also reflect the shared Muslim heritage of both cultures.

The Nowruz holiday is celebrated with distinct yet overlapping traditions in Kazakh and Uzbek families. In Kazakh families, the holiday is marked by the preparation of *Nauryz kozhe*,¹⁴ a traditional soup, alongside a variety of cultural activities such as games and performances that symbolize the renewal of nature and prosperity (www.iapn.kz/articles/history/nauryz_kozhe_istoriya_glavnogo_simvola_prazdnika/). Uzbek families celebrate Nowruz by thoroughly cleaning and decorating their homes, participating in traditional customs, and preparing festive dishes. For Uzbeks, *Sumalak*¹⁵ is the symbolic holiday dish, which parallels the *Nauryz kozhe*

¹³ **Plov** – a medley of rice, vegetables, meat and spices – is popular throughout the countries of the Silk Road, but it's most closely associated with Uzbekistan. Widely consumed at least once a week, it's the country's national dish and is considered an indispensable part of family celebrations, served at births, weddings and funerals and to honour Muslims returning from Hajj.

¹⁴ **Nauryz kozhe** symbolizes prosperity and happiness, which is why eating it on the first day of the celebration is considered a good omen. It is believed that if you make a wish while eating it, the wish will certainly come true. It is made from seven ingredients: water, meat, flour, butter, grains, salt, and dairy products.

¹⁵ **Sumalak** (a wheat bran pudding) is a dish cooked exclusively for spring festival of Navruz and thus available for tasting only once a year. Sumalak is very tasty, invigorating and restores one's strength lost in the course of the winter.

in the Kazakh tradition (www.centralasia-travel.com/en/countries/uzbekistan/cuisine/sumalak). In the interviews, locals indicated that the meals often reflect individual tastes and seasonal availability rather than rigid cultural norms. This flexibility in food preparation emphasizes the importance of family preferences in shaping the culinary practices of the community. Symbolizing personal and communal renewal, Nowruz is marked by a focus on family and community bonding. In Zhana Iqan, Kazakh and Uzbek families partake in these annual celebrations, with shared customs observed across both groups.

Kazakh National Unity Day, celebrated on May 1, is an important holiday for both Kazakhs and Uzbeks in the Turkestan region. In Kazakh families, the day is marked with parades, cultural performances, and traditional games. The holiday fosters a sense of unity and national pride and reinforces collective identity and the importance of community (Tursynbayeva, 2016). Uzbek families in the Turkestan region also celebrate National Unity Day, participating in traditional ceremonies, music, and dance, which showcase the broader cultural connections between the Kazakh and Uzbek communities.

Family celebrations, such as weddings and birthdays, are valued by both Kazakh and Uzbek families. Kazakh celebrations are characterized as vibrant ceremonies with music, dance, and a strong emphasis on hospitality. These occasions are not only social, but also serve as avenues to express cultural pride. Similarly, Uzbek families celebrate significant life events with colorful attire, festive meals, and distinctive ceremonies, particularly during weddings. These practices echo Kazakh traditions and highlight the shared cultural heritage of Kazakhs and Uzbeks, primarily in the Zhana Iqan area, where both cultures coexist harmoniously.

The shared rituals and festivities within Kazakh and Uzbek families illustrate the deep cultural ties between the two peoples and underscore the mutual respect and common values that define their traditions. These celebrations not only showcase individual cultural practices but also highlight the interconnected cultural landscape of Central Asia.

Based on interviews with five Kazakh-Uzbek families in the Zhana Iqan region, traditional clothing emerged as an important cultural artifact, which embodies their historical heritage, aesthetic values, and evolving social norms. Within inter-ethnic households, clothing choices further revealed underlying power dynamics, shifting family hierarchies, and gendered negotiations of cultural practices. Rooted in its nomadic heritage, Kazakh traditional clothing balances practicality with symbolic elements. Iconic elements like the *shapan*¹⁶ (robe) for men and the *saukele* (bridal headdress) for women are often adorned with vibrant colors and intricate embroidery that symbolize social status and lineage (Nygmanova, 2022). The Uzbek attire, on

¹⁶ **Shapan** or also called chapan, is a large long dressing gown. These robes are not gender specific a other clothes, and both men and women commonly wear them. but they are still considered mostly as a man's clothing.

the other hand, reflects its Silk Road legacy through colorful patterns, detailed embroidery, and materials such as silk and cotton (Gafurov, 2017). Notable features include the *duppi*¹⁷ (skullcap) and ornately decorated robes, which showcase the region's history of artistic craftsmanship and trade (www.novotours.uz/about-uzbekistan/uzbek-skullcap/uzbek_skullcap.html).

Inter-ethnic dynamics influence the clothing worn during cultural celebrations. Observations indicated that in families where the husband is Kazakh, Kazakh attire often dominates family rituals and reflects male authority over cultural practices. Conversely, Uzbek attire prevails in families where the husband is Uzbek. These patterns highlight the patriarchal nature of decision-making, particularly in younger households, where the male partner exerts more influence on cultural expression. However, these dynamics were shown to evolve. For couples who had been married for 20 years or more, it was observed that wives gained greater decision-making power and influenced clothing preferences and other cultural practices. Anthropological theories on gender and power align with this gradual balancing of authority, as older couples tend to demonstrate more egalitarian dynamics. Women's assertiveness and leadership were critical factors shaping household practices. Interviews revealed that in families where the wife assumes a more dominant role, her preferences often guide the household's cultural expressions, including one's attire.

Beyond familial dynamics, broader societal influences also shape clothing preferences. In Zhana Iqan, women from other ethnic groups often adopt Kazakh attire for ceremonial occasions. This reflects their admiration for its cultural symbolism and aesthetic appeal. The trend can be interpreted in terms of cultural assimilation and mutual respect, with the traditions of the dominant local culture influencing inter-ethnic interactions. Traditional clothing transcends its functional purpose and symbolizes identity, power, and cultural negotiation. In inter-ethnic Kazakh-Uzbek households, attire is a dynamic medium for balancing heritage and adaptation and offers insights into the evolving interplay of gender, culture, and societal expectations. These patterns illustrate the complexities of preserving identity while navigating inter-ethnic coexistence in contemporary Kazakhstan.

In Zhana Iqan, the preparation of traditional cuisine in Kazakh-Uzbek mixed families symbolizes cultural identity, hospitality, and the dynamics of inter-ethnic interaction. Every day meals often alternate between Kazakh and Uzbek dishes, reflecting mutual respect and the blending of culinary traditions within these households. However, the chosen dishes at important family events reveal more profound cultural and societal influences. Uzbek cuisine

¹⁷ **Duppi** is a tetrahedral black skullcap made of silk or satin, on which national ornaments of white silk threads are embroidered. Ornaments and patterns on skullcaps from ancient times carry a profound meaning.

assumes a prominent position on such occasions, with the widespread preparation of a famous dish known as *plov*, an essential part of important events in Zhana Iqan. Whether marking celebratory or somber events like funerals, *plov* is a staple that unites families and communities across ethnic lines. Its practicality and popularity underscore its significance as a shared cultural marker in the region and transcend ethnic boundaries.

In addition, Kazakh traditional dishes, such as *beshbarmak*¹⁸ (www.smh.com.au/traveller/inspiration/this-country-s-national-dish-is-fascinating-and-challenging-20240411-p5fiyj.html) with *kumis*¹⁹ (indyguide.com/article/national--traditional-cuisine-and-drinks) are reserved for guests held in high esteem, particularly *qudalar* (in-laws) (Abduvaliev, 2021). This practice underscores the role of Kazakh cuisine in symbolizing honor and reverence within interfamily and communal relationships. The preparation of *beshbarmak* for such guests also reflects the cultural norms of hospitality and respect deeply ingrained in Kazakh traditions.

In Zhana Iqan, the shared culinary practices between Kazakhs and Uzbeks demonstrate a significant degree of acculturation. For instance, the frequent inclusion of *plov* at family events, irrespective of the host's ethnic background, illustrates a mixture of cultural norms. This adaptation illustrates how cuisine bridges ethnic identities, fostering shared cultural practices within the community.

The patterns highlighted offer valuable insights into the cultural adaptation and identity negotiation processes prevalent in mixed families. Culinary choices during important events reveal power dynamics within the household and reflect broader societal influences and the shared values emerging from inter-ethnic coexistence. Traditional dishes, therefore, represent the fluid boundaries of cultural identity and the mechanisms of integration found in the Turkestan region.

3.6. Homogeneous Uzbek families in Zhana Iqan

The similarities and differences in the family dynamics observed in the present research are measured through a comparative analysis of homogenous Uzbek and Kazakh-Uzbek families. Both family systems exhibit overlapping traits, particularly in terms of their hierarchical and patriarchal social structures. However, significant cultural variations develop, particularly in setting the shared living arrangements and gendered practices.

¹⁸ **Beshbarmak** is traditionally the food of nomadic tribes, the Kazakh and Kyrgyz people, and ain't nobody travelling around with cutlery.

¹⁹ **Kumys** is an ancient Turkic word, which means fermented drink made from mare's milk by special acidification. The most important thing in Kumys is that it is made from mare's milk. Kazakhs have never made Kumys from cow's milk or milk of any other domestic animal. The key issue in Kumys is that it is made only from mare's milk.

In homogenous Uzbek families in Zhana Iqan, it remains culturally acceptable for newly married couples to reside with the groom's parents, even after the marriage of another son. This practice reflects a traditional Uzbek cultural norm in which extended families cohabitate, allowing for mutual support and reinforcing patriarchal family hierarchies. This tradition aligns with broader patterns in Uzbekistan, where multi-generational households are commonplace. In contrast, while Kazakh-Uzbek families may adopt similar practices due to cultural proximity, extended cohabitation is less frequently observed, particularly among younger generations influenced by the changing socioeconomic landscape.

The position of daughters in Uzbek families presents another point of divergence. Within the cultural and Islamic frameworks common among Uzbeks, a daughter is often viewed as an *amanat*, a trust or responsibility entrusted by Allah. Thus, she is viewed as temporarily under her parents' care until she is married and "returned" to her husband's family. Consequently, the birth of a girl may be perceived less positively, and there is often a cultural inclination toward early marriage to ensure the daughter's transition to her husband's family and fulfill her perceived role. While such practices align with broader societal norms, they raise concerns about gender equality and the rights of young women. In contrast, daughters are regarded as honoured guests within their natal homes within Kazakh-Kazakh families. They are nurtured and cherished, often enjoying elevated status and special treatment. A strong cultural ethos encourages brothers to respect and support their sisters, highlighting a more protective and egalitarian perspective within the family structure. This divergence underscores how gender roles and familial expectations are embedded differently within the cultural frameworks of Kazakh and Uzbek communities, even amidst shared geographic and historical influences. Such variations in family dynamics mirror larger cultural issues, such as the traditions, gender roles, and socioeconomic change. Understanding these trends provides insights into how culture influences family life in Turkestan, particularly in the context of inter-ethnic marriages.

Ceremonial rituals are central in shaping familial bonds and cultural identities within Uzbek households. Deeply rooted in tradition, these rituals preserve and reflect the cultural heritage of Uzbek families, especially during significant life events such as weddings and births. Despite modern influences, many Uzbek families, including those in Zhana Iqan, continue to uphold these practices, which reveal details regarding their values and social structures. These rituals reflect social norms and carry profound symbolic meaning. They also represent key transitions while reinforcing shared values. From the perspective of symbolic anthropology, as articulated by scholars such as Clifford Geertz (1973), rituals serve as cultural texts that offer a glimpse into the collective consciousness of a society. These shapes and continuously formed by the social structures they reflect (Geertz, 1973).

For example, Uzbek weddings are elaborate and symbolise familial unity and community engagement. Pre-wedding traditions like the *Qiz Oshi* (girl's farewell) mark the bride's transition to married life. This ritual allows the bride to bid farewell to her natal family, a symbolic act representing the continuity of the family lineage and the transfer of responsibilities. The emotional resonance of such ceremonies highlights their symbolic importance, as they embody not just familial roles but also the broader cultural understanding of life's transitions. In line with Victor Turner's (1967) theory of ritual as social drama, these rites of passage facilitate the individual's movement through life stages, which reaffirm social roles and relationships within the community (Turner, 1967). The main wedding ceremony, *Nikokh Tui*, involves religious vows, the exchange of gifts, and the participation of extended family members, and underscores communal solidarity and reinforces cultural values of reciprocity and unity (Rahimov, 2024). These layers of ritual actions serve as tangible expressions of collective identity and social harmony that fulfill Turner's (1967) notion of *communitas*, where rituals help strengthen a sense of belonging and shared experience within the community.

In contrast, Kazakh weddings are generally less ritualised. While they feature significant communal celebrations, they lack deeply ingrained pre-wedding ceremonies, which can be compared to the *Qiz Oshi*. However, traditions such as hosting honoured guests (құдалар) reflect deeply embedded values of hospitality and respect. Though simpler in form, these elements carry their own symbolic weight, underscoring the importance of interpersonal relationships and social cohesion. This relative simplicity can be interpreted through Mary Douglas's (1966) understanding of symbolic purity: even in less elaborate forms, rituals such as the hosting of guests serve to reinforce the social fabric through acts of respect and honor (Douglas, 1966).

Second, birth ceremonies in Uzbek culture play a significant part in developing familial and communal bonds. The *Chilla*, a 40-day postpartum period, represents care and protection for the mother and newborn during the vulnerable stage. Its symbolic function reflects the fragility of new life and the need for communal nurturing. This resonates with Douglas's (1966) analysis of ritual purity, which examines the social significance of maintaining physical and spiritual cleanliness during critical life stages. Similarly, the *Aqiqah* ceremony, involving the sacrificial offering of a sheep, expresses gratitude for the child's arrival and a plea for blessings upon the family (Masharipova, 2024). These rituals are not only religiously significant, but they are also deeply symbolic and reinforce themes of purity, gratitude, and communal well-being.

Kazakh families also celebrate the birth of a child through the ritual of *kyrkynan shygaru* (қырқынан шығару), performed when the child reaches 40 days old. This tradition involves a

symbolic bath for the baby with silver jewelry used to purify the water. This reflects strong beliefs about purity and protection. According to Geertz (1973), ritual symbolic elements provide profound insights into a culture's belief systems, highlighting how material objects such as silver are imbued with deep cultural significance. The presence of a *Kindik Ana* (umbilical mother) to perform the ritual underscores communal responsibility and the collective nature of child-rearing in Kazakh society. Through these ceremonies, families reaffirm cultural values and foster a shared understanding of care and continuity (www.islam.kz/kk/articles/atamura/balany-qyrqynan-shygaru-dasturi-jane-onyn-dindegi-orny-2938/#gsc.tab=0).

These rituals, rich in symbolic meaning, also act as a bridge between generations and preserve cultural traditions while adapting to the needs of contemporary family life. Examining these activities shows connections between symbolic behaviors, social structures, and cultural identity, which contribute to a better understanding of how rituals form and reflect societal values.

Both family systems exhibit overlapping traits, particularly their hierarchical and patriarchal social structures. However, significant cultural variations emerge, especially regarding shared living arrangements and gendered practices. In homogeneous Uzbek families in Zhana Iqan, it remains culturally acceptable for newly married couples to reside with the groom's parents, even after the marriage of another son. This practice reflects a traditional Uzbek cultural norm in which extended families cohabit, allowing for mutual support and reinforcing patriarchal family hierarchies. This tradition aligns with broader patterns in Uzbekistan, where multi-generational households are commonplace. In contrast, while Kazakh-Uzbek families may adopt similar practices due to cultural proximity, extended cohabitation is less frequently observed, particularly among younger generations influenced by the changing socioeconomic landscape.

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and egalitarian perspective within the family structure. Such divergence underscores how gender roles and familial expectations are embedded differently within the cultural frameworks of Kazakh and Uzbek communities, even amidst shared geographic and historical influences. Such variations in family dynamics mirror larger cultural issues, such as traditions, gender roles, and socioeconomic change. Understanding these trends provides insight into how culture influences family life in Turkestan, particularly in the context of interethnic marriage.

Ceremonial rituals are central in shaping familial bonds and cultural identities within Uzbek households. Deeply rooted in tradition, these rituals preserve and reflect the cultural heritage of Uzbek families, especially during significant life events such as weddings and births. Despite modern influences, many Uzbek families, including those in Zhana Iqan, continue to uphold these.

3.7. Uzbek-Russian mixed marriages in Hantagy

Examining the dynamics of Uzbek-Russian families in Hantagy revealed significant distinctions between older and younger generations. These represent the acculturation process regarding cultural, religious, and national beliefs. In inter-ethnic marriages between Uzbek and Russian partners, who represent distinct cultural and religious backgrounds, the adaptation and negotiation of familial roles and identities can be observed. Analyzing this contrast uncovers the complexities of acculturation, cultural interaction, and identity retention in everyday life. In the context of Uzbek-Russian mixed marriages, generational differences can be understood from the perspective of acculturation theory and the social dynamics of intergenerational change. Older couples, formed by the sociopolitical context of the Soviet era, frequently adhere to more rigorous cultural and religious rituals. For them, acculturation is characterized by assimilation or separation (Berry, 1997), with ethnic and religious identities more strictly preserved. This aligns with Barth's (1998) claim that ethnic boundaries were clearer and more significant in the past. In contrast, younger couples experience a more flexible, bicultural identity influenced by globalization and greater exposure to transcultural influences (Grimes, 2018). As such, they are more likely to blend traditions, embrace hybrid identities, and reflect the social shifts and opportunities for cultural exchange in the contemporary world (Smith, 2017). Gender roles in mixed marriages have also evolved. Younger couples exhibit more egalitarian dynamics, with women often assuming more dominant roles, in contrast to older families' more traditional, gendered power structures (Kozlova, 2019). Religious acculturation additionally occupies an important role, as younger generations tend to adapt religious customs more easily, often opting to follow their spouse's faith (Adler, 2015). This was less common in

older generations, where religion and ethnic identity were more closely intertwined.

In older Uzbek-Russian families, it has been observed that Uzbek husbands typically wield a dominant influence over the household, with the Russian wife experiencing significant acculturation, adopting Uzbek traditions, values, and even cultural markers such as dress and lifestyle. This dynamic reflects the Uzbek husband's patterns of cultural preservation and his role as the "cultural leader" of the family. Concepts like *namysqoy* (an attitude of honour and pride toward cultural heritage) play an important role in shaping these family dynamics. These marriages exemplify strong cultural integration with a prevailing Uzbek cultural dynamic. In contrast, younger Uzbek-Russian couples adopt a more flexible and negotiated approach. Here, the Uzbek wife often takes the dominant role in shaping family life, with the Russian husband adapting to Uzbek norms and prioritising family harmony rather than asserting his cultural identity. This reflects a shift towards "transcultural" practices, where elements of both Uzbek and Russian cultures blend to form hybrid identities. Unlike the older generation, there is less emphasis on rigid cultural preservation. Homogeneous Russian families in Hantagy maintain distinct cultural practices, such as dacha culture, Orthodox Christian celebrations, and the Maslenitsa festival. These practices represent tradition, community, and multigenerational family bonds. In mixed marriages, Russian traditions are often adapted or integrated into family practices and reflect the broader processes of cultural synthesis within inter-ethnic families. Kallus and Vinnitsky (2016) explore the cultural significance of the dacha in Russian life, highlighting its dual role as both a symbol of leisure and a practical response to historical socio-economic conditions. Initially a privilege of the Russian aristocracy, the dacha became widely accessible during the Soviet era. It served as a retreat and a site for self-sufficiency, especially when food scarcity was imminent. The dacha continues to play a central role in Russian cultural practices, signifying the connection to nature, family, and the Russian idea of a "home away from home." In mixed marriages, dacha ownership represents a blending of cultural identities and a space in which traditions are adapted to meet new familial and social realities.

This chapter has rigorously tested Hypothesis 1, which proposed that acculturation and assimilation processes coexist and significantly shape the dynamics of inter-ethnic families in Turkestan. Drawing on 45 interviews from three villages (Shornak, Zhana Iqan, and Hantagy), the study analysed Kazakh-Uzbek, Uzbek-Russian, and homogenous Russian and Uzbek families. The findings provide complex insights into the interplay between these processes in shaping cultural identity and family practices.

The research revealed that assimilation is most evident in Kazakh-Uzbek marriages. In Shornak, families with Kazakh husbands and Uzbek wives demonstrated near-total assimilation into Kazakh cultural norms, despite the huge Uzbek presence in the village. This phenomenon

can be attributed to deeply ingrained gender roles, with the husband's cultural identity dictating family traditions and values. This suggests that the assimilation process is deeply intertwined with patriarchal structures and reinforces the dominance of Kazakh culture.

In contrast, acculturation emerged as a more nuanced and reciprocal process in mixed marriages in Zhana Iqan and Hantagy. In Zhana Iqan, Kazakh-Uzbek and homogeneous Uzbek families demonstrated hybrid cultural practices. They merge elements from the two ethnic groups to form a new, shared cultural identity. This successful negotiation of cultural differences aligns with the tenets of acculturation theory. Similarly, in Hantagy, Kazakh-Russian and homogeneous Russian families' presence and interactions with Kazakh families highlight adaptive acculturation processes, despite the pronounced cultural distinctions between Central Asian and Russian traditions.

The findings confirm that both assimilation and acculturation processes are at play but manifest differently depending on the ethnic composition, gender roles, and sociocultural dynamics of each village. Assimilation is more prevalent in cases where one ethnic group holds substantial cultural or gender-based authority, as observed in Kazakh-Uzbek families. Conversely, acculturation prevails in environments that encourage cultural exchange and mutual adaptation, as exemplified by the hybrid practices of Kazakh-Russian families.

In conclusion, the empirical findings support the hypothesis, illustrating how inter-ethnic marriages act as a microcosm for broader sociocultural dynamics in a multicultural society. This chapter underscores the importance of context-specific factors, such as local demographics, traditional gender norms, and the historical relationships between ethnic groups, in shaping the outcomes of assimilation and acculturation processes. These findings contribute valuable perspectives to inter-ethnic relationships and their role in fostering multicultural coexistence in Kazakhstan.

4. THE CONCEPT OF DISSIMILATION IN THE STUDY OF INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES WITHIN HOMOGENEOUS MESKHETIAN TURKISH, AZERBAIJANI MARRIAGES IN THE TURKESTAN REGION

4.1. Description of inter-ethnic marriages from the perspective of homogeneous households in the research context

Most families in the communities studied in southern Kazakhstan are homogeneous, making them a key focus for understanding how cultural heritage and traditional values are preserved. These families offer a window into how ethnic identities are passed down through shared customs, languages, and religious practices. At the same time, inter-ethnic marriages, though less common, reveal the challenges and opportunities of blending cultures and identities. How homogeneous families view and treat inter-ethnic unions – whether with acceptance or social pressure – is a key influence in shaping the community attitudes toward diversity and integration. By focusing on the experiences of Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis, this study uses dissimilation theory to explore how marriages reflect broader cultural and social dynamics. Through this lens, the research uncovers the delicate balance between preserving tradition and embracing change in these multicultural settings.

Inter-ethnic marriages have long captivated the curiosity of scholars from various disciplines and served as windows into societal attitudes towards race, ethnicity, and cultural integration. These unions offer a unique context for exploring the complexities of identity formation and cultural dynamics within multicultural societies. Homogeneous households, on the other hand, explore the subtleties of multiethnic living and safeguard cultural traditions. This, in turn, enhances our comprehension of inter-ethnic marriages and their dynamics. Analyzing the preservation of cultural heritage is more straightforward in homogeneous households. However, inter-ethnic marriages provide an informative context for exploring processes of cultural integration, the negotiation of social identity, and the interplay of traditions within diverse societies. This study investigated the dynamics of inter-ethnic and homogeneous marriages among Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis in Kazakhstan and utilized dissimilation theory as its primary analytical lens. The research contextualizes these communities' historical and contemporary realities. It also explores how cultural, linguistic, and social norms influence the formation and experiences of homogeneous and mixed marriages among minority populations.

In the present study, dissimilation theory offers a theoretical basis for understanding how individuals in inter-ethnic marriages navigate the complexities of identity formation by

distancing themselves from their ethnic origins to construct new identities within the framework of their relationships. This perspective facilitates the analysis of cultural and social differences, including the gendered dynamics of these interactions and the mechanisms through which traditions are preserved, adapted, or transformed.

For the chapter on dissimilation, a more focused approach was employed by selecting a subset of interviews to facilitate deeper analysis. From the original pool, 10 interviews were chosen from homogeneous families and 10 from inter-ethnic families. This selection aimed to provide a clearer understanding of the processes by which cultural and linguistic traits are maintained, adapted, or lost over time, offering a comparative perspective on the lived experiences of these two groups.

Homogeneous families serve as a comparative baseline and provide insights into cultural preservation and its influence on mixed family structures. The findings indicate that the region's homogeneous marriages are more prevalent than mixed marriages. This trend appears to reflect an intentional effort by some families to maintain national values and traditions. It also aligns with the predictions of dissimilation theory.

Additionally, the study observes that Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis who enter inter-ethnic marriages often relocate to new areas. This phenomenon aligns with dissimilation theory, which, as conceptualised by Ralph Linton and later expanded on by John Milton Yinger, suggests that inter-ethnic marriages can lead to a reconfiguration of identity through partial disengagement from one's original ethnic group (Linton, 1940; Yinger, 1976).

Analyzing the relational dynamics in homogeneous and interethnic families, this research reveals that cultural identities are negotiated and redefined through a complex process. These findings contribute to anthropological perspectives on integration, cultural transmission, and the adaptive strategies of minority groups in diverse social environments.

Cultural legacy and migration histories hold considerable importance among diverse ethnic populations of Kazakhstan, especially in the targeted research settlements of Turkestan, namely *Turki Poselkasy* and *Kentau-Hantagy*, where *Meskhetian* Turks and Azerbaijanis reside. Classification and understanding of these ethnic groupings in census data, however, have sparked debates and prompted further research in this area.

Against this backdrop, this study explores the theoretical underpinnings of dissimilation theory. It aims to illuminate the historical context, migratory patterns, and current circumstances experienced by these communities in the research areas. Central to this exploration is the overarching question: How does dissimilation theory predict the likelihood of inter-ethnic marriages among individuals striving to balance cultural identity and societal integration?

Building upon this inquiry, the hypothesis posited is that inter-ethnic marriage may result in the erosion of an ethnic group's core values and culture. Rooted in the framework of dissimilation theory, this hypothesis suggests that individuals who marry someone from a different ethnic or cultural background may distance themselves from their ethnic group as they forge a new identity within the inter-ethnic relationship.

The primary objective of this research is to assess the applicability of dissimilation theory in understanding the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages, with a specific focus on *Meskhetian* Turks and Azerbaijanis in Turkestan, Kazakhstan, by exploring historical contexts, contemporary realities, and lived experiences within these communities. The research uncovers the intricate mechanisms of cultural adaptation and social integration among minority groups.

Twenty families, consisting of both homogeneous and mixed marriages, with members aged 25 to 50, participated in the survey. Despite equal participation from men and women, it was observed that women generally had greater access to knowledge than men and were more willing to share information.

The dynamics of dissimilation theory were also evident during the interview process. Local Azerbaijanis and *Meskhetian* Turks often showed reluctance to exchange information with local Kazakhs and representatives of other ethnic groups, and even when they consented, they frequently prohibited the use of media tools (e.g., dictaphones, audio and video tools, photos). Thus, the author's handwritten notes serve as the foundation for this study.

This study examines social identity and groups, which are based on the concepts of ethnic identity maintenance and social pressure, as well as cultural and social differences, which arise from language barriers, religious differences, social norms, and traditions. These elements serve as the foundation of dissimilation theory. In cultural anthropology, dissimilation theory can explain how group differences become more pronounced and significant and is used to investigate how individuals identify with their ethnic group and how this identification affects their marital preferences. Specifically, this study considers (1) ethnic identity maintenance: how a preference for intra-ethnic marriages may stem from a desire to preserve one's ethnic identity; (2) social pressure: how societal and family pressures can encourage integration and discourage inter-ethnic unions; (3) language barriers: how linguistic disparities can hinder communication and pose challenges in marriage; (4) religious differences: how various religious beliefs and practices can affect the likelihood of interethnic marriages; and (5) social customs and traditions: how cultural practices and traditions can either positively or negatively impact interethnic unions. Additionally, how gender roles and expectations shape personal and interpersonal behavior are also explored. This includes variations in the division of labor, authority within the household, and behavioral expectations. These differences can pose

significant challenges if partners' views on gender roles clash (Hofstede, 2001).

Moreover, the study extends to inter-ethnic families, particularly between *Meskhetian* Turks and Russians. It also offers insights into the fusion of cultural heritages, familial customs, and identity formation.

Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of multicultural dynamics in Kazakhstan and recommend policies and initiatives that promote social cohesion and inclusion. By amplifying the voices and experiences of minority groups, the study endeavours to chart a path towards a more equitable and harmonious society.

4.2. Theoretical framework of the study interpretation of the origin of Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis

This chapter employs dissimilation theory as the primary analytical system to investigate identity negotiation and cultural dynamics in interethnic marriages among Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis in Kazakhstan. As conceptualised by Ralph Linton (1940) and further developed by John Milton Yinger (1976), this theoretical perspective posits that individuals in inter-ethnic marriages partially distance themselves from their ethnic origins, adopting new identities within their marital contexts. Building on this, Ewa Morawska (2001) argues that such shifts in identity often emerge as adaptive responses to migration and social integration, which reflect broader cultural transformations.

Dissimilation theory, deeply rooted in cultural anthropology, is enriched by Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) notion of *habitus*, which elaborates on how social environments impact cultural preferences and behaviours. This aligns with Geert Hofstede's (2001) analysis of cultural differences, particularly those related to gender roles, authority, and traditions, examining how they shape interpersonal dynamics. This study uses dissimilation theory to explain how cultural and social differences, such as language, religion, and customs, are negotiated within homogeneous and interethnic families.

The historical context surrounding the Meskhetian Turks' arrival in Kazakhstan is a critical backdrop for understanding their current sociocultural dynamics. The forced deportation of Meskhetian Turks from the Caucasus in December 1944 initiated a complex process of resettlement and integration (Savin, 2007). Isolated from their homeland, these communities adapted to life in Kazakhstan while maintaining their Turkic-speaking identity, as reflected in the works of Akkiewa (2016) and Osipov (2013).

The dual identity of Meskhetian Turks is evident in their self-identification as "Ahiska Turks" and rejection of the label "Meskhetian Turks" (Savin, 2007). This issue reflects the

broader debate over their origins, with scholars like Stephen Jones (1993) identifying them as Muslim Georgians or a distinct Turkic-speaking ethnic group. This variation in their self-perception, influenced by migration and settlement in various regions, aligns with Morawska's (2001) findings on the fluidity of identity among displaced populations.

Language is an important part of the dissimilation process, serving as a communication tool and a marker of cultural identity. For the Meskhetian Turks, who speak the Kars dialect of Turkish, their linguistic diversity highlights their adaptability and absorption into Turkestan's largely Kazakh – and Russian-speaking districts. These dynamics are consistent with Hofstede's (2001) findings on cultural convergence and divergence, which show that language reflects cultural preservation and assimilation.

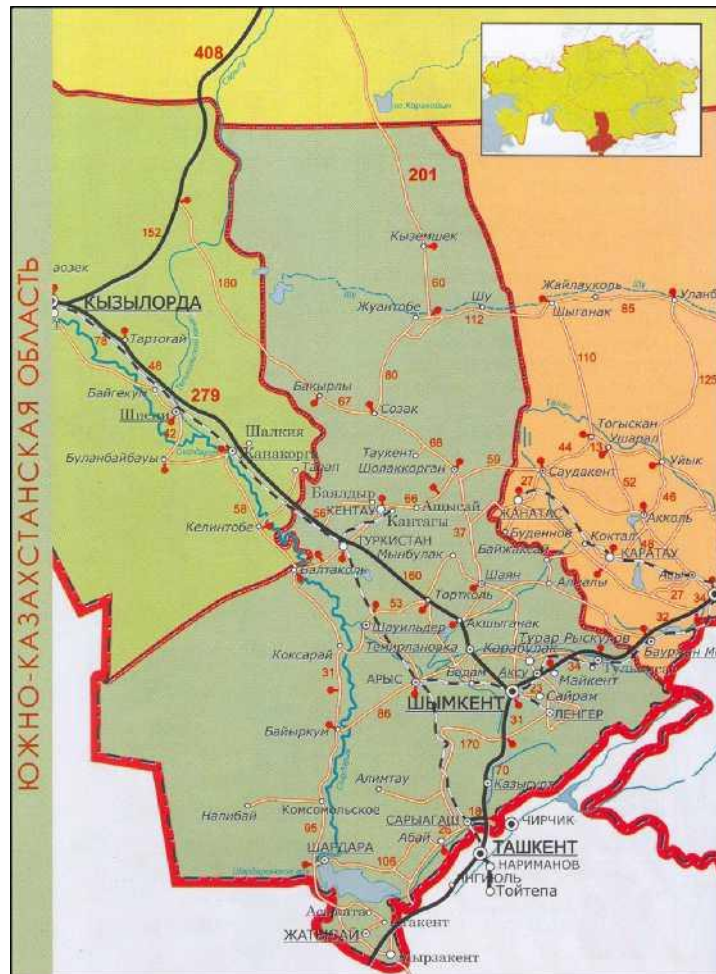
Drawing on Eric Wolf's (1982) insights on cultural interaction, this study situates the dynamics of inter-ethnic marriages within Kazakhstan's broader historical and sociopolitical context. The narratives of Meskhetian Turks in villages such as Turki Poselkasy and Kentau exemplify the blending of traditions and the negotiation of identity within multiethnic environments. This dynamic resonates with Mauss's (1925) theories on social exchange, which highlight how cultural practices are continually renegotiated within new social frameworks.

This study emphasises the complex interplay between identity, tradition, and adaptation by synthesising foundational works in dissimilation theory with historical and contemporary research on the Meskhetian Turks. The theoretical grounding stipulated by Linton (1940), Yinger (1976), Morawska (2001), and others offers a robust framework for understanding how inter-ethnic marriages serve as sites for cultural transformation. These marriages not only facilitate communication and coexistence but also mediate the processes of identity negotiation and cultural adaptation in the context of Kazakhstan's diverse sociocultural landscape.

During the data collection process from *Meskhetian* Turks and Azerbaijanis residing in Kentau and Turki Poselkasy, the locals volunteered a wealth of information regarding their migration history. This information supplied a historical context for the research to inform the exploration of the culture and way of life of the aforementioned ethnic groups. Based on the data gathered, the historical backgrounds of the *Meskhetian* Turks and Azerbaijanis show remarkable parallels, suggesting close ancestral ties. Nonetheless, the interview data indicate that both groups have maintained unique ethnic values while avoiding significant affinities with the local Kazakh population or other groups residing in the region. It is important to note that these insights are based on the interviewees' self-perceptions, who are entrusted with providing definitive descriptions of their ethnic identities. Ongoing research will continue to investigate the precise differences between the *Meskhetian* Turks and Azerbaijanis.

Turki Poselkasy, a rural district in Turkestan known locally as *Туркі поселкасы*

[Turkish settlement], is primarily inhabited by Meskhetian Turks, which explains its local name. Officially, it is called the Bekzat region. Information about the rural district is scarce both online and in territorial databases. Nevertheless, fieldwork research yielded some basic information about the location from the village's administrative sources (Picture 5).



Picture 5. Historical map of the Turkestan region before its designation as a separate administrative entity, including its integration into southern Kazakhstan.

Source: https://oldford.ru/foto/post/karta-turkestanskoj-oblasti-po-rajonam?utm_referrer=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.google.com%2F.

According to these sources, Turki Poselkasy currently has a total population of 2,405, with the following ethnic composition: 2,350 *Meskhetian* Turks, 49 Kazakhs, and 6 Uzbeks. The economically active segment of this population includes 1,100 individuals, while the number of pensioners stands at 214, indicating a smaller proportion of elderly residents. Preschool children number 387, and school-age children (i.e., those enrolled in primary and secondary education) total 546, which indicates a substantial youth presence within the population. There are 121 unemployed individuals. They represent those actively seeking

employment. Additionally, there are 37 individuals classified as disabled, encompassing those with physical or mental impairments that impact their daily activities (Figure 1).

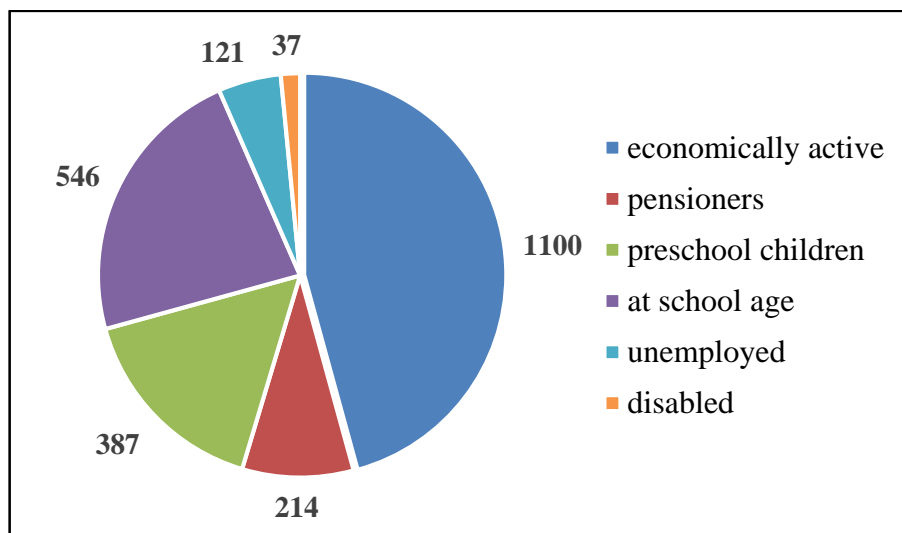


Figure 1. *Statistical information on the social composition of the population.*

Source: Provided in handwriting by the local administrative data of the Turki Poselkasy.

Even during Soviet times, Kazakhstan was referred to as a laboratory of friendship between peoples. This title reflected the multinational composition of its population and the significant demographic changes strongly influenced by migration over the past 150 years. Migrants from other provinces of post-reform Tsarist Russia – those who came to the “construction sites of socialism,” those who were repressed or evacuated during wartime, and the “virgin lands” farmers of the 1950s – all contributed to the formation of the modern multicultural landscape of Kazakhstan. According to statistics from March 1, 2024, the current population of Kazakhstan totals 20,075,271. The composition of major ethnic groups based on the summary results of the 2021 census was published on September 1, 2022 and is detailed in Figure 2.

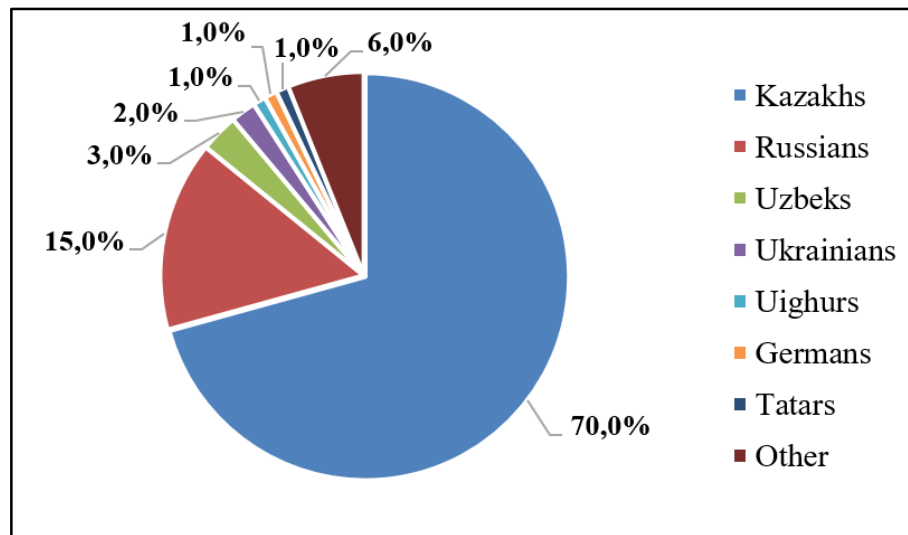


Figure 2. *Population of Ethnic Groups in Kazakhstan (2022)*.

Source: Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for strategic planning and reforms, 2021: 60.

The categorisation of *Meskhetian* Turks in the 1999 Census shows that they are subsumed under the categories of Azerbaijanis (78,000), Turks (76,000), and Meskhetian Turks themselves (3,000). Determining the precise number of Meskhetian Turks included within the Turk and Azerbaijani populations is impossible. Therefore, it was hypothesised that most of those listed as Turks and about 3/4 of those listed as Azerbaijanis could be attributed to *Meskhetian* Turks. This assumption is based on expert opinions from the Meskhetian Turk community and research into the circumstances in which Azerbaijanis came to be in Kazakhstan. During fieldwork in February and March 2024, visits were made to meet with the local administration in Turki Poselkasy (Agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Strategic Planning and Reforms, 1999).

4.3. Migration history and dissimulation in inter-ethnic families of Kentau and Turki Poselkasy

The Meskhetian Turks arrived in Kazakhstan in December 1944 after being forcibly removed from the Caucasus. According to activists in Meskhetian Turk societies, the total number of those expelled in 1944 ranges from 90,000 to 100,000 people. After arriving in Kazakhstan, these individuals, unfamiliar with both the local language and way of life, were forcibly resettled across various villages in family groups (Savin, 2007: 44).

The Meskhetian Turks, who refer to themselves as Ahiska Turks (or Yerli in pre-Soviet times), are a heterogeneous Turkic-speaking Muslim ethnic group of disputed origin. Originating from the Meskheti region in southwestern Georgia and speaking the Kars dialect of

Turkish, they are often described as either Turkified Georgians or a distinct Turkish ethnic group. Jones (1993) further explores this contested identity, emphasising the fluid and politicised nature of the Meskhetian Turks' identity. According to Jones, the group's ambiguous ethnic status has been shaped by historical and geopolitical forces, which oscillate between being classified as "Muslim Georgians" or as part of the Turkish ethnos. He argues that the displacement and statelessness experienced by the Meskhetian Turks have further complicated their self-perception and how others categorise them.

Regarding their origins, Akkieva writes that "researchers E. Panesh and L. Ermolov believe that the Turks from Meskheta represent a special ethnic group of the Turkish ethnos, which developed in the zone of two ethnic territories – Georgia and Turkey. Naturally, it was formed from representatives of both peoples and even to some extent combined the features of the cultures of these peoples. The Turkish component turned out to be more influential. Today, among a significant part of the Meskhetian Turks, the second point of view is more widespread, and they consider their origin to be Turkish, and their true name is 'Ahiska Turks' (Ahiska Turklyari)" (Akkieva, 2016: 21–22). Jones's (1993) work complements this perspective by highlighting context-dependent variations in the group's identity, with some Meskhetian Turks strongly identifying as Turkish, while others emphasise their Georgian roots. This duality underscores the complex interplay of historical migration, forced displacement, and cultural adaptation in shaping the identity of the Meskhetian Turks, who represent a "community without a homeland."

Similarly, another Russian scholar, A. Osipov considering both versions of the origin, concludes that "in general, we can say that the appearance of a Turkish-speaking Muslim population in Akhaltsikhe could be the result of complex demographic and linguistic processes that chronologically extend beyond the period of Ottoman rule in the 17th – early 19th centuries and not reducible to the assimilation of the Georgian population" (Osipov, 2013:122).

Although the majority of Meskhetians, most of whom were born outside of Meskheta, refer to themselves as "Meskhetian Turks," a significant minority actively seeking to return to Georgia continue to identify as Georgian Muslims (Jones 1993, p.14–16). This variation extends to those living in different countries; for example, Meskhetian Turks in Azerbaijan, according to Yunusov, often feel a stronger connection to a Turkish identity, whereas those in Georgia vehemently deny this connection and emphasise their distinctiveness from Turks (Bilge 2012, p. 13). Azerbaijanis and Meskhetian Turks were interviewed during fieldwork in the selected settlements. Although they may share the same ethnic origins, the information provided and the following analysis are based on their perceptions.

Research fellow Savin from the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS, who conducted his

research in the southern part of Kazakhstan, notes that almost all Meskhetian Turks identify themselves as Ahiska Turks and strongly reject the term “Meskhetian Turks”. Despite its use in census forms, the community does not accept the term itself. This may be the reason why few of them agreed with this definition during the 1999 census (Savin 2007, p.61).

The forced resettlement of the Meskhetian Turks in Kazakhstan in 1944 and their subsequent efforts to maintain cultural autonomy align closely with the theoretical insights of Morawska (2001), Wolf (1982), and Stephen Jones (1993). Morawska emphasises the fluidity of identity in displaced populations, claiming that migration provides an opportunity to rethink ethnic and cultural boundaries in response to navigating new sociopolitical circumstances. This perspective can be applied to the adaptive strategies employed by the Meskhetian Turks as they settled in Kazakhstan, which balances between assimilation and preserving their distinct linguistic and cultural practices. Similarly, Wolf (1982) positions population movements within the broader context of historical power dynamics and structural inequalities to examine how they shape cultural interactions and identity formation.

The dual identity observed in the Meskhetian Turk communities in Turki Poselkasy and Kentau is reflected in their emphasis on preserving unique architectural styles, places of worship, and community cohesion, which serve as distinct ethnic markers and mechanisms of cultural preservation. Together, these frameworks underscore the intricate interplay between historical displacement, social adaptation, and the enduring quest for cultural self-definition among the Meskhetian Turks in Kazakhstan.

Yinger highlighted the role of social institutions such as education, religion, and the media in shaping the processes of assimilation and dissimilation (Yinger, 1981). These institutions can either facilitate or impede the integration of minority groups into mainstream society, depending on their attitudes and policies toward cultural diversity. This is evident among Meskhetian Turk families who navigate their cultural practices and integration into the broader community. Yinger argued that dissimilation can be a legitimate response to cultural autonomy and self-determination among minority groups. His work provides a deeper understanding of how minority groups, such as the Meskhetian Turks, negotiate their identity, power, and belonging within multicultural societies. This theoretical framework is essential for analysing the integration strategies of Meskhetian Turk families and their interactions with the broader community.

Dissimilation theory, which examines variations in cultures, languages, and social norms, can serve as a robust analytical framework for investigating the dynamics of inter-ethnic unions. This theoretical approach systematically explores how distinct cultural, linguistic, and social factors influence the formation and evolution of inter-ethnic marriages. Dissimilation

theory provides insights into the complex interplay between individual identities and broader societal structures in shaping inter-ethnic relationships by focusing on the increasing salience of group distinctions.

Social identity, heavily influenced by the preservation of ethnic identity and influenced by social pressures, plays a crucial role in promoting homogeneous marriages. This inclination often stems from the desire to maintain and transmit cultural traditions, language, and customs. Individuals are more likely to select partners from their ethnic group to ensure the continuity of their cultural heritage. This phenomenon underscores the impact of social identity and external pressures in shaping marital choices and preserving ethnic distinctiveness. Understanding social pressure illuminates how family and community expectations compel individuals to choose partners from within their ethnic group to maintain cultural integrity and unity. Such pressures discourage inter-ethnic marriages and reinforce differences between ethnic groups. These factors promote dissimilation (Fowers–Richardson, 1996).

While compiling the respondent list for the research project in the Turkestan region, it was discovered that over 70% of the households in the village were composed of members of the same ethnic group, resulting in a higher number of homogeneous marriages than mixed ones. Regardless of how long they had resided in their community, families in mixed marriages often moved to other nearby villages due to societal pressures. Ensuring useful comparative data for the study, families who relocated to a different area were contacted and included in the data collection process.

The data collected from Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis in Turkestan provides a compelling illustration of dissimilation theory with social identity. The fieldwork reveals that despite coexisting in the same region with other ethnic groups, Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis prefer endogamous marriages and tend to live in separate villages with minimal interaction with other ethnic groups. This preference for intra-group marriages underscores the desire to preserve ethnic identity and cultural continuity.

Turki Poselkasy, primarily inhabited by Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis, is characterised by unique architectural features, house designs, and places of worship that further emphasise their ethnic distinctiveness. These observable differences raise questions about how residents from different ethnic backgrounds perceive and respond to this segregation, forming the basis for future research. This analytical perspective highlights the intersection of social identity and dissimilation processes and provides valuable insights into the dynamics of ethnic relations in the region.

Cultural and social differences between ethnic groups can influence the propensity for inter-ethnic marriages. In this context, the following aspects can be considered: language

barriers, religious differences, social norms, and traditions. Data collected from various types of families in Kentau and Turki Poselkasy, including both homogeneous and mixed marriages, indicates that although these are distinct, autonomous families, the viewpoints and responses of men and women in Azerbaijani and Meskhetian Turk households frequently match, with 80% of them sharing the same views on language, religion, social norms, customs, and other fundamental aspects of daily life.

During the interviews with couples from inter-ethnic marriages, it was found that men typically held the dominant role and had greater freedom in choosing their spouses. This dynamic resonates with Mauss's (1925) theories of social exchange, which conceptualise marriage as a site of negotiation, involving individual preferences and the broader exchange of cultural, social, and symbolic capital. Women faced more constraints in this regard and underscored the asymmetrical nature of social and cultural power in marital decisions. This power imbalance may explain why I failed to find households where Meskhetian Turk or Azerbaijani women were married to men from other ethnic groups in the observed research sites.

The interviewees also provided insights into how linguistic barriers, religious differences, and the maintenance of traditions shape the dynamics in homogenous Azerbaijani marriages compared to mixed Meskhetian Turkish marriages. According to Mauss, these acts are examples of symbolic exchange, wherein customs and language preservation serve as a conduit to maintain social cohesion and ethnic identity. In one interview, an Azerbaijani man emphasized the importance of maintaining linguistic and cultural practices, noting that his family exclusively uses their native language at home. This practice underscores the significance of language as a means of communication and a medium for transmitting cultural heritage (Mauss, 1925).

In mixed educational settings, Azerbaijani families often select Russian-language schools due to the scarcity of public and educational institutions offering instruction in their native language. This preference, rooted in the historical legacies of the Soviet era, illustrates the complex interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation. According to Mauss, this choice can also be viewed as reciprocity and exchange. While the adoption of Russian facilitates broader social and economic integration, it also entails a symbolic "trade-off" that negotiates aspects of native linguistic identity in favor of practicality and societal inclusion. This duality underscores the relevance of Mauss's framework for understanding how cultural and social practices are exchanged, preserved and transformed in inter-ethnic contexts.

The analytical comparison between homogeneous and mixed marriages reveals that language choices and educational decisions are influenced by broader socio-historical contexts.

This interplay underscores the persistent impact of Soviet-era policies on current linguistic practices and the ongoing efforts to preserve ethnic identity within the community.

Homogeneous marriages are strongly preferred within the studied communities, as they are viewed as vital for preserving ethnic identity, cultural traditions, and social unity. Families in these marriages see them as a way to maintain their heritage and pass down language, customs, and values to future generations. Often, such preference is reinforced by family and community expectations, which discourage inter-ethnic unions to ensure cultural continuity.

Although less common, inter-ethnic marriages encounter significant social challenges. Families in mixed unions frequently feel pressured to relocate due to societal resistance and must navigate cultural and linguistic differences within their relationships. Gender dynamics also influence the situation, as men are typically afforded more freedom to marry outside their ethnic group, while women face stricter social constraints. These dynamics contribute to the infrequency of inter-ethnic unions involving Meskhetian Turk or Azerbaijani women.

Overall, homogeneous families often approach inter-ethnic marriages with caution. This is driven by a desire to protect their cultural identity. While some mixed marriages succeed in blending traditions and adapting to new cultural contexts, the prevailing sentiment in these communities emphasizes the importance of preserving distinct ethnic identities and traditions. This balance between resistance and adaptation reflects cultural identity complexities in the region.

4.4. Gender roles and social integration in *Meskhetian Turk families*

Yinger's dissimilation theory, when applied to gender roles, suggests that individuals in inter-ethnic marriages may adapt their traditional gender norms and behaviours to better align with those of their partner's culture. This can lead to a blending or reshaping of gender expectations, as both partners negotiate their roles within the marriage. The theory highlights the fluidity of cultural and gender identities in inter-ethnic relationships (Yinger, 1981).

The research underscores the crucial role of gender order in shaping perceptions and integration strategies of Meskhetian Turk families within their local communities. Traditional gender roles greatly influence both internal family dynamics and external social interactions. According to the data collected, most female interviewees emphasised the significance of gender policies in their society.

When discussing gender-related issues during the research and data collection phase, it became evident that men predominate in major spheres of public social life. For instance, empirical findings suggest that children, irrespective of the nationality of their father, tend to

speak more in the father's native language, maintain stronger ties with their father's side of the family, and initially adhere to the customs, religious beliefs, and family values of their paternal side.

The daily routines of Meskhetian Turk families reveal a strong adherence to traditional gender roles. Approximately 95% of women interviewed reported that girls are raised to be meek, frugal, and subservient, and are often trained to become good housewives. Boys, conversely, enjoy more freedom but are also raised with strict expectations, including a strong sense of responsibility towards their sisters. These gender-specific upbringing practices reflect deeply entrenched cultural norms.

Wedding customs further illustrate the community's commitment to traditional gender norms, especially with women. During fieldwork in Turkestan, a significant cultural insight emerged from an interview with a respected 53-year-old community leader, Usen, hailing from the village of Turki Poselkasy. He emphasised that in the Meskhetian Turk community, girls are raised from early childhood to become what is considered a "good" and "proper" wife and mother. According to him:

"In our culture, the expectations for girls are different from a very young age. Once a woman marries, there are strict rules she must follow. For example, a new bride is not allowed to speak aloud to her husband's parents or relatives for up to five years. If she does, it is considered disrespectful. There is a popular story we often share: A bride once followed all the traditional duties—waking up at 5 a.m., cleaning, preparing breakfast, and serving her in-laws without complaint. One day, her father-in-law insisted that she finally speak to them. Following custom, she asked her husband to organise a formal sacrifice (qurban) and a religious ceremony to 'open her mouth'. From the next morning, however, she stopped all her previous tasks, slept in, and no longer showed the same respect to the family. When asked why, she responded, 'Even though I resisted, you made me break the tradition of our ancestors. If you disrespected their path, I too have the right to break from my duties'" (interview, 2022).

This story, as shared by Usen, illustrates how oral traditions are instilled and preserve social norms within the community, particularly concerning gender roles and intergenerational respect. It also reflects how ritual and symbolism are deeply embedded in upholding family and

cultural hierarchy. Such narratives reinforce customary behaviour among young women, shaping their roles long before marriage. This practice underscores the community's commitment to maintaining social order and respect for elders.

Additionally, traditional gender roles influence household authority, with men typically holding decision-making power and women overseeing domestic responsibilities. These roles can create challenges in inter-ethnic marriages, particularly when partners come from diverse cultural backgrounds with differing expectations regarding gender behaviours and responsibilities.

The observed reluctance of men to participate in interviews and the gendered patterns in cultural transmission highlight the complexities of navigating gender dynamics in inter-ethnic marriages. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for comprehending the broader processes of social integration and identity negotiation within multicultural societies.

The observed gender-specific practices and cultural norms within Meskhetian Turk families can be analysed through the lens of Mauss's (1925) theory of gift exchange, which highlights the intricate social obligations that bind individuals within a community and ensure the continuity of cultural traditions and social order. One such example is the custom requiring new brides to remain silent and subservient until formally permitted to speak. This reflects an implicit exchange: the bride adheres to familial expectations as part of her integration into her husband's family, which symbolizes respect and unity. Similarly, transmitting the father's language, customs, and values to his children represents a symbolic exchange, where paternal identity is preserved and reinforced within the family structure. These practices underscore the reciprocal obligations inherent in gender roles, where women uphold cultural continuity through domestic responsibility, and men maintain authority and lineage. By viewing these dynamics through Mauss's framework, the interplay of tradition, gender, and social cohesion within Meskhetian Turk families can be interpreted as a process of structured reciprocity and provides an insightful perspective for understanding the community's cultural preservation and adaptation.

Homogeneous Meskhetian Turk Families. In the subsequent section, following a discussion of the analysis of the collected data, specific examples will be provided that highlight the differences between Meskhetian Turk homogeneous families and Turkic-Russian inter-ethnic marriages. This comparative analysis will emphasise the distinct cultural practices, family structures, and social dynamics characterising each type of marital arrangement.

Inter-ethnic couples often face the challenge of adapting to each other's cultural norms, values, and practices. According to dissimilation theory, individuals may consciously or subconsciously distance themselves from aspects of their own culture to better integrate into

their partner's cultural milieu. This cultural adaptation process can be observed in various aspects of daily life, such as language use, food preferences, and religious practices.

For example, Meskhetian Turks grow up in a multicultural society, interacting with Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, Tatars, and Russians. Their childhood memories, especially from their school years, reflect a sense of unity and mutual support across ethnic lines. However, in their current settlement, Meskhetian Turks predominantly occupy the central area and maintain a distinct cultural and social identity. They prioritise their native language, using it exclusively at home and comfortably among friends from similar ethnic backgrounds. Their social circles often include Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Turks, or Azerbaijanis. Religion, particularly Islam, plays a significant role in their daily lives and influences social etiquette and children's education. In terms of family structure, Meskhetian Turk families preserve traditional lifestyles and customs, setting themselves apart from other ethnic groups. Extended families are ordinary, with close bonds among relatives creating a supportive network that upholds social norms and customs. This structure typically includes parents, children, and often grandparents or other close relatives, who live together or nearby, forming a tightly knit social network.

4.5. Meskhetian-Turk-Russian inter-ethnic families

The following section of the research focuses on inter-ethnic marriages involving Meskhetian Turks, based on the findings from the gathered data. Specifically, the study examines marriages between Meskhetian Turks and Russians to assess the degree of integration and other significant components of these interethnic unions. To conduct interviews with these inter-ethnic couples, I travelled to a rural district near the city of Shymkent, where these couples currently reside as they relocated from the initially investigated region. These moves were primarily due to the social pressure mentioned above.

Inter-ethnic relationships often involve renegotiating cultural values, traditions, and beliefs to reconcile their partners' diverse cultural backgrounds. Accordingly, this subsection will explore how inter-ethnic couples navigate the celebration of holidays, traditional clothing, and ceremonial rituals within these marriages, areas which were highlighted in the interview results.

In several case studies, a Meskhetian Turkish man married a Russian woman. Upon arrival in a Turkish family, Russian women were often given a new name to integrate into the family's cultural milieu. For example, a 21-year-old Russian new bride who came very young to the Turk-Meskhetian family shared:

“My name was Ksenia, but after I married into a Meskhetian Turkish family, they gave me a new name — Gozel. It was part of adapting to their culture, which was completely different from the life I knew. I was raised by a single parent and spoke only Russian, with just a little Kazakh. I didn’t know anything about Turkish customs or language before marriage — I had to start learning everything from scratch once I joined the family. I used to be an athlete, played basketball, and had a very active lifestyle. However, in my husband’s community, even activities like going to a dance club could be considered inappropriate. It was a big adjustment for me” (interview, 2022).

This testimony highlights the profound cultural transition experienced by non-Turkish brides entering the Meskhetian Turkish community. It illustrates how identity, language, and lifestyle are reshaped within the framework of traditional expectations. It also renders personal adaptation not merely a social but also a symbolic transformation.

I. Savin, in his work *Kazakhstan: Successful Integration but Inadequate Protection*, notes that dance groups often face a scarcity of dancers, as some families do not permit their daughters to perform in public (Savin, 2007).

The researcher focused on religious differences between two distinct ethnic groups, identifying these as significant contributing factors to the escalation of several ethnic conflicts involving these groups. In one case mentioned in the interviews, a Russian bride, despite her Christian background, adapted to the demands of her husband’s family out of love and respect. However, she faced internal conflict as she struggled to reconcile the obligations of Islam with her lifelong Christian upbringing. The adaptation process for new brides often includes learning their husband’s language and converting to Islam. This example demonstrates considerable cultural and religious integration.

A second point of conflict emerged from the cultural traditions upheld by elders, who play a central role in organizing and enforcing customary practices during weddings and other celebratory events. This tension was particularly evident in the case of a bride of Russian heritage adhering to Turkish wedding customs and underscores the challenges of reconciling different cultural expectations within the marriage. The wedding and the bride’s departure ceremony were conducted according to Turkish customs due to the man’s dominant role in the family and the influence of the husband’s ethnic background on family rituals. The data gathered for the present study reveal that in mixed marriages where the husband is of Turkic descent, fundamental family values and traditions are predominantly influenced by Turkic

customs. This influence is evident when the husband's family's ethnic values were prioritized over the wife's original cultural practices. For instance, while Russian customs on marriage proposals and bride departure ceremonies are less defined, Meskhetian Turkish weddings are elaborate events that bind the entire families. Overall, the research highlights significant cultural adaptation and integration in inter-ethnic marriages involving Meskhetian Turks. Preserving Turkic traditions within these marriages underscores the importance of ethnic identity and the continuous negotiation of cultural values in shaping family life.

Similarly, the family structure of homogenous Meskhetian Turkish families typically includes parents and children. They often incorporate grandparents and other close relatives, who may live together or nearby. This also forms a tightly knit social network.

In conclusion, the study provides valuable insights into the complex dynamics of migration, cultural adaptation, and cultural and social identity among the Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis in Kazakhstan, particularly in the context of Turkestan. By examining historical backgrounds, demographic data, and firsthand accounts, the research illuminates the multifaceted experiences of these ethnic groups, highlighting their diverse origins and the challenges they have faced in integrating into Kazakh society. The comparative analysis between homogeneous Meskhetian Turkish families and Turkic-Russian inter-ethnic marriages reveals significant distinctions in cultural practices, family structures, and social dynamics influenced by the underlying principles of dissimilation theory. Turkish-Meskhetian families exhibit a robust preservation of their cultural identity, characterised by cohesive family structures, strong adherence to traditional customs, and a unified linguistic environment. In contrast, Turkic-Russian inter-ethnic marriages exemplify a dynamic process of cultural negotiation, where individuals actively adapt to their partner's cultural milieu, often leading to a reconfiguration of identity. Despite these adaptations, men often hold a particularly influential position. The findings indicate that inter-ethnic couples experience both challenges and opportunities as a result of their marital arrangements, especially regarding religious differences. As illustrated through the case study of a Turkish-Meskhetian man and his Russian wife, significant cultural adaptation occurs, encompassing language acquisition, religious conversion, and the integration of cultural practices. This case highlights the transformative impact of love and respect in facilitating cultural exchange and adaptation, yet also underscores the predominance of Turkic customs within the family dynamics, which often supersede the original cultural practices of the Russian partner. The analysis demonstrates that while homogeneous Meskhetian Turk families maintain a distinct cultural identity rooted in traditional values, inter-ethnic marriages embody a complex interplay of adaptation and integration. The preservation of Turkic traditions in these marriages serves as a testament to the

resilience of ethnic identity amid the challenges posed by cultural diversity. Future research could further explore the long-term effects of these dynamics on the identity formation of children from inter-ethnic unions and the potential for evolving cultural identities within a broader social context.

Overall, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of identity, power dynamics, and belonging among ethnic minority groups in Kazakhstan. As such, it provides valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners in migration studies, cultural anthropology, and social integration.

5. LANGUAGE USE IN EVERYDAY LIFE IN INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES IN THE TURKESTAN REGION

5.1. Role of language use and theoretical supplements within the study

The language choices made in inter-ethnic marriages reflect a delicate balance between holding onto cultural traditions and adapting to new realities. Assimilation often means adopting the dominant language to fit into broader society. In Turkestan, for example, many families prioritise Kazakh. The language is not just a national symbol, but may open doors to education, jobs, and other opportunities promoted by the state. This idea ties closely to Gordon's (1964) view that assimilation involves cultural and structural adjustments to integrate into mainstream life. At the same time, acculturation allows families to blend their heritage with the surrounding culture to find ways to keep their traditions alive while adapting to practical needs. Berry's (1997) work helps explain this approach. The study shows how families strive for a middle ground – using languages like Uzbek, Tatar, or Russian at home while embracing the languages needed for public life.

Dissimilation adds another dimension, as some families actively preserve their linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, resisting complete absorption into the dominant culture. In inter-ethnic marriages, these choices are not just about language – they reflect deeper issues of identity, connection, and family harmony. Couples often work together to balance the cultural heritage of both partners while ensuring their children are prepared for the future. In these households, language becomes a powerful symbol of shared history and a practical tool for navigating modern life, while capturing the ongoing tension between tradition and change.

Language use in inter-ethnic marriages is shaped by a delicate balance between preserving cultural heritage and addressing practical needs. Families often navigate this complex terrain with deliberate strategies and adaptability, as highlighted by some key theoretical frameworks, such as family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013) and language negotiation theory (Piller, 2001). These perspectives shed light on how linguistic choices are thoughtfully established and managed in diverse households, reflecting the unique dynamics of mixed-ethnicity families.

Family language policy focuses on how parents intentionally decide which languages to use at home to shape their children's linguistic abilities and cultural identity. In Kazakh-Uzbek and Russian-Tatar families, this often means walking a fine line: preserving heritage languages such as Kazakh, Uzbek, or Tatar to maintain deep cultural roots, while encouraging Russian or English to ensure opportunities for social mobility. In the Turkestan region, this

balancing act demonstrates a dual effort to honour tradition while preparing children for broader societal participation.

Language negotiation theory adds another layer to this understanding by exploring how couples dynamically navigate their linguistic preferences in daily life. For example, inter-ethnic couples may choose Russian – a shared, neutral language – for public or formal interactions. Kazakh, Uzbek, or Tatar is reserved for more personal, culturally significant settings, like family rituals or intimate conversations. These choices often reflect practical concerns, emotional connections, and even power dynamics within the household. Such flexibility allows families to nurture harmony while safeguarding the cultural identities of both partners.

Marriage is a fundamental part of the socialisation process. In addition, it has a significant role in preserving and transmitting key ethnic values, such as religion, history, traditions, culture, and language. In inter-ethnic marriages, the decision of which language/s to use in the household plays a critical role in shaping the dynamics of cultural retention and assimilation. Broader socio-cultural negotiations and influence have an impact on the linguistic and cultural upbringing of future generations.

In her work on language shift within Dutch communities, Pauwels (1985) introduces the term “exogamy” to describe marriages between individuals of different ethnic groups. While the study of exogamy was largely the domain of sociologists and demographers historically, more recent developments in sociolinguistics have examined the linguistic consequences of mixed marriages. In this context, language is a means of communication and a cultural system that reflects and transmits the collective histories of the ethnic groups involved (Pauwels, 1985).

Proficiency in multiple languages is not static but varies depending on various factors (Encyclopedia Britannica, 1965). In multicultural societies, language must be adapted to align with the cultural and social norms of the community (Nuryana, 2019). As Fishman (2008) notes, sociolinguistic processes are highly context-dependent, a characteristic also present in the linguistic behaviours of individuals within mixed marriages.

Mixed-marriage families in Turkestan often use more than one language. This is influenced by their immediate family environment and broader societal structures such as schools and local social networks. The daily use of multiple languages in these settings is deeply intertwined with cultural norms and is consciously and unconsciously learned through socialization. This linguistic fluidity is a key part of understanding how language functions in the lives of those in the research context.

This chapter addresses three central questions informed by the fieldwork: (1) What language is predominantly used in interethnic marriages in Turkestan, and what factors

influence this choice? (2) How does the local socio-cultural environment shape language practices in these mixed marriages? and (3) What are the sociolinguistic implications of language use in these marriages, and how do they reflect broader cultural and social trends?

The hypothesis guiding this inquiry posited that in inter-ethnic marriages, language functions as both a practical tool for communication and a symbolic marker of ethnic identity. It was expected that one language would tend to dominate daily interactions, shaped by factors such as family traditions, levels of education, the degree of social integration, and the broader sociolinguistic environment. This dominance reflects broader processes of dissimilation, whereby language choice mediates identity negotiation and cultural adaptation within these marriages.

This study's theoretical framework draws on sociolinguistic and anthropological perspectives, incorporating the works of Pierre Bourdieu, John W. Berry, Milton Gordon, Benedict Anderson, among others. These frameworks provide a nuanced understanding of how language choices in mixed marriages are shaped by sociopolitical pressures, cultural identities, and structural constraints within the Turkestan region. Pierre Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital provides a valuable perspective for analyzing language proficiency as a means of socio-economic mobility and cultural legitimacy (Bourdieu, 1991). In the case of Kazakhstan, the legal framework governing language use in Kazakhstan is outlined by the Law on Languages in the Republic of Kazakhstan, specifically Article 4, which states that "the state language of the Republic of Kazakhstan is the Kazakh language. The state language is used throughout the entire territory of the Republic in all spheres of public relations, including state administration, legislative activities, legal proceedings, and official documentation." This law not only affirms the constitutional status of Kazakh as the state language but also emphasizes its role in governance, legislation, and official forms of communication. From a legal perspective, it is clear that Kazakh is the single official state language of Kazakhstan. The «Қазақ ресми тест» (Qazaq resmi test or Kazakh official test) must be taken by civil servants. Commercial organisations producing official documentation, and administrative procedures are also conducted in the state language. Knowledge of the Kazakh language is crucial for success in various spheres of society and for obtaining quality education. For instance, proficiency in Kazakh is a prerequisite for those applying to master's and doctoral programs at the Academy, candidates for the presidential youth personnel reserve, applicants for the "Bolashak" international scholarship program, senior officials of the Presidential reserve, and staff members of prestigious schools, among others. These policies underscore that proficiency in the Kazakh language is a critical skill for professional advancement and integration into Kazakhstan's administrative, educational, and corporate sectors (www.apa.kz/keshki-kurstar/).

Additionally, proficiency in Kazakh is widely regarded as an important factor for enhancing access to scholarships and employment opportunities, further embedding the language's significance within the sociopolitical and economic fabric of the nation.

By positioning these institutional measures within the broader sociocultural landscape, it is evident that the Kazakh language functions as a critical unifying element, shaping both national identity and public life in Kazakhstan. These state-driven initiatives reflect the country's commitment to preserving and promoting Kazakh as a cornerstone of its cultural heritage while ensuring its active integration into contemporary public and professional engagement.

These dynamics illustrate how language operates as a material and symbolic resource that influences family decisions about which language to prioritise within the household. Families in mixed marriages in particular must navigate a complex array of pragmatic considerations, such as educational success and career advancement, as well as cultural pressures to uphold Kazakh national values (www.tilalemi.kz/kz/news/qazaq-tilinin-quqiqtiq-martebesi.html).

This emphasis on language as a marker of cultural belonging aligns with Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of imagined communities, which highlights the role of shared language in fostering a sense of collective identity among individuals. In Turkestan, Kazakh represents a powerful unifying force. It also symbolises participation in the national community and the moral obligations associated with citizenship. For families in inter-ethnic marriages, prioritising Kazakh reflects a commitment to these broader national ideals while simultaneously serving as a mechanism for social integration (Anderson, 1983).

These dynamics can be further explained through the frameworks of Milton Gordon's (1964) model of assimilation and John W. Berry's (1997) acculturation theory. Gordon's distinction between cultural and structural assimilation offers valuable insights into how language practices in mixed marriages facilitate integration into societal institutions. In Turkestan, cultural assimilation is evident in the adoption of Kazakh for everyday communication, while structural assimilation can be observed in state-driven linguistic policies and institutional incentives. Berry's acculturation framework, which identifies strategies (e.g., integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization) provides further insight into families' diverse ways of navigating multilingual realities. Many families adopt an integration strategy, balancing the use of Kazakh with their heritage languages. However, external pressures may lead some families toward full linguistic assimilation.

Spolsky's (2004) family language policy theory extends the sociolinguistic aspects of inter-ethnic marriages. The theory explains how ideological, management, and practice-

oriented factors influence language use in the home. In Turkestan, the prioritization of Kazakh is often driven by state policies and social expectations, yet families simultaneously make strategic decisions to preserve their ethnic languages. This balancing act reflects a dynamic interplay between societal pressures and individual agency, as families strive to maintain linguistic and cultural pluralism within the constraints of the broader socio-political landscape (Spolsky, 2004).

Ualiyeva's (2017) research on linguistic practices in Central Asia further emphasises the importance of contextualising language dynamics within the locals' cultural and historical systems. The historical legacy of Russian as a *lingua franca* during the Soviet era, combined with the resurgence of Kazakh as the dominant national language, creates a unique sociolinguistic environment in Turkestan. Families in mixed marriages navigate these legacies by incorporating historical influences and contemporary linguistic norms into their daily lives, underscoring the intricate connections between language, culture, and identity. By integrating the above theoretical perspectives, this chapter provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the linguistic practices of inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan. The role of language in these marriages reflects not only individual family dynamics but also broader societal and cultural trends. It also reveals the intersection of multilingualism, assimilation, and identity in complex and meaningful ways (Ualiyeva, 2017).

The methodology employed in this study follows a structured approach to exploring the linguistic dynamics within mixed marriages in the Turkestan region. The research consisted of numerous interconnected processes, beginning with identifying major research sites, focusing on villages that offered a representative sample of the region's linguistic and cultural variety. Another key aspect of the methodology was the development of interview questions designed to capture the nuances of language use within mixed marriages. These questions focused on various dimensions, including multilingualism, language shift, and the role of language in family communication. The interview guide aimed to uncover language functions within these families and highlight how they manifest in interactions between spouses, children, and extended family members.

Interaction with the community played a fundamental role in the preparation for the fieldwork. Before conducting interviews, I engaged with local communities to immerse myself in the social and cultural context in which the families lived. This interaction helped contextualize the linguistic practices observed, ensuring a more holistic interpretation of the data. Ethical approval for the research was obtained from local authorities to ensure that the study adhered to local norms and respected the privacy and rights of participants. This established trust with the communities and ensured the validity of the research process.

Analyses focused on the role of language in shaping familial communication dynamics between spouses, children, and extended family members. This study provides a nuanced understanding of how linguistic choices reflect and mediate cultural and social relationships in mixed marriage households. The analysis of the data is organised around three primary areas of inquiry: (1) the role of language in everyday communication, (2) the language of communication with children, and (3) the language dynamics between spouses. This methodological approach enabled a nuanced understanding of the role of language in social interaction and identity construction within multicultural family settings in the Turkestan region.

This chapter also highlights the main linguistic characteristics observed in the studied villages. Key information for each village is also provided in each section. For example, in the first section, Shornak stands out as a village with a notably high number of Kazakh speakers. Information regarding the village, with a particular focus on its patterns of language use, is presented in detail. The second section focuses on Hantagy, with special attention given to the prevalence of Russian speakers in the region. A discussion is included on how the observed language dynamics reflect the area's historical and cultural influences. Next, the multilingual characteristics of Zhana Iqan are discussed in the third section. The narrative focuses on the reasons behind the linguistic diversity within the community. As for the remaining regions with less significant linguistic representation, case studies are presented, and the reasons behind the specific linguistic patterns of these villages are analysed and explained accordingly.

5.2. The historical context of language use in the Turkestan region

In contemporary society, inter-ethnic marriages transform the family institution and its role in socialization and integration. They also represent broader trends of globalization influencing ethnic interactions, national self-determination, and ethno-geopolitical dynamics. These unions blend different ethnic traditions, languages, and cultures and are fundamental to social reproduction and cohesion. This is especially significant in regions such as Turkestan, where marrying a spouse from another cultural background is a common social practice that also reflects the socio-political and historical landscape.

The Soviet Union's policies left an enduring impact on Kazakhstan, particularly regarding language and national identity. Under Soviet rule, language was systematically positioned as a key element of national identity. As Francine Hirsch (2005) argues in *Empire of Nations*, the Soviet state actively managed ethnic diversity by fostering the development of distinct national identities, with language as a central tool in this process. Each republic,

including Kazakhstan, was assigned a “national language” and promoted through schools, local media, and the local elite. These efforts were part of the broader Soviet strategy of “nation-building,” which sought to formalize and institutionalize ethnic and linguistic distinctions while maintaining central control (Hirsh, 2005).

However, as Adeeb Khalid (2015) emphasizes in *Making Uzbekistan*, Soviet linguistic policies also created hierarchies of language use that extended across Central Asia, including Kazakhstan. While national languages were elevated as symbols of local identity and culture, Russian emerged as the lingua franca – a unifying language for interethnic communication across the multiethnic Soviet Union. Khalid underscores that Russian, while ostensibly just another regional language, was systematically promoted as an essential language for governance, trade, and cultural exchange, and it became an indispensable tool for upward mobility (Khalid, 2015).

In *Everyday Stalinism*, Sheila Fitzpatrick (1999) discusses how Soviet language policies shaped the rhythms of daily life at the grassroots level. In Kazakhstan, as in other republics, the Russian language became a prerequisite for higher education and professional advancement, particularly in government administration. This ensured its widespread adoption, even within households. Many mixed-ethnic families used Russian as their primary language at home, as it bridged linguistic differences between spouses and facilitated their children’s access to opportunities within the Soviet system (Fitzpatrick, 1999).

In Kazakhstan, this linguistic policy created a complex cultural dynamic. While Kazakh was recognized as the national language and a marker of identity, Russian became a functional necessity for participating in the broader Soviet system. The use of Russian in inter-ethnic marriages and its dominance in educational and professional contexts highlights the role of language as both a tool of governance and a means of negotiating everyday life in a multiethnic environment. Hirsch characterizes this effort to simultaneously celebrate ethnic diversity while imposing a unifying structure of control as a paradoxical approach to language policy.

In addition to the works of Hirsch, Khalid, and Fitzpatrick, other scholars have also made significant contributions to understanding the linguistic and cultural dynamics of the Soviet era. Historians such as Terry Martin and Robert Conquest have analysed the broader implications of Soviet policies on language and identity. Their research examines the complexity underlying Soviet efforts to balance the promotion of local identities with the overarching goal of ensuring centralised control through Russian as the dominant language (Martin, 2001; Conquest, 1970). In Kazakhstan, these policies shaped national identity while promoting Russian as a unifying and practical medium of communication. Moreover, among various ethnic communities (e.g., Germans, Armenians, Koreans, Tatars), Russian often served

as the predominant language. It acts as a bridge between cultures (Ualiyeva; Edgar, 2012). As demonstrated in previously, these policies influenced governance, education, and daily life, creating a multilayered linguistic landscape that continues to shape Kazakhstan's sociocultural and political identity to this day, albeit in limited ways. Today, the Kazakh language is held in the highest regard by the current Kazakh intelligentsia. It is part of a broader historical ideal to "know everything about other languages, but respect your language" (www.abai.kz/post/46970).

While Soviet policies profoundly influenced Kazakhstan's linguistic landscape, the southern region, where the present study took place, has historically maintained Kazakh as the dominant language. Compared to other regions of Kazakhstan, the South boasts the highest number of Kazakh speakers. Due to the region's proximity to other Central Asian countries, particularly Uzbekistan, which has fostered strong cultural and linguistic ties, it is not uncommon to find members of different ethnic groups who speak Kazakh fluently, sometimes even better than native Kazakhs. During the Soviet era, many families in the South enrolled their children in Russian-language schools in response to the pressures of the time. Interestingly, this had a less pronounced linguistic impact than other regions of the country, with most families in the region retaining Kazakh as a central part of their identity. As such, Kazakh culture and language thus remained a cornerstone of local identity, even amidst Soviet-era pressures.

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan undertook deliberate efforts to revitalize the Kazakh language as it recognises its importance in shaping national identity. The 1989 "Law on Languages in the Kazakh SSR" officially declared Kazakh as the state language while retaining Russian as the language of interethnic communication. This was further reinforced by the 1993 Constitution of independent Kazakhstan and the 1997 Language Law, which solidified Kazakh's status as the official state language. These legislative measures continue to shape the nation's sociolinguistic landscape and emphasise the critical role of Kazakh in governance, education, and society. The Kazakh language is often described as the soul of the Kazakh people. It bridges their past, present, and future, with its development and expansion as the state language remaining a key national priority. A recent development, the transition to the Latin alphabet, reflects contemporary efforts to modernise the language and ensure its relevance in a globalised world. Initiatives such as these reflect a collective responsibility to respect, master, and promote the Kazakh language in public and private spheres.

Kazakh is framed not only as the language of ethnic Kazakhs but as a unifying medium for all of the country's citizens and a means of fostering national unity and pride; neglecting it

is seen as disregarding the heritage and future of the nation. The ongoing development of the state language and its integration into all aspects of daily life are considered crucial efforts requiring continuous public and institutional support. Various programs and policies are aimed at expanding the scope and strengthening the role of the Kazakh language. These mandates underscore the language's role as a vital thread connecting Kazakhs, which fosters patriotism and affirms the nation's identity (www.tinyurl.com/ujhpbkxx).

5.3. Language use in everyday life in Turkestan inter-ethnic marriages

According to the findings from the research sites, language use in inter-ethnic marriages reveals the basic points of speaking the studied languages. In the rural settlements examined, the everyday use of language reveals patterns shaped by historical and socio-cultural factors. Kazakh was observed as the dominant language across all locations, with Shornak reporting the highest proportion of Kazakh speakers, highlighting the strong cultural ties within the community. Conversely, Hantagy showcased a distinctive linguistic profile, with approximately 40% of the population primarily using Russian. This reflects the legacy of Soviet influence and the functional role of Russian as a lingua franca in inter-ethnic contexts. Meanwhile, the linguistic dynamics within Turki Poselkasy exemplify a pluralistic environment where multiple languages are used in spousal interactions, while Kazakh remains the dominant language in broader communal interactions.

Zhana Iqan also presents a distinct pattern, with Kazakh being predominantly spoken by children, aligning with the national "Kazakhization" movement. This trend highlights the growing emphasis on Kazakh as a language of educational and professional opportunities for younger generations (Encyclopedia of South Kazakhstan, 2005).

A noteworthy distinction was observed between the linguistic preferences in spousal communication and those used with children. These differences in language preference and acquisition are shaped by generational experiences and the socio-political contexts, which underscore the complex interplay between language, ethnicity, and identity within mixed marriages in Turkestan. This highlights how linguistic practices serve as a lens through which broader processes of social integration and cultural preservation in Kazakhstan can be understood.

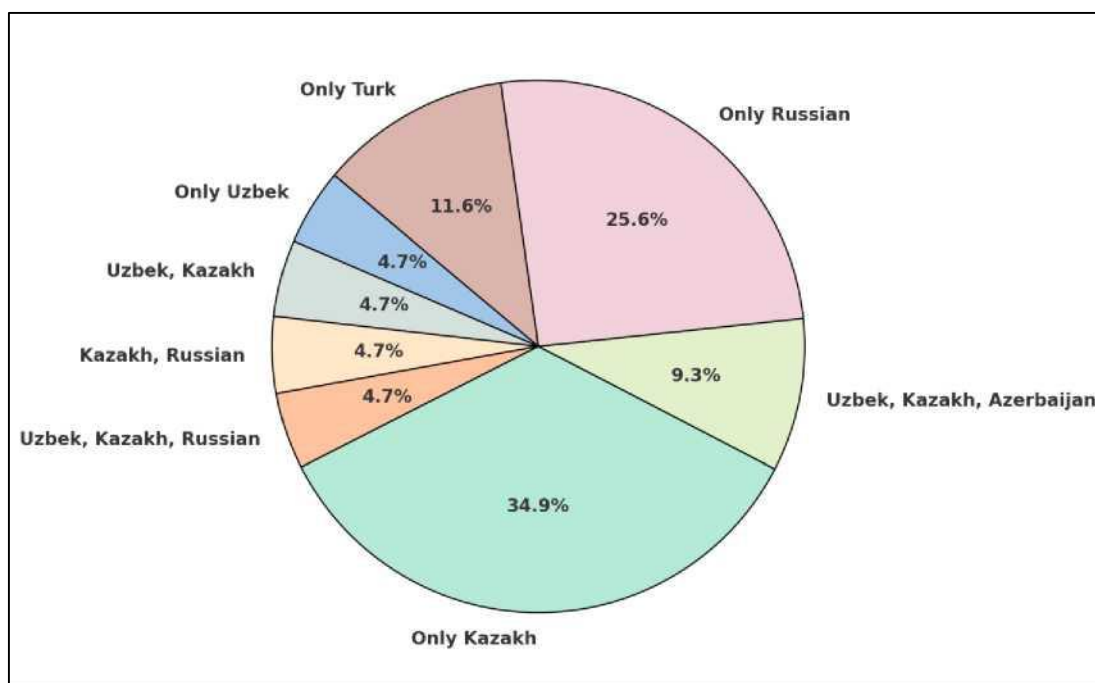


Figure 3. Languages used in daily communication in interethnic households.

Source. Author.

The diagram above illustrates the distribution of language use in the daily lives of the sampled inhabitants from the research sites in Turkestan based on data drawn from 45 interviews. The findings reflect the linguistic diversity shaped by inter-ethnic interactions, geographic settings, and broader socio-cultural dynamics within the region.

The data shows that monolingual Kazakh speakers constitute the largest group, with 15 individuals, representing 34.9% of the total respondents (Figure 3). This likely reflects the cultural and linguistic significance of Kazakh identity, highlighting the broader socio-cultural influence of Kazakh language and ethnicity in the rural settlements. The second largest group comprises monolingual Russian speakers, with 11 individuals (25.6%). This group represents the enduring legacy of Russian linguistic and cultural influences. The trend is particularly prominent among specific communities, including older generations and groups with closer ties to Russian-speaking environments.

The Turkish language also occupies a notable position, with five respondents (11.6%), marking a smaller yet visible presence in everyday language practices. This likely reflects the ethnic composition of specific villages where Turkish-speaking families or individuals reside, potentially due to historical migrations or familial ties. Less commonly spoken languages and multilingual combinations account for approximately 26% of the responses, underlining the linguistic fluidity and hybrid identities that emerge in inter-ethnic settings.

A closer examination of the data reveals geographic patterns in language use. Shornak

emerged as a hub for monolingual Kazakh speakers, with nine respondents reporting exclusive use of Kazakh in their daily lives. This concentration suggests a strong Kazakh cultural and linguistic presence in this village, where traditional Kazakh identity appears to be more preserved. Hantagy also features a significant presence of monolingual Kazakh speakers, as evidenced by the five respondents. Additionally, there were notable cases of linguistic diversity in Hantagy, as represented by multilingual combinations such as Uzbek-Kazakh-Azerbaijani speakers, which emphasise its status as a culturally blended settlement. Zhana Iqan also showed similar multilingual trends, where combinations such as Uzbek-Kazakh-Azerbaijani are reported. However, only one monolingual Kazakh speaker was identified there, suggesting a more mixed linguistic environment than Shornak or Hantagy.

The data also highlights the complex interplay between linguistic identity and inter-ethnic relationships in rural Turkestan. The predominance of monolingual Kazakh dominance reflects not only ethnic identity but also broader state policies promoting Kazakh language use. In contrast, the notable presence of monolingual Russian speakers points to historical Soviet influences and even a certain degree of generational continuity regarding the use of Russian as a primary language.

The language patterns observed in the Turkestan region reflect the rich cultural and linguistic diversity shaped by inter-ethnic relationships. These resonate strongly with the ideas presented in family language policy (Curdt-Christiansen, 2013) and language negotiation theory (Piller, 2001). These frameworks help us understand how families make thoughtful decisions about language use to preserve their cultural roots while adapting to the realities of a multilingual environment.

Family language policy presents why monolingual Kazakh speakers dominate in villages like Shornak and Hantagy. Families here appear to prioritise Kazakh as a heritage language, reflecting their cultural identity and broader national policies encouraging its use. Parents in these communities may see maintaining Kazakh as essential for passing on their traditions and values to the next generation. On the other hand, the significant presence of monolingual Russian speakers, particularly among older generations, illustrates the lasting influence of Soviet-era linguistic policies. These patterns show how families strategically choose languages to align with their cultural priorities and historical experiences.

Language negotiation theory offers another layer of understanding, particularly for the multilingual households in Hantagy and Zhana Iqan. Families in these villages demonstrate remarkable flexibility, blending languages like Uzbek, Kazakh, and Azerbaijani in their daily interactions. During the research fieldwork, an interviewer from the Zhana Iqan mentioned:

“My husband comes from a mixed Kazakh-Uzbek family, and he prefers that our children speak Kazakh and Uzbek,” said Khori, a 56-year-old Azerbaijani woman. “However, during the summer holidays, the children stay with my relatives for about three months. While they’re there, they mostly speak Azerbaijani and pick up the language. My husband isn’t very happy about that” (interview, 2022).

This account highlights how linguistic expectations within interethnic families may conflict with external influences such as extended kinship ties. Despite clearly expressed preferences using multiple languages, they indicate that multilingual environments remain common even in households with set linguistic boundaries. These linguistic choices reflect the need to navigate diverse cultural settings while fostering inclusivity within their communities. For instance, Russian often emerges as a neutral language to bridge differences and ensure effective communication across ethnic groups. Piller’s theory highlights how emotional connections, practical needs, and the dynamics of family relationships shape these decisions.

The appearance of multilingual combinations, such as the Uzbek-Kazakh-Azerbaijan example mentioned above, is particularly significant from an anthropological perspective, as it reflects transcultural practices in inter-ethnic families. In such cases, multilingualism can serve as both a strategy for cultural negotiation and a means of maintaining social ties across ethnic boundaries. In villages like Hantagy and Zhana Iqan, the coexistence of diverse linguistic groups underscores the hybrid cultural identities that emerge in mixed communities. These settlements can thus be viewed as microcosms for observing the dynamics of language as a tool for communication and a marker of identity.

The analysis above provides an understanding of the daily language use among rural inhabitants of Turkestan. The dominance of Kazakh and Russian speakers, with the presence of smaller linguistic groups and multilingual practices, reflects a dynamic cultural landscape where tradition, history, and contemporary inter-ethnic dynamics intersect.

Based on the findings from inter-ethnic households in Shornak, insights into Kazakh language usage suggest that, in Shornak, the predominance of Kazakh as the primary language in inter-ethnic marriages reflects broader sociopolitical and cultural dynamics within Kazakhstan and is driven by several pragmatic factors. Firstly, the mandatory state examination in Kazakh at the end of secondary school encourages linguistic assimilation, as families usually prioritize their children's educational success. Secondly, proficiency in Kazakh is perceived as enhancing access to government scholarships and employment opportunities, which aligns with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). By acquiring Kazakh,

individuals can enhance their socio-economic mobility and cultural legitimacy as citizens. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that Shornak residents emphasize their moral obligation to respect and uphold Kazakh national values, underscoring the symbolic significance of language as a marker of national identity. This attitude resonates with Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983), wherein a shared language becomes a unifying factor in constructing a collective sense of belonging.

5.4. Language communication with children

Language is a critical aspect of children's socialisation process. It influences their cognitive and emotional development, cultural identity, and knowledge of social conventions. From an anthropological perspective, language is more than just a means of communication; it is a crucial medium through which children develop a feeling of belonging, learn societal values, and navigate their social surroundings. Children engage in verbal communication from a young age that connects them to their immediate family, community, and society as a whole. Language also reinforces cultural practices, traditions, and social roles. All of this impacts the development of a child's worldview.

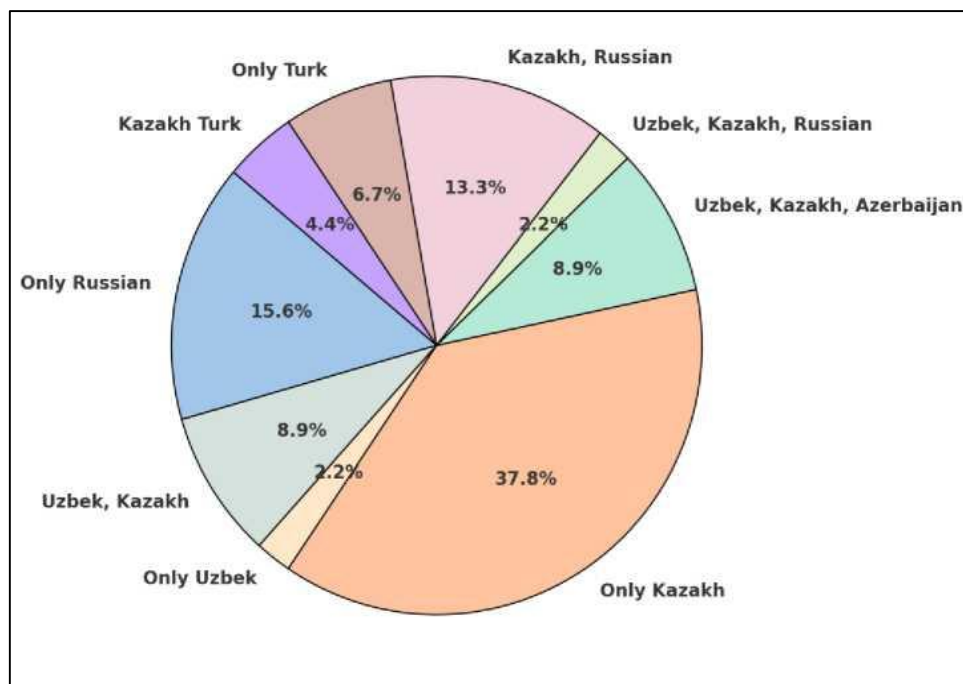


Figure 4. *Language used in communication with children.*

Source. Author

The chart above depicts the language used by the participants to communicate with

children. The findings present a strong preference for monolingual Kazakh, with 17 respondents (37.8%) using Kazakh exclusively in their communication with children (Figure 4). This significant proportion suggests that Kazakh remains the dominant language in these rural areas, underscoring the importance of Kazakh culture and linguistic identity for the participants. This was especially the case in Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, and Hantagy, where Kazakh is the primary language for communication.

Berry's (1997) model of acculturation provides a framework for understanding how individuals and groups navigate cultural interactions, particularly in multicultural settings. According to Berry, acculturation refers to how individuals or groups from different cultural backgrounds interact with one another and the impacts on their identity and language use. In the case of Turkestan, the data suggests a significant degree of integration, with individuals maintaining their ethnic language (such as Kazakh or Russian) while also adopting elements of other languages, such as Uzbek or Turkish. This is most evident in multilingual households where families use combinations of Kazakh, Russian, and Uzbek (or even Turkish in some cases). This linguistic integration reflects the negotiation of ethnic identities through blending languages. It shows openness to adopting aspects of other cultures without abandoning their own.

Alongside the Kazakh-speaking majority, Russian retains a notable presence, with 7 respondents (15.6%) using it exclusively with their children. This persistent use of Russian aligns with the concept of integration derived from Berry's framework, through which bilingual or multilingual individuals blend elements of their native and host cultures to adapt to social contexts while maintaining dual cultural identities. The findings above highlight the continued influence of Russian, likely rooted in the historical and generational ties to the language and culture that persist within these communities. The legacy of Russian as a lingua franca in the Soviet era is evident in these findings, particularly among families that maintain stronger ties to Russian-speaking environments or represent older generations who learned Russian as their first language.

Interestingly, a smaller yet significant number of families communicate using mixed languages. Four respondents (8.9%) use a combination of Uzbek and Kazakh, while another four (8.9%) employ Uzbek, Kazakh, and Azerbaijani. These multilingual households reflect the diverse ethnic makeup of the region and demonstrate how language serves as a means of negotiating and maintaining familial and cultural connections across various ethnic communities. For instance, the coexistence of Uzbek, Kazakh, and Azerbaijani speakers in Zhana Iqan suggests that inter-ethnic marriages and cultural exchanges have created environments where multiple languages operate within families. It presents the region's

dynamic social setting. This linguistic blending also illustrates Gumperz's (1982) code-switching theory, where choices in language shift according to context, indicating a flexible form of adaptation to socio-cultural demands. It was observed that the sampled families navigated their identities through strategic language use, balancing ethnic ties with the practical need for communication across different cultural groups.

The combination of Kazakh and Russian, used by six respondents (13.3%), demonstrates a bilingual linguistic environment where both languages coexist in daily family life. This bilingualism occurs as a result of the historical and contemporary interplay between Kazakh and Russian in Kazakhstan, with the two languages functioning as complementary tools for communication, especially in mixed or urban communities. The presence of Turkish in communication with children is comparatively smaller, with only 3 respondents (6.7%) using it, all of whom were from Turki Poselkasy. The presence of Turkish-speaking households reflects the region's historical connections to other Turkic-speaking populations, likely influenced by migration or familial ties. While the number of Turkish-speaking households is relatively low, their use in this particular district highlights the continued relevance of ethnic languages in maintaining cultural ties. Lastly, smaller groups of participants exhibited unique language combinations, such as Kazakh and Turkish (2 respondents, 4.4%) and Uzbek, Kazakh, and Russian (1 respondent, 2.2%). These instances further reflect the linguistic complexity of the region, where families blend languages as part of their daily lives, particularly in households with diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Overall, the findings exemplify the intricate linguistic landscape of Turkestan, where language use is deeply tied to ethnic identity, historical legacies, and inter-ethnic relations. While the dominance of Kazakh is clear, the continued presence of Russian and other languages, such as Uzbek and Turkish (as well as multilingual combinations), highlights the dynamic and fluid nature of language in these rural communities. This linguistic diversity reflects the language choice as a marker of cultural negotiation and identity within a region characterised by ethnic interactions and historical transitions.

Based on the findings from inter-ethnic households in Shornak, several underlying factors influence insights into Kazakh language usage. Hantagy, located in the administrative region of Kentau city, boasts a rich historical and sociocultural landscape. Hantagy underwent significant transformations during the Soviet era, transforming into an industrial hub centered around mining and processing lead-zinc ore. This industry attracted a multi-ethnic workforce, which included Kazakhs, Russians, Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, Tatars, and Chechens. According to the rural district's administrative records, the ethnic breakdown of the population is about 5,708 Kazakhs, 150 Russians, 362 Uzbeks, 102 Azerbaijanis, 32 Tatars, 8 Chechens, and 2 Koreans.

In Hantagy, the continued use of Russian reflects its historical role as a lingua franca, particularly during the Soviet era when it served as the primary medium for interethnic communication among mining workers and their families. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital helps explain how Russian became a valuable resource for social mobility and integration within the multiethnic community. For older generations, particularly those aged 45–70, the influence of Russian remains deeply ingrained, with many expressing difficulties with transitioning to Kazakh. This is largely due to Russian's dominant role in their formative years and their limited exposure to Kazakh at the time. Despite periods in which ethnic Kazakhs were a minority, the village exhibits a strong sense of social cohesion. The hospitality and openness of Hantagy residents are evident in observed practices, such as leaving doors and windows unlocked, which exemplify deeply ingrained cultural values prioritizing communal trust and support. These behaviors align with Kazakh traditions such as *konakasy* (hospitality) and *uzattyq* (neighborly relations), which are central to Kazakh identity and social organisation (Kudaibergenova, 2016).

During the collectivization period, agricultural and industrial activities formed the backbone of the local economy. Over time, the socio-demographic composition of Hantagy shifted significantly. While ethnic minorities once constituted a significant portion of the population, Kazakhs now form the majority, reflecting broader national trends of “Kazakhization” (Dave, 2007). Despite these changes, residents described the harmonious multi-ethnic environment of the village, which showcases the values of hospitality, moral integrity, and mutual respect as defining characteristics of their community. The ethnographic interviews further highlighted the enduring significance of inter-ethnic interaction and communal solidarity in Hantagy. Moreover, the younger generation in the village is experiencing a gradual shift, influenced by modern socio-political changes and education policies that emphasize the use of Kazakh. Linguistic practices among bilingual families reflect historical migration patterns and contemporary social dynamics.

Furthermore, based on Kazakh-Russian language use, in villages such as Hantagy and Shornak, where Kazakh-Russian bilingualism is prevalent, Russian has historically been the dominant language, particularly in households with Russian-speaking parents who migrated to work in the local mining industry. This linguistic preference was shaped by practical considerations, given the broader social and ethnic dynamics with Russian serving as a unifying medium for communication among diverse ethnic groups, especially when proficiency in Kazakh was limited among the communities present. Language use in mixed Kazakh-Russian households reflects this intergenerational complexity. In Hantagy, for instance, five children from the bilingual families demonstrated proficiency in both languages, while in Shornak, two

children also displayed bilingual abilities. A notable example involved a Russian family whose children, raised in Kazakh-language schools, became fluent in Kazakh. This shift in linguistic practice significantly influenced their social integration, with two daughters from the family marrying Kazakh men. One even embraced Islam, which extends the role of language as a means to foster cultural integration and bridge ethnic divides. These examples align with Fishman's (1991) theory of language shift, which emphasizes how family language practices are shaped by, and in turn shape, broader societal changes. In this context, it illustrates how language, ethnicity, and family dynamics intersect to reflect the fluid and evolving nature of cultural identity in a rapidly changing society. However, an active generational shift is evident. While older respondents cite challenges in fully adopting Kazakh, particularly for daily use, many recognise the growing societal importance of Kazakh. They increasingly try to integrate it into their families' linguistic practices. This shift is particularly noticeable in the educational decisions made by parents, with Russian-speaking families choosing to enrol their children in Kazakh-language schools. These decisions reflect a desire to ensure greater fluency in Kazakh and build stronger connections with their children's Kazakh peers. This can be interpreted as part of the broader process of linguistic and cultural transition in the region. The evolving linguistic landscape in Hantagy thus illustrates the complex interplay between historical language practices and contemporary shifts in language policy and social identity.

The impact of this bilingual environment is particularly visible in the social dynamics of children. Even within families that identify as Russian, children primarily form friendships with Kazakh-speaking peers. In one of the observed cases (a Kazakh-Russian family where the wife is Russian), the children were raised in a bilingual environment, with Kazakh being dominant; nonetheless, the mother's Russian-language heritage occasionally emerges in their communication. These intergenerational language practices illustrate how language, as a dynamic cultural element, reflects broader social changes while also shaping individual identities within the community.

5.5. Language communication with spouses

Figure 5 details the languages used to communicate with spouses among the participants from rural districts in the Turkestan region. As can be seen, it reveals a significant sociolinguistic dynamic. The data shows a diverse range of language practices shaped by historical and contemporary factors, underscoring the intricate relationship between language, identity, and social mobility in this multiethnic context.

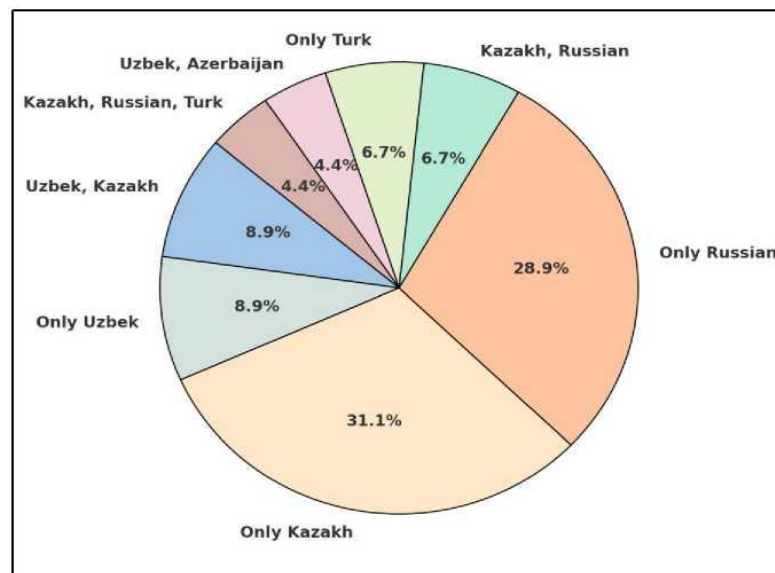


Figure 5. *Language used in communication with spouses.*

Source: Author.

A strong preference for the exclusive use of Kazakh was observed, with 14 individuals (31.1%) representing this linguistic practice. This trend is closely tied to practical considerations, particularly regarding opportunities for children. Parents emphasize the necessity of Kazakh language proficiency as state exams, which are crucial for securing government scholarships and gaining access to desirable career paths, are administered in Kazakh. This reflects the increasing significance of Kazakh in both educational and professional spheres, which connotes broader shifts in Kazakhstan's language policy. Kazakh has become a marker of national identity and an important tool for upward social mobility. Fishman's (1991) theory of language shift provides a useful lens for understanding this phenomenon, emphasizing how shifts in societal power structures and opportunities can influence linguistic preferences within families.

The data also reveals the enduring significance of Russian, with 13 individuals (28.9%) reporting the exclusive use of Russian with their spouses. The prevalence of Russian in spousal communication reflects the historical and sociocultural legacy of the Soviet era, during which Russian functioned as the lingua franca for inter-ethnic communication. The enduring presence of Russian in the region signals the persistence of this historical influence, despite the national language shift toward Kazakh.

The region's multilingual nature is further illustrated when families use multiple languages. The use of Kazakh and Russian in spousal communication, as reported by three individuals (6.7%), reflects the bilingual nature of many households. This is a legacy of the Soviet era's language policies that promoted Russian alongside Kazakh. Additionally, a smaller

group of respondents (3.3%) reported using a combination of Kazakh and Uzbek, stressing the region's ethnic diversity, with Uzbek and Kazakh coexisting as a medium of communication in many households.

Furthermore, the linguistic landscape of towns like Zhana Iqan highlights the region's multicultural diversity. Within the community, Kazakh, Uzbek, and Russian are employed in a balanced manner, emphasising the area's historical role as a site of cultural interchange and its current status as a multiethnic community. This pattern of multilingualism aligns with Grimshaw's (1974) concept of domain analysis, which posits that language choice is influenced by the specific social contexts in which communication occurs. In this case, Kazakh may dominate in formal and educational domains, while Russian and Uzbek remain prominent in familial and informal settings.

The interplay among Kazakh, Russian, and Uzbek in the surveyed households highlights the complex dynamics of language use in this rural region. The increasing preference for Kazakh in domestic settings signifies the influence of post-independence language policies aimed at revitalising Kazakh and asserting national identity. However, the persistence of Russian, particularly in interethnic families, demonstrates the ongoing impact of the Soviet linguistic legacy. The multiethnic, multilingual nature of these households reflects broader patterns of cultural adaptation, where language serves as both a tool for social mobility and a marker of ethnic and familial identity.

In summary, the linguistic practices related to spousal communication illustrate the dynamic and multifaceted nature of language use in post-Soviet Kazakhstan. The data reveal a complex interplay between historical continuity, contemporary sociolinguistic shifts, and the evolving role of language in shaping identity and social mobility within families. This linguistic adaptation reflects broader trends in multiethnic societies, with language choices being shaped by personal and societal factors. These influence how communities navigate their diverse cultural heritage.

Foundations of cultural diversity in Zhana Iqan. The village of Zhana Iqan, situated in the Sauran district of the Turkestan region, holds historical and contemporary significance within Kazakhstan's sociolinguistic landscape. Geographically positioned near major landmarks such as the historical Iqan district, Zhana Iqan is home to a diverse population of Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and smaller groups of Tatars, Uyghurs, and others. Historically, Iqan was an important hub during the Middle Ages, with its rich heritage tied to ancient cities in the Turkestan region. While the modern village is primarily agricultural, with many residents engaged in shepherding and seasonal work, the area continues to reflect tradition and modernity. Its residents are committed to honouring and preserving their ethnic and cultural

identities, while also adapting to the pressures of modern Kazakhstan. Language practices in Zhana Iqan reveal the delicate balance between ethnic traditions and societal changes. The inhabitants of Zhana Iqan generally emphasise unity and peaceful coexistence among ethnic groups, with a shared respect for Kazakh customs and traditions. National holidays are commonly celebrated with equal participation from various ethnic groups, and many residents identify themselves as Kazakhs in their daily lives.

This blending of cultures in Zhana Iqan is reflected in the language used in the home, especially in communication between spouses. These multilingual dynamics reflect a complex interplay of historical, social, and practical influences that shape language use within families. While Kazakh occupies a dominant position as the state language, language practices in the village are shaped by factors such as generational shifts, social norms, and concerns about future opportunities for children. In this village, 31.1% of the population communicates exclusively or primarily in Kazakh with their spouses, with a significant portion of the community also using Russian. This reflects the fluid linguistic landscape of the village, where multilingualism is not simply a matter of convenience but a response to the broader socio-economic context.

For families that predominantly speak Kazakh, the choice of language is primarily motivated by the desire to secure future success for their children. Given that Kazakh is the language of state exams, scholarships, and government employment, proficiency in Kazakh is seen as a critical tool for social mobility. On the other hand, many inter-ethnic households, such as Kazakh-Uzbek or Kazakh-Russian, continue to use both Kazakh and Russian, pointing to the bilingual nature of the community.

This multilingual environment in Zhana Iqan mirrors broader patterns seen across rural Kazakhstan, where language is not only a medium of communication but also a marker of identity and social cohesion. Kazakh is an anchor for cultural identity in the village, even as younger generations increasingly distance themselves from traditional ethnic boundaries. In this way, the language practices in Zhana Iqan offer valuable insights into how language, ethnicity, and social mobility intersect in the evolving post-Soviet context of Kazakhstan. It also illustrates the continued relevance of language as a tool for cultural preservation and social integration.

Based on Russian language usage with the spouses within inter-ethnic households in Hantagy, several underlying factors influence the usage. In Hantagy, most Russian-speaking respondents come from families of Russian ethnicity whose parents or grandparents migrated during the Soviet era to work in the mining industry. For these families, Russian historically functioned as the primary household language, serving as a communication tool and a vehicle for cultural continuity. During the Soviet period, Russian became a *lingua franca* across

Kazakhstan's diverse ethnic groups. It facilitated inter-ethnic communication and ensured access to administrative, educational, and economic opportunities (Fierman, 1991). This widespread use of Russian enabled individuals from different ethnic backgrounds to interact, form relationships, and navigate a linguistically diverse environment.

However, a gradual linguistic shift has emerged in the post-Soviet era, driven by national policies prioritizing the Kazakh language as a marker of national identity (Smagulova, 2008). In Hantagy, younger generations are increasingly adopting Kazakh, which reflects the influence of state-led language revitalization efforts and the sociopolitical dynamics of contemporary Kazakhstan. While older generations often acknowledge the challenges of transitioning to Kazakh after decades of Russian linguistic dominance, many respondents recognise the necessity of adapting to new linguistic and cultural norms. Proficiency in Kazakh has become essential for accessing education, employment opportunities, and social mobility. This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic capital, wherein the mastery of the dominant language is a valuable resource for integration and upward mobility.

In contrast, Zhana Iqan presents a more intercultural linguistic environment, where Kazakh, Uzbek, and Russian are used more or less equally. Respondents in this community emphasize a conscious effort to align with Kazakh social norms and customs while simultaneously maintaining their linguistic and cultural heritage. This dynamic reflects Berry's (1997) acculturation theory, which states that intercultural adaptation involves preserving one's cultural identity with practices that facilitate integration into the broader society. The negotiation between multilingualism and adherence to Kazakh norms in Zhana Iqan highlights a dynamic, ongoing process of identity formation through which individuals strategically balance their ethnic heritage and national belonging.

The linguistic adaptation observed in both communities (i.e., Hantagy's gradual shift toward Kazakh and Zhana Iqan's multilingual equilibrium) underscores social constructivist perspectives on identity. According to Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), language is a mechanism for constructing and negotiating social belonging. Even in historically Russian-dominated villages like Hantagy, Russian-speaking families increasingly adopt Kazakh language and customs to signal their participation in Kazakhstan's evolving cultural ethos. This process is not merely pragmatic but also symbolic, as it reflects broader efforts to integrate into contemporary Kazakh society while contributing to the broader national project.

Ultimately, the interplay between linguistic diversity and adaptation in Hantagy and Zhana Iqan reveals the complex role of language in Kazakhstan's post-Soviet landscape. Whether through the linguistic assimilation seen in Hantagy or the balanced multilingualism of Zhana Iqan, individuals and families navigate their cultural and linguistic realities in ways that

reflect Kazakhstan's rich historical legacy and contemporary transformations.

5.6. Families who speak Kazakh, Uzbek, Azerbaijani, and Turkish Languages

The following section presents a brief case study that explores the linguistic and cultural dynamics within mixed-marriage families in the Turkestan region. These cases reflect the relationships between ethnicity, language, and cultural assimilation and offer insights into how families navigate interethnic coexistence while adapting to dominant cultural norms. For example, one of the Uzbek-Azerbaijani families interviewed included a wife who was born into an Azerbaijani minority in a town where Kazakhs and Russians were the dominant ethnic groups. Despite the ethnic diversity of her school environment, which included Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Russians, and Koreans, the Kazakh language emerged as the primary communication medium. This linguistic dominance reflects the sociolinguistic influence of the Kazakh majority and highlights how minority groups adapt linguistically and culturally to maintain harmonious interethnic relations. The wife emphasised that the community upheld friendly relations across ethnic boundaries, with most families adhering to Kazakh cultural norms for the sake of social cohesion.

A contrasting example was observed in the case of a homogenous Uzbek family. The wife in this family was raised in a traditional Uzbek household with limited exposure to other ethnic groups. Her husband, also from an Uzbek family, was raised in a teacher's household where Uzbek cultural values predominated. Despite their distinct ethnic backgrounds, the couple stressed the importance of peaceful coexistence with Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. According to the husband, discussions about ethnic divisions were regarded as taboo, as the community valued unity and collaboration over cultural differences.

A notable trend that emerged across these families was the process of Kazakhization, a term that describes the linguistic and cultural assimilation of minority groups into the Kazakh majority. This process was evident in settlements such as Zhana Iqan, where families often were shown to make intentional choices to communicate with their children in Kazakh, even when their ethnic backgrounds were Uzbek or Azerbaijani. Both pragmatic and symbolic motives shape this practice. Pragmatically, parents recognise Kazakh fluency as critical for their children's educational and professional success, while symbolically speaking, Kazakh represents an expression of gratitude and respect toward the Kazakh nation, which is historically viewed as providing support and refuge for various groups during difficult times.

Turki Poselkasy, also known locally as "Bekzat," is a rural settlement in the Turkestan region, situated between the rural districts of Shornak and Zhana Iqan. The name "Turki

Poselkasy” reflects its historical association with the Ahiska Turks, who have predominantly inhabited the village since their forced deportation during the Stalinist era. This group is known for its resilience in preserving its language, religion, and cultural traditions. According to Ziyatdin Kasanov, chairman of the World Association of Ahiska Turks, the community has managed to maintain its identity even under the pressures of exile. This persistence can be understood through cultural retention theory, which underscores the importance of maintaining cultural identity as a survival mechanism within diaspora communities. The strong community ties and shared efforts of the Ahiska Turks have been crucial in sustaining their sociocultural environment. Simultaneously, support from Turkey has reinforced their cultural and national identity, both within the diaspora and internationally (Portes; Rumbaut, 2001).

Ethnographic data collected in Turki Poselkasy showed moderate integration within the community, with interethnic marriages accounting for 11.6% across all research sites. This suggests that while integration is present, the Ahiska Turks maintain a distinct ethnic identity. Language use within the community further reflects these dynamics of cultural assimilation and retention. According to the data from the language-use figures above, 11.6% of the participants stated that their everyday communication occurred in Turkish. In comparison, communication with children in Turkish was reported at 6.7%, and spousal interaction in Turkish stood at 7%. These figures indicate that, although younger generations increasingly adopt Kazakh and Russian in response to broader societal norms, Turkish remains an important part of everyday life for these families.

The shift towards Kazakh and Russian usage, particularly among younger generations, reflects the broader acculturation process, wherein minority groups balance maintaining cultural identity and adapting to the host society. The Ahiska Turks' selective engagement with Kazakh and Russian illustrates ethnic boundary negotiation, whereby cultural practices are selectively integrated while preserving key ethnic elements. This dynamic challenges the notion of fixed cultural identities and connotes identity's fluid and adaptive nature when influenced by the sociopolitical and historical context.

Maintaining the Turkish language within the family also represents a symbolic act and as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). It is representative of cultural values and heritage passed on to future generations. The community's efforts to preserve their ethnic identity while participating in the linguistic and cultural practices of Kazakh society also reflect a pragmatic approach to survival and adaptation in an evolving social landscape.

The cohesion observed in Turki Poselkasy underscores the importance of shared traditions and collective identity in sustaining a minority community's resilience. At the same time, the adoption of Kazakh and Russian highlights the pragmatic needs of the younger

generation regarding education and social integration. This stresses the complex interplay between cultural preservation and adaptation. The community's approach is one of flexibility and strategic engagement with their ethnic heritage and the demands of the broader social context. It also ensures the survival of their cultural identity while embracing opportunities from a multilingual society.

As the focus of our anthropological research, Southern Kazakhstan, particularly the Turkestan region, represents a stronghold of Kazakh national values. Despite the political transformations that have significantly impacted the country, the linguistic landscape of the research sites has continued to be dominated by the Kazakh language. This assertion is substantiated by analysing over 50 interviews conducted across four villages, focusing on families in interethnic marriages. The findings showed that a complex interplay of historical, cultural, and socio-political forces shapes the linguistic landscape of Turkestan. The use of Kazakh, Russian, and other languages reflects the dynamic nature of language practices in inter-ethnic contexts, where they serve not only as a means of communication but also as a marker of identity and social status. Within inter-ethnic families, particularly those of Uzbek and Azerbaijani descent, Kazakh often becomes the primary language due to its societal significance while preserving ethnic identity in the household. The Ahiska Turkish community in Turki Poselkasy further exemplifies the resilience of minority groups in maintaining their language and traditions, even as younger generations increasingly adopt Kazakh and Russian.

The hypothesis that language in inter-ethnic marriages functions as a practical tool for communication and a symbolic marker of ethnic identity is strongly supported by the data. The study produced three qualitative charts regarding language use in different contexts. Each shows Kazakh as the dominant language in the given setting and highlights its significance as a marker of national identity and a strategic tool for education and social mobility. The dominance of Kazakh in daily interactions, spousal communication, and child-rearing reflects the broader sociolinguistic environment of Turkestan, shaped by factors such as family traditions, education levels, and the degree of social integration. However, the enduring influence of Russian, particularly among older generations and in interethnic marriages, focuses on the historical legacy of the Soviet era, during which Russian served as a *lingua franca*. Language choice in these contexts illustrates processes of dissimilation, where multilingualism and hybrid identities emerge as families negotiate cultural adaptation while maintaining ethnic ties. Multilingualism, observed prominently in the data above, connotes the blending of languages in inter-ethnic families, suggesting a negotiation of identities and an openness to cultural exchange. Theories such as Berry's (1997) acculturation model, Gumperz's (1982) code-switching theory, and Fishman's (1991) language shift theory provided valuable

frameworks for understanding these patterns. These processes show that while one language often dominates due to practical and societal pressures, it also mediates identity negotiation and cultural adaptation within contexts such as interethnic marriages. Linguistic trends in Turkestan exemplify how language use reflects both practical communication needs and serves as a tool for navigating and reconciling complex cultural landscapes.

6. THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES IN THE TURKESTAN REGION

6.1. Role of religion and theoretical concepts within the study

Religion is a powerful force in shaping the lives of individuals and communities, particularly in the context of inter-ethnic marriages, where it acts as both a bridge and a boundary. In my research on inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan, the significance of religion emerges as a recurring theme. It influences daily family interactions, child-rearing practices, marital roles, and broader social integration. To situate these findings within a broader scholarly discourse, I draw on key works that explore the intersection of religion, ethnicity, and marriage, offering a deeper theoretical foundation for understanding these dynamics.

Adrienne Edgar's (2022) *Intermarriage and the Friendship of Peoples: Ethnic Mixing in Soviet Central Asia* provides a compelling framework for understanding the interplay of religion and ethnicity in shaping marital practices in Central Asia. Her analysis of Soviet policies and Islamic traditions is particularly relevant to studying Kazakh-Uzbek and Kazakh-Russian marriages in the Turkestan region, where historical, political, and religious factors have long influenced inter-ethnic unions. Edgar argues that Soviet ideology promoted inter-ethnic marriages to foster ethnic integration, yet these unions often retained distinct cultural and religious dynamics (Edgar, 2022).

In Kazakh-Uzbek marriages observed during my research, the integration of Islamic principles mirrors Edgar's findings. Both Kazakh and Uzbek families emphasise Islamic values in daily life, but the practical application of these values often differs due to variations in cultural traditions. For example, influenced by their nomadic heritage, Kazakh families emphasise rituals such as respect for elders and hospitality, which are deeply embedded in their Islamic practice. Conversely, with their sedentary and Silk Road legacy, Uzbek families integrate Islamic values with strong familial cohesion and a sense of honor (*nomus*). Edgar's insights into the negotiation of Islamic practices in Soviet-era marriages illuminate how these differences are reconciled in contemporary Kazakh-Uzbek unions, where couples often blend their traditions into shared religious and cultural practices.

Edgar's discussion of Soviet efforts to secularize inter-ethnic relationships and downplay religious differences provides valuable context in Kazakh-Russian marriages. My study reveals that while Kazakh-Russian couples often lack a shared religious framework, they draw on cultural practices rooted in their respective traditions. Edgar's observation that Soviet

policies encouraged pragmatic approaches to inter-ethnic marriages helps explain why these couples prioritise practical solutions over rigid adherence to religious norms. This pragmatic approach fosters mutual respect and adaptability and allows such marriages to thrive despite differing religious and cultural backgrounds.

Moreover, Sherkat's work (2004) provides an analytical lens for examining how religious homogamy and boundaries influence marital stability and partner selection. Sherkat's theories are particularly relevant to studying Russian-Tatar and homogeneous Russian marriages, where religious affiliation and participation play a defining role. In Russian-Tatar marriages, Sherkat's concept of religious boundaries is evident in how couples navigate the intersection of Russian Orthodoxy and Islam. My research highlights that these marriages often blend religious traditions, with couples negotiating shared practices such as celebrating holidays or rearing children. Sherkat's observation that religious flexibility is critical for the success of interfaith marriages aligns with my findings, as Russian-Tatar couples frequently adapt their practices to create a harmonious family environment.

For homogeneous Russian marriages, Sherkat's discussion of religious homogamy offers insights into why these unions often emphasize shared Orthodox Christian values. In my study, such marriages demonstrate a strong alignment of cultural and religious beliefs and contribute to marital stability while underscoring the importance of this shared framework in reducing potential conflicts and fostering cohesion within families (Sherkat, 2004).

Netting's work (2011) further discusses how couples adapt and blend their religious traditions to create shared practices. Her idea of "building bridges" mirrors what I observed in Turkestan, where families integrate elements of Kazakh and Uzbek religious traditions into their lives. This blending often requires creativity and compromise, as couples work to maintain harmony while respecting their unique cultural identities. Netting's focus on adaptation and pluralism offers valuable insights into how religion can be flexible and grounded in inter-ethnic marriages (Netting, 2011).

This subchapter investigates the role of religion in shaping inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan. The study finds that religion is a fundamental component in everyday family interactions and impacts child-rearing, marital relations, sexual education, and broader social integration. A mixed-methods approach was employed, which combined qualitative data from interviews and participant observations with quantitative data from structured questionnaires, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of religious practices. The findings show that religion informs inter-ethnic marital dynamics and reinforces cultural and familial roles within the broader social fabric. The study contributes to discussions on the intersection of religion, ethnicity, and family life, emphasizing how religious flexibility and

adaptation occur in response to practical life challenges. Additionally, the study underscores the role of women within these marriages, particularly in negotiating religious and cultural expectations. Thus, the study contributes to understanding “lived religion” in diverse social settings.

Inter-ethnic marriages have long been a feature of the social landscape in Turkestan, a historically diverse region where various ethnic and religious groups coexist. In Kazakhstan, especially in rural areas, ethnicity and religion intersect significantly in shaping familial and social relationships. The Turkestan region, with its dominant Muslim population and various Turkic-speaking ethnic groups such as Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tatars, presents a unique case for exploring how religion influences inter-ethnic marriages. According to the data gathered in these villages, religion plays an important role in each family studied. This extends to various aspects of everyday life, such as raising children, intergenerational communication, marriage processes, family planning, and integrating a new daughter-in-law into the family. Religion also affected social interaction, hosting guests, organising festivities, and celebrating religious holidays. Furthermore, the data illustrate the integration of religious and ethnic values, as well as insight into how religion influences sexual education within inter-ethnic marriages.

In examining the role of religion in shaping inter-ethnic marriages, this study draws upon several key anthropological and sociological theories. Barth’s theory of ethnic boundaries (1969) posits that ethnic groups maintain their distinctiveness not primarily through shared cultural traits, but through ongoing practices and interactions that emphasize difference and sustain group identity. Within the context of inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan, religious practices emerge as critical in maintaining and redefining these boundaries, particularly in how they navigate ethnic and religious identities. Complementing this is Redfield’s theory of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936), which underlines how prolonged cultural contact leads to the exchange of traits and the creation of hybrid practices. This is reflected in the present study’s findings, where inter-ethnic couples adapt their religious practices and make an impact in marital dynamics, child-rearing, and gender roles. Furthermore, Nancy Ammerman’s “lived religion” (2007) is important in understanding how religion operates in daily life, beyond institutional doctrines. Ammerman emphasises how individuals engage with religious practices as dynamic, embodied experiences, rather than merely adhering to doctrinal mandates. The current study highlights how women in inter-ethnic marriages actively negotiate religious and cultural expectations within the domestic sphere, particularly regarding child-rearing and sexual education.

Paul Vermeer’s research on parent-child pairs (2014) further contributes to the transmission and negotiation of religious values within families. He argues that parent-child

pairs operate as dynamic units, reflecting shared beliefs and practices while being shaped by cultural context and individual differences. This perspective is particularly relevant to inter-ethnic marriages, where the religious socialisation across generations becomes a complex negotiation of both cultural and religious identities. Vermeer's insights help contextualise how inter-ethnic families pass down religious values, especially in mixed marriages, where children often navigate questions of religious identity and adopt either a singular religious affiliation or a more fluid, bi-ethnic identity. His work on methodological diversity in studying religious socialisation also enriches the present study's approach to analysing inter-ethnic families.

These theoretical frameworks collectively illuminate how religion both preserves and transforms cultural and ethnic identities within the context of inter-ethnic marriages. In this study, the dynamics of Kazakh-Uzbek and Russian-Tatar mixed marriages exemplify how Barth's theory of ethnic boundaries and Redfield's theory of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936) are negotiated in these unions. While Kazakhs and Uzbeks have historically coexisted in the same region, they maintain distinct cultural and religious identities. It reaffirms Barth's idea that ethnic boundaries are sustained through everyday practices. As Redfield posits, prolonged interaction fosters the development of hybrid cultural and religious practices and demonstrates acculturation in action. Vermeer's concept of parent-child pairs offers a deeper layer of understanding, particularly in the intergenerational transmission of religious and cultural identities. This interplay of maintaining ethnic boundaries while exchanging cultural traits is evident in the everyday practices that shape family life and religious observances. They become markers of ethnic identity in both homogeneous and inter-ethnic families.

6.2. Research design of the chapter

This phase of the study exclusively focused on Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatar, and Russian communities, and concentrated on the most renowned ethnicities in the region. The collected data were fundamental in addressing the study's objectives, particularly in exploring how religion and national values shape family structures, influence gender roles, and impact the negotiation of ethnic identities within interethnic marriages. Approximately 70% of the interviews from the broader research were utilized in this study, providing a focused examination of the influence of national values on interethnic family life in the region.

Notably, these interviews explored several key topics on religion: (1) religious identity within families that focuses on the religious affiliations of spouses and children and highlights how religion influences family dynamics and personal identity in inter-ethnic households; (2) integration of religious practices into daily life, which examine how individuals incorporate

religious beliefs and practices into their routines and point the importance of adhering to religious rules, and the role of spirituality in shaping moral and ethical decisions; (3) religious influence on upbringing, which addresses the role of religion in raising children, including its impact on moral education, behavioral expectations, and family rituals; and (4) observance of religious norms and traditions that aims to explore adherence to religious prohibitions, the celebration of religious holidays, and how these practices contribute to familial and communal cohesion.

In contrast, national values are based on the following: (1) daily integration of national values, how couples incorporate traditional customs, festivals, and moral principles into their everyday routines; (2) family and marriage dynamics, the role of national values in marriage negotiations, raising children, and managing inter-family relationships, particularly in cases where ethnic differences exist; (3) negotiation of ethnic and cultural values, how national values are reconciled with ethnic customs and traditions in mixed-ethnicity marriages; and (4) gender roles and intergenerational transmission, how national values shape attitudes toward gender expectations, child-rearing practices, and the transmission of cultural heritage.

The semi-structured format allowed participants to elaborate on their personal experiences while ensuring consistency across interviews. This enables comparison between the responses. Each interview was recorded (with the participant's consent), transcribed, and later analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The theoretical framework for this study draws on acculturation theory (Berry, 1997), which examines how individuals and groups adapt to and negotiate between differing cultural values in a multicultural setting. The study also employs social identity theory (Tajfel, Turner, 1986), focusing on how national identity is constructed and maintained in inter-ethnic marriages, and the assimilation model (Park, Burgess, 1921) to understand the integration of diverse ethnic groups within shared cultural frameworks.

Ethical approval for this study was obtained from the local administration's ethics committee. All participants were informed of the study's aims and were assured that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Informed consent was obtained from each participant before conducting interviews or administering questionnaires. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was anonymised in the study results.

The value and effectiveness of each of the selected factors were illustrated through the selection of both mixed marriages and homogeneous marriages. Given the impracticality of presenting the collected material in depth, homogeneous marriages were specifically selected to facilitate a more accurate comparison and better understanding of interethnic marriages. Based on the analysed data and the established database, the respondents were categorised into

the following groups, encompassing all marriage units (Table 5):

- (1) Muslim households: Kazakh-Uzbek, homogeneous Uzbek marriages under study;
- (2) Christian households: Russian-Tatar, homogeneous Russian marriages under study;
- (3) Mixed-religious households: Uzbek-Russian, Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriages.

Table 5. *Number of interviews by marriage type and household classification.* Source: Author

Type of marriage	Household classification	Number of married couples interviewed	Total number of interviewees
Kazakh-Uzbek	muslim	7	14
Homogeneous Uzbek	households	7	14
Tatar-Russian	christian	5	10
Homogeneous Russian	households	3	6
Uzbek-Russian	mixed-religion	4	8
Kazakh-Russian	households	4	8

This section examines how couples in mixed Russian-Uzbek and Kazakh-Uzbek marriages integrate religious rituals such as prayer, fasting, and celebrating religious holidays into their everyday routines. Nancy Ammerman (2007) emphasises that the central focus is on how individuals engage with religious practices as lived, embodied experiences rather than purely doctrinal or institutional observances. It explores how religious rituals and behaviours are not passively followed but actively negotiated and sometimes resisted, depending on the social context.

Ammerman highlights that individuals often adapt religious rituals, such as prayer or fasting, to fit their everyday realities, engaging in subtle negotiations to align these practices with their personal and cultural identities. This is particularly evident in diverse social settings where religious norms may conflict with secular expectations or other cultural values. The chapter emphasises the dynamic nature of religious practice and demonstrates how adherents can embrace and resist religious norms while crafting a spirituality that reflects their everyday lives. This work contributes to the study of “lived religion” and focuses on the real-life challenges and adaptations people make while practising faith within complex social environments (Ammerman, 2007).

As an example, consider families representing two types of mixed marriages under the category of Muslim households and Muslim-Christian households: Kazakh-Uzbek and Russian-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriages. These cases were chosen because the majority of the

people in the region under investigation are Muslims, including Uzbeks and Kazakhs, who were initially chosen. Representatives of the Russian ethnic minority are scarce, and their national ideals and religious heritage differ significantly from Muslims in the region under study.

6.3. Kazakh-Uzbek and Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriages

The marriages examined in this section are categorised as Muslim households, specifically Kazakh-Uzbek mixed marriages. Among Uzbeks, specific rituals such as the acceptance of the bride, birth ceremonies, and the circumcision ritual—integrated with Islamic obligations—are important in reinforcing both ethnic and religious boundaries. Religious holidays, especially Eid al-Adha, hold significant importance in shaping family dynamics; Uzbeks customarily gather at night to recite prayers, exchange religious insights, and engage in communal discourse, practices notably less prevalent among local Kazakhs. Furthermore, religiously grounded rituals such as sacrifices during key holidays, the preparation of traditional dishes associated with these customs, and adherence to national attire during funerals and other major life events highlight how homogeneous and mixed families express their cultural and religious identities. These practices reflect Barth's (1969) theory of ethnic boundaries, which posits that ethnic groups maintain their distinct identities through shared cultural content and everyday interactions and ritualised activities that differentiate one group from another, even within a shared religious framework. Religion thus plays a profound role in shaping family and marriage dynamics, particularly in inter-ethnic or interfaith contexts, where it governs key rites such as marriage customs, bride acceptance, child-rearing rituals (including circumcision), and the overall management of family relationships under Islamic tenets.

In the case of Uzbeks, these rituals serve as crucial mechanisms for reinforcing both ethnic and religious boundaries and illustrate how religion functions as a key factor in shaping ethnic identity through daily practices and communal interactions. This process of maintaining boundaries through religious and cultural rituals also resonates with Redfield's theory of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936), which explores how cultural exchange and adaptation arise from prolonged contact between distinct groups. Despite the shared geographical and historical context of Kazakhs and Uzbeks, their unique religious practices, such as bride acceptance and sacrificial ceremonies, underscore how acculturation occurs selectively. While certain cultural traits may blend over time, these rituals demonstrate how clear ethnic and religious boundaries are preserved, even in contexts of ongoing cultural interaction.

Edgar highlights how Soviet-era policies encouraged inter-ethnic marriages as a tool to foster integration, yet these unions often retained distinctive religious and cultural practices. In

the context of Kazakh-Uzbek families, the blending of Islamic traditions reflects Edgar's observation that religion often serves as both a unifying force and a marker of cultural boundaries. For example, shared Islamic rituals such as Eid prayers and sacrificial ceremonies become opportunities for communal bonding, while differences in traditions, like bride acceptance and circumcision ceremonies, reinforce ethnic identities. These findings resonate with the role of Islamic rituals in maintaining cultural specificity within inter-ethnic unions (Edgar, 2022).

Additionally, in the mixed Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriages examined, every aspect of daily life demonstrates the essential role of Islam. This includes the preparation of meals, hosting visitors, showing respect for the elderly, parenting, and family holiday celebrations. Male dominance is also frequently evident in the religious beliefs of these families. Depending on their specific daily habits, the *five primary Islamic duties*²⁰ are adapted to the everyday practices of Kazakh households (Denny, 2016; Esposito, 2005).

The requirement to pray five times per day (known as *Salat*) at specific times is emphasized. However, practical circumstances, such as the arrival of a guest or illness, can interfere with this obligation. Despite this, Islamic teachings allow for some flexibility; for instance, if one cannot pray at the prescribed time due to a valid reason, Islam provides guidelines for making up for missed prayers later, though intentionally skipping *Salat* without a valid excuse is discouraged. The situation described in this family highlights practical challenges, but it should be noted that Islam both encourages prayer and accommodates situations in which prayers might be delayed.

Additionally, every Muslim who is physically and financially able must perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca. In this context, financial constraints are a valid reason for postponing this obligation. As in the case described, if the family is experiencing financial hardship, the obligation to perform Hajj can be deferred until they can afford it, as Islamic law prioritises the family's well-being.

Zakat (i.e., almsgiving, the obligation to give a portion of one's wealth to the less fortunate) is a key component of Islamic social justice. However, this obligation is also contingent on one's financial capacity. If a family does not have the necessary wealth, they are not required to give *Zakat* until they reach a threshold of savings, known as *Nisab*. Thus, scenarios in which a family cannot fulfil this duty due to financial hardship are addressed within

²⁰ **The five pillars of Islam** are essential acts of worship that form the foundation of Muslim faith and practice. These include: (1) *Shahada* – the declaration of faith in Allah and Muhammad as His Prophet, central to Islamic belief; (2) *Salat* – five daily prayers facing Mecca, fostering discipline and submission to Allah; (3) *Zakat* – obligatory charity (2.5% of wealth) to support social equality; (4) *Sawm* – fasting during Ramadan for self-discipline and spiritual growth; and (5) *Hajj* – the once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage to Mecca, symbolizing unity and submission to Allah. These pillars integrate personal faith with social, economic, and spiritual life.

Islamic teachings. In the Kazakh-Uzbek families studied, the observance of *Sawm*, one of the Five Pillars of Islam, is primarily fulfilled annually by the men. However, women also participate in most cases. However, Islamic law provides specific exemptions for women who are pregnant, menstruating, or experiencing health-related conditions, allowing them to delay fasting until they can complete it later without compromising their well-being. This flexibility aligns with the broader principles of Islamic jurisprudence that prioritise health and welfare when fulfilling religious obligations. Islamic law offers practical flexibility in religious obligations when genuine constraints arise, ensuring that worship remains accessible while also accounting for life's challenges.

Uzbek-Russian mixed marriages. Among the married couples interviewed, a notable segment consisted of mixed-religious households, specifically Uzbek-Russian mixed marriages, for whom Islam plays a significant role in their daily lives. In one case, a Russian wife, originally a Christian, converted to Islam after years as the daughter-in-law in an Uzbek family characterised by male dominance. In the interview, she expressed a deep commitment to her new community's teachings and the Islamic faith's standards. She highlighted the importance of religious practices, such as the five daily prayers, in fostering self-discipline and cultivating positive thoughts. Furthermore, she articulated her belief that prayer uplifts communal spirits, encouraging individuals to support one another and nurture positive relationships with their neighbours. She added her determination to raise her children following these values and emphasized the importance of instilling a sense of community and responsibility.

This transformation in her identity illustrates Ammerman's (2007) concept of lived religion, where religious practices are experienced as integral to daily life rather than mere adherence to doctrine. Additionally, her acknowledgement of women's specific roles in Islam reflects a broader understanding of gender dynamics within religious frameworks. The multifaceted role of women in Islam, as informed by religious texts and interpreted through various cultural lenses, grants women distinct rights and responsibilities, including spiritual equality with men, access to education, and participation in economic activities. Simultaneously, their familial duties encompass child-rearing and maintaining household harmony. Islamic law also emphasizes women's autonomy and protecting their rights to consent in marriage and to seek divorce under certain conditions (Jawad, 1998). This interplay of religious and cultural identities and the negotiation of personal beliefs and communal practices highlights the complexities of inter-ethnic marriages and the transformative power of faith within family dynamics.

Moreover, this transformation aligns with Redfield's theory of acculturation (Redfield

et al., 1936). It explains how prolonged exposure to a different cultural and religious environment can lead to adapting and blending practices. The Russian woman's adoption of Islamic values and her acknowledgement of women's distinct roles within Islam underscore the multifaceted nature of her experience. Islamic teachings grant women various rights and responsibilities, including spiritual equality, education, and participation in economic activities, while also emphasizing familial duties such as child-rearing. This negotiation of identity and practice exemplifies how religious and cultural values evolve within inter-ethnic marriages. Such instances illustrate a blend of traditions and the complexities of maintaining personal and communal identities.

The transformative role of religion in family dynamics, as seen in Uzbek-Russian and Kazakh-Uzbek marriages, aligns with the complex themes explored by Edgar, Sharot, and Netting. Edgar's historical perspective illustrates how religion adapts to sociopolitical contexts and influences rituals and family practices. Sharot's work underscores the importance of religious rituals in maintaining ethnic identities, even within inter-ethnic households. Meanwhile, Netting's emphasis on pluralism and adaptability highlights the creative ways in which families navigate cultural and religious differences.

This section explores the role of religion in the marriage process, child-rearing, and managing family relationships, with a particular emphasis on families in which ethnic or religious differences exist. Utilising the data from a homogeneous Islamic Uzbek family and mixed Christian Tatar-Russian families, the following subsections explore the coexistence of Islamic and Christian households within a shared geographic region. The research focuses on key aspects of family life, including the marriage process, child-rearing practices, and the management of familial relationships to assess how these elements are operationalised in the respective families.

6.4. Homogeneous Uzbek and Tatar-Russian mixed marriages

The following marriages examined represent Muslim households where religion profoundly shapes family and marriage dynamics, particularly in multicultural or interfaith contexts, where it often dictates the rites and customs associated with marriage, child-rearing, and managing relationships. For instance, in Islamic marriages, both parties must consent to the union, and a husband must provide a 'bride price' or '*Mahr*²¹' to his wife, an obligation rooted

²¹ In Islamic law, *mahr* is a mandatory gift or financial obligation given by the groom to the bride as part of the marriage contract (*nikah*). It serves as a form of security and respect for the bride and is her exclusive right. The *mahr* can be a monetary amount, property, or any agreed-upon asset and is typically negotiated before the marriage. Unlike a dowry, Mahr is a legal requirement ensuring the women's financial rights in the union. The Quran emphasizes the importance of the *mahr*, stating that it should be given willingly and with good intention.

in Islamic law (Ali, 2002). This obligation serves as a symbolic gesture and as legal protection for the wife, which grants her security in the marriage. Religious norms can also influence the selection of partners and legal conditions, such as divorce terms, which vary across different religious traditions (Esposito, 2005). In the settlements studied, the bride price called «ҚАЛЫҢ МАЛ» operates somewhat differently, as locals have established their own rules for the marriage system. Importantly, the bride price is distinct from the mahr, as it is a locally established practice with its own cultural significance.

According to the data collected, the form and amount of «ҚАЛЫҢ МАЛ» (bride price) can vary across different villages. The responsibility for providing the «ҚАЛЫҢ МАЛ» typically rests with the groom's parents and extended family. The specific amount is generally determined by the elders of both families, including the parents and close relatives of both the bride and groom. The bride price is higher in Kazakh families than Uzbek homogeneous families.

Moreover, locals who participated in the interviews indicated that besides the bride price, there is another essential requirement called «Жасау» (dowry). This includes the provision of various household items and furnishings by the bride and her family required for establishing life in a new household. This preparation typically involves acquiring home appliances, new furniture, and items such as curtains and tulle. The total cost of these contributions often exceeds that of the mahr. According to the women interviewed, these requirements for the new bride are dictated by the local communities. In the context of other Uzbek homogeneous families, the treatment of the bride by her new family is influenced by the dowry that she brings. The perceived value, quality, and aesthetics of the dowry items play a critical role; when the mother-in-law is satisfied with these attributes, it often leads to a corresponding level of respect and favorable treatment toward the daughter-in-law within the new family structure.

Among the homogenous Uzbek family observed, religious convictions are crucial to the premarital phase. Before the marriage agreement is formalized, obtaining elder consent is deemed necessary, and the process usually begins with invoking the name of Allah. The mother of the potential groom formally approaches the prospective bride's family to announce her decision to marry her son to their daughter. In Uzbek homogeneous families, in preparation for the wedding, the elders convene to perform rituals associated with obtaining their approval. These include «нан сындыру²²» (breaking bread) and «сарпо корор» (the celebration of arranged marriage). In Islam, respecting elders and seeking their blessings is deeply rooted in

²² «нан сындыру» - **breaking the bread**. On the day of the "Fatih wedding", guests gather at the bride's house, they are mainly the groom's family, some relatives and a representative of the local community or an old man-honorary elder. Representatives from the groom's side explain the purpose of the visit, and if they receive consent, an important ceremony called "Breaking the Bread" is performed. The loaves are divided into two equal halves, and they are considered to be betrothed and blessed.

religious texts and cultural practices. Numerous hadiths emphasise the value of showing respect to elders. This value is associated with blessings and success in life. For instance, the Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said, "He is not one of us who does not show mercy to our young ones and esteem to our elders" (Ali, 2002). This principle extends to major life events, including the initiation of new ventures, where the blessings of elders are sought as a sign of respect and to ensure divine favor.

On the wedding day, before the celebratory festivities begin, the couple participates in a ceremonial marriage at the mosque following Islamic traditions. This religious ceremony is crucial, as it involves the taking of an oath mandated within Islamic jurisprudence. Only after the formalization of their union through this Muslim marriage can the couple be regarded as faithful to one another, both in a physical and spiritual sense, thus permitting further intimacy.

Tatar-Russian mixed marriages. The family analysed in this section is categorized as a Christian household. As noted earlier in the villages examined, the husband's religion holds particular significance. Despite the wife's efforts to maintain both Muslim and Christian practices, the family is generally regarded as Christian by the local community due to the husband's religious affiliation.

Paul Vermeer's research (2014) highlights the concept of "parent-child pairs" as a crucial framework for understanding the interplay between religion and family life. He argues that these pairs are dynamic units reflecting shared beliefs, practices, and experiences, with their interactions revealing how religious values are transmitted and negotiated across generations. Vermeer also stresses the importance of accounting for certain factors (e.g., cultural context and individual differences) that shape these relationships. By focusing on parent-child pairs, researchers can gain deeper insights into the complexities of religious socialization and the impact of family dynamics on religious beliefs and practices. To capture the multifaceted nature of these relationships, Vermeer advocates for a diverse methodological approach in researching this area.

Moreover, the implications of mixed marriages, particularly in religiously diverse contexts, extend to the next generation, with children often grappling with questions of religious identity. Research shows that children from Christian-Muslim unions frequently engage in a process of identity negotiation, which may result in the adoption of a single religious affiliation or the development of a more secular, bi-ethnic identity. This fluidity in religious identification can promote cultural exchange and understanding, but may result in identity loss or confusion among children (Cerchiaro, 2020).

In the mixed Tatar-Russian family examined in this study, the husband identifies as Christian and Russian, while the wife identifies as Tatar and practices Islam. Although

patriarchal structures are commonly observed in the villages under investigation, this particular family exhibits egalitarian dynamics. Both spouses enjoy equal rights and responsibilities, granting each other autonomy and mutual respect for their distinct religious and cultural identities. They refrain from exerting pressure on one another to convert or adopt different beliefs; instead, their relationship is characterised by respectful communication.

When it comes to child-rearing, both parents in this mixed Russian-Tatar family allow their children the freedom to choose their religious affiliation. For example, one son in the family identifies as Christian, while the daughter follows Islam. According to the mother, both religious traditions are preserved in the household. Islamic customs such as the weekly baking of seven loaves of bread (*жеті нан*²³: (Шайгозова, 2023) and reading the Qur'an for deceased ancestors on Fridays are adhered to.

The practice of baking seven loaves of bread, though not universally Islamic, is common in certain regional and cultural expressions of Islam, particularly in Central Asian and Tatar communities. The number seven holds symbolic significance in Islamic tradition. It represents completeness or spiritual fulfilment, as reflected in the Qur'an and hadith literature. The act of baking bread is seen as a form of charity (*sadaqah*)²⁴ (<http://www.islamic-relief.org/sadaqa/>), as it is distributed among family, friends, or the needy, and serves as a supplication (*du'a*) for the soul of the deceased. This ritual underscores the communal aspect of remembrance, as family members gather to participate in acts of charity and worship together (Schimmel, 1994).

Despite her observance of these Islamic practices, the wife does not strictly adhere to all Islamic obligations, such as praying five times a day, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca, or fasting regularly during Ramadan. Additionally, the family celebrates Christian religious holidays and follows certain Christian traditions. The husband, in contrast, distances himself from Islam and maintains a Christian identity, viewing baptism as central to being Christian. The children, raised with exposure to both religions, are permitted to make independent decisions regarding their religious identity once they reach adulthood, with the parents refraining from exerting pressure. They support their children's choices and allow them to form their own beliefs based on their personal and societal influences, and overall upbringing.

The participant observation method used in this study helped validate and corroborate the data collected during the interview, ensuring its consistency with the observed reality. Immersing in the family environment and engaging directly with the children provided valuable

²³ **Zheti shelppek** is a ritual dish of Kazakhs: round flatbread, roasted in oil. The number of flatbreads is usually 7 or 9, which are sacred in the Kazakh sense. They are prepared on religious holidays, funeral rites, Fridays – the day of remembering the spirit ancestors or on the crisis days of human life. People still say: “Zheti shelppek zheti päleden qutqarady” (seven flatbreads will save you from seven troubles).

²⁴ **Sadaqa** is a charity given voluntarily in order to please God. It also describes a voluntary charitable act towards others, whether through generosity, love, compassion or faith. These acts are not necessarily physical or monetary. Simple good deeds such as a smile, or a helping hand, are seen as acts of sadaqah.

insights into the influence of parents on their children, as demonstrated by the observed interactions and familial dynamics.

6.5. Integration of religious, ethnic values within sexual education and gender roles

The integration of religious and ethnic values in mixed-ethnicity marriages presents a complex interplay of local customs, traditions, and individual beliefs. This interaction is particularly pronounced when different religious backgrounds converge. It also influences family dynamics, cultural preservation, and social acceptance. Intermarriage can challenge traditional ethnic boundaries, as ethnically mixed couples may experience a dilution of distinct cultural practices and religious observances, which may lead to a transformation in identity for both partners and their offspring (Voas, 2009).

The case of a Kazakh-Russian couple representing a mixed-religion household from the study exemplifies the intersection of two distinct ethnic identities and religious traditions. Despite her Russian ethnicity and Christian upbringing, the wife has lived in the village for over 15 years, has assimilated into the local Kazakh culture, and has adopted its national values and customs. She has also become proficient in the Kazakh language, using it as her primary means of communication. Despite her integration, she continues to observe her Christian religious duties and rituals, including important celebrations like Easter²⁵ (www.britannica.com/topic/Easter-holiday).

In contrast, the husband has maintained his Islamic faith and has not adopted his wife's religious beliefs. The woman noted that while interacting with her husband's relatives and neighbours in public and social contexts, she also adheres to local Kazakh traditions to ensure social cohesion. For example, during Eid al-Fitr, which is celebrated by Muslims worldwide to mark the end of the month-long dawn-to-dusk fasting of Ramadan, the family engages in the customary practices of sacrifice, hosting guests, and reciting the Qur'an, following the religious and social expectations of the village. She emphasised that celebrating Eid with neighbours is an annual tradition that reflects the family's integration into the local community despite their religious differences.

However, in mixed-ethnicity marriages, particularly between Muslim Kazakhs and Russian Orthodox individuals, religious differences can sometimes lead to tensions, especially during key religious observances. For instance, a Kazakh woman married to a Russian man

²⁵ **Easter** Easter, principal festival of the Christian church, which celebrates the Resurrection of Jesus Christ on the third day after his Crucifixion. The earliest recorded observance of an Easter celebration comes from the 2nd century, though the commemoration of Jesus' Resurrection probably occurred earlier.

noted that religious holidays often become a source of conflict due to differing traditions and expectations. As she stated, “religion sometimes becomes a source of conflict, especially during holidays. We have different traditions, and it can be hard to balance them.” In such marriages, compromises are frequently necessary, with couples either celebrating both sets of religious holidays or adopting a more secular approach to avoid conflict.

Additionally, in rural communities, social and familial pressures can exacerbate these challenges, as adherence to religious customs is often crucial for social acceptance. One interviewee highlighted this dynamic, stating, “In our village, people expect you to follow the religious customs, even if you're from different ethnic groups. It's part of being accepted in the community.” This underscores the broader role that community expectations and cultural norms play in shaping religious practices within mixed-ethnicity marriages, further complicating the negotiation of religious identities and observances.

In examining how religion interacts with local customs and traditions in mixed-ethnicity marriages, participant observation revealed significant intersections between religious practices and culturally ingrained beliefs. For instance, in the researched area, members of some communities use the Qur'an for healing purposes, a practice deeply rooted in local traditions yet grounded in Islamic belief. Interviews with these healers suggest that they view their ability to heal as a spiritual obligation, one that, if neglected, would result in their own illness. This reflects a local understanding of religious texts not only as sources of spiritual guidance but also as conduits for mystical power. The belief in the efficacy of Quranic healing is widespread, with many locals turning to such healers during times of uncertainty or difficulty, seeking purification and relief. This interaction between Islamic practices and indigenous healing traditions highlights how religion can adapt and integrate with pre-existing cultural customs, which create a unique fusion of religious and local practices.

Sexual education and gender roles. This part focuses on how religious beliefs shape attitudes toward sexual education, gender roles, and marital relations. The interplay between religious beliefs, sexual education, and gender roles is a significant factor shaping societal attitudes towards marital relations. Religious doctrines often dictate the parameters of acceptable sexual behavior. These also influence not only individual choices but also broader community norms regarding sexual education and gender expectations.

Moreover, religious beliefs significantly shape gender roles within marital contexts. In many religious traditions, especially within Islam and Christianity, there is a strong emphasis on sexual abstinence outside of marriage. These religions reinforce traditional gender roles where men and women are expected to adhere to specific behavioral norms (Koffi; Kawahara, 2008). For example, in Muslim communities, the concept of virginity is often regarded as a

critical aspect of a woman's honor and respectability, which can lead to stigmatization of women who engage in premarital sexual relations (Navarro-Prado et al., 2023). This cultural framework not only affects women's autonomy but also perpetuates gender inequalities, as men may face fewer repercussions for similar behaviours.

According to the data collected, the role of religion in sex education is crucial, particularly in the regions of Turkestan examined in the present study, where traditional norms significantly influence societal attitudes towards gender and sexuality. A comprehensive evaluation of the five villages revealed a distinct disparity in the freedoms afforded to men and women. Men often experience societal leniency, with minimal restrictions on their behaviour concerning sexuality, which is deemed acceptable within the local cultural context. In contrast, women face considerable pressure and stringent societal expectations regarding their own sexual conduct.

From a young age, girls in these regions are subjected to strict regulations, such as wearing conservative clothing, refraining from public appearances, and avoiding evening gatherings. These restrictions aim to preserve the perceived honour of both the individual and her family. A girl who fails to conform to these standards risks bringing shame, and engaging in premarital sexual activity is regarded as a profound disgrace for herself and her entire family. The societal valuation of gender roles is markedly uneven; the birth of a boy is celebrated as he signifies the future head of the household, while the arrival of a girl is often viewed with less enthusiasm. This custom reflects the belief that she is merely a temporary guest in her family until marriage. Within the family unit, girls are expected to learn domestic responsibilities from their mothers and familiarise themselves with cultural customs and traditions. These are seen as essential for successfully entering a new family as a bride. This emphasis on preparation for marriage underscores the pervasive influence of cultural and religious beliefs in shaping the understanding of gender roles and sexuality in inter-ethnic marriages within these communities.

The study of inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan reveals the complex interplay between religion and ethnicity in shaping familial dynamics and social relationships. Through a mixed-methods approach that encompasses both qualitative and quantitative research, the investigation provides valuable insights into how Islamic beliefs and practices influence everyday life, marriage processes, and family structures among diverse ethnic groups. The findings from semi-structured interviews and participant observations highlight that religion is not merely a set of beliefs but a practical framework guiding various aspects of life, including parenting, social interactions, and cultural celebrations. Integrating religious rituals into daily routines underscores the importance of spirituality in maintaining family cohesion and cultural identity within inter-ethnic marriages. Moreover, the study

demonstrates how religious practices adapt to the complexities of mixed marriages; while adherence to Islamic principles remains crucial, families also exhibit flexibility by negotiating religious obligations based on contextual factors such as the presence of a guest or financial constraints. This reflects a dynamic understanding of lived religion, where personal and cultural identities intersect. Additionally, the analysis of family and marriage dynamics reveals that religious norms significantly impact the selection of partners, the marriage contract, and child-rearing practices. The findings indicate that religious observances, such as the payment of a bride price (*mahr*) and seeking elders' blessings, play a pivotal role in the marriage process, particularly within Islamic communities. However, the study also sheds light on the challenges faced in inter-ethnic marriages, including potential tensions arising from differing religious backgrounds. In conclusion, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of how religion shapes inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region, emphasising the need for continued exploration of the complexities surrounding ethnicity and faith in multicultural contexts. The study serves as a foundation for future inquiries into the role of religion in family life, social cohesion, and cultural integration in diverse societies.

6.6. The significance of national values in interethnic marriages

The study examines three primary areas: the importance of preserving national values within inter-ethnic families, attitudes towards marriage involving children of different nationalities, and the participants' acceptance of the national values and social norms of their spouses. The analysis presented here investigates the role of national values in shaping family dynamics, focusing on Kazakhs as the leading ethnic group alongside their cultural integration with Uzbeks, Azerbaijanis, and Russians. The findings highlight how Kazakh values influence family structures and cultivate adaptive frameworks through cultural blending. Drawing on anthropological and sociological theories, the research illustrates how inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan foster a dynamic interplay of traditions and promote unity and coexistence in the region.

K. Baudiyarova, a researcher in South Kazakhstan who focuses on interethnic marriages, observes the following: The emotional aspect of ethnic identity is very important in both interethnic relations and national politics. This mood is a complicated psychological phenomenon that has a significant impact on the national mindset; it is not merely a passing emotion. This collective mindset is shaped by a number of important variables. The first are the cultural and historical experiences that contribute to a collective identity. Second, a significant part is performed by the ideological and spiritual milieu, as well as the general psychological

atmosphere of society. Third, subjective factors that have a long-lasting effect on how an ethnic group views itself include the political and ideological actions of the state and political parties, as well as the design of the educational system. Finally, ethnic consciousness is also shaped by the type and flow of information. These elements, when combined, give each ethnic group its distinct personality. Supporting and fostering each group's cultural heritage and traditional values is therefore crucial to fostering positive interethnic interactions. Representatives of many ethnic groups in Kazakhstan experience the advantages of this welcoming atmosphere on a daily basis (Baudiyarova, 2025).

The findings reveal that national values are fundamental to inter-ethnic marriages and create mutual understanding, adaptation, and respect between partners from different ethnic backgrounds. Furthermore, the study emphasises the importance of the “dominant spouse” in upholding and negotiating these values. This allows insight into how cultural expectations are maintained and adapted within the realities of inter-ethnic family life in the Turkestan region.

Inter-ethnic marriages have long been a distinctive aspect of the social landscape in Turkestan, a region renowned for its centuries-old history of coexistence among diverse ethnic groups. In Kazakhstan, particularly within rural communities, ethnic identity plays a crucial role in shaping familial and social relationships. The Turkestan region, primarily inhabited by ethnic groups that speak Turkic languages, such as Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Azerbaijanis, presents a unique environment for examining how national values and cultural traditions influence inter-ethnic marriages. To gain a deeper understanding of this context, an investigation into the cultural and social values, as well as the role of national identity in family life, was conducted through 85 semi-structured interviews carried out in the Turkestan villages of Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Hantagy, and Sayram.

In these communities, fundamental aspects of daily life, such as shared values, language, social norms, and religious practices, are deeply intertwined and cannot be considered independent of one another. However, in this article, I will emphasise national values and how they influence family life and inter-ethnic marriages in this culturally diverse region. According to the data gathered, national values significantly influence each family. These values impact various aspects of daily life, including raising children, maintaining intergenerational communication, family planning, and the acceptance of their spouse's national values. In newly formed inter-ethnic families, mutual adaptation between spouses through understanding and acceptance contributes to integration into local social norms. This process gradually affects societal development and constitutes the reciprocal relationship between families and society. Families reflect the social fabric of their communities and are shaped by it. This demonstrates that interethnic marriages serve as vital mechanisms for fostering societal cohesion and

integration.

National and cultural values significantly shape how individuals interact socially, celebrate traditions, and practise hospitality. This study investigates the profound influence of cultural and ethnic traditions on family life and interethnic marriages. The emphasis on Kazakhs arises from their demographic prominence and cultural centrality in Kazakhstan. As a defining group within the country's national identity and value system, Kazakhs provide a valuable reference point for exploring how relationships with other ethnic groups, such as Azerbaijanis, Russians, and Uzbeks, influence cultural identity within mixed marriages.

The research applies several key theories from anthropology and sociology to explore how national values influence inter-ethnic unions, particularly in their contribution to national identity and social cohesion. Based on fieldwork, the study demonstrates how shared language, customs, and traditions can act as powerful unifying forces in the multicultural setting of Turkestan. These theoretical approaches help elucidate the mixed cultural practices that arise in daily life and illustrate how abstract ideas acquire meaning through lived experience, especially in the context of family and marriage.

One of the guiding frameworks used in the analysis is structural functionalism, developed by Radcliffe-Brown and Malinowski. This theory helps understand how cultural institutions, including family and kinship, function to maintain social order and balance. In Azerbaijani-Kazakh marriages, for instance, structural functionalism explains how these unions facilitate the integration of social norms and customs, which in turn can strengthen communal ties. The theory also offers insight into how traditional values and modern influences can coexist within a single household, even when spouses come from different cultural backgrounds (Radcliffe-Brown, 1952; Malinowski, 1922).

Social identity theory also plays a significant role in this study. According to Tajfel and Turner (1986), individuals derive a sense of identity from their association with national and ethnic groups. This influences their values and behaviours. Among inter-ethnic families, this sense of identity may be challenged as couples navigate their cultural legacies. Community expectations can profoundly affect how parents perceive their children's potential marriages, with levels of support often hinging on how similar or different the cultural backgrounds are.

In Turkestan, mutual respect and a willingness to understand one another's national values are often crucial to the success of interethnic marriages. Social identity theory emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing each partner's background as a foundation for a stable relationship. Couples who are open to cultural exchange tend to build households that reflect both traditions, which can lead to the development of a blended or hybrid family culture.

Stuart Hall's theory of cultural hybridity supports this idea by suggesting that couples in inter-ethnic relationships do not simply adopt or discard cultural traditions. They combine them to create something new. These blended traditions reflect national identities and the shifting nature of culture itself. Among younger generations, there is often a move away from rigid cultural boundaries towards more inclusive approaches. This shift suggests that cultural identity is flexible and that younger people in Turkestan increasingly view inter-ethnic marriage as a means to foster respect and understanding. Traditional concerns about cultural purity give way to multiculturalism, with hybrid practices symbolising a changing sense of identity (Hall, 1990).

This chapter focuses on how national values are preserved in Turkestan and how parents perceive their children's future marriages. It employs cultural capital theory to explain how these values are transmitted in mixed families and how they influence everyday life. From this viewpoint, national values are deemed cultural capital that helps children feel a sense of belonging in diverse environments. Successful inter-ethnic marriages often involve mutual compromise and a willingness to learn from one another. By integrating their cultural experiences, couples can cultivate a shared family life that respects both backgrounds. According to Bourdieu (1991), each partner contributes knowledge and values that reinforce the idea of a family. Through shared experiences, couples begin to understand each other's heritage and create a home where both identities are acknowledged and respected.

6.7. National values and family dynamics among Turkestan's ethnic groups

The national values of Turkestan's main ethnic groups—Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Azerbaijanis—serve as foundational frameworks that shape personal identities and family aspirations. These values are deeply rooted in historical traditions, cultural norms, and shared experiences. Such values also influence daily life, marital dynamics, and inter-ethnic relationships. Although core concepts such as hospitality, honour, and respect for elders are common across various Central Asian peoples, the prominence and significance of these values can differ among different ethnic groups. Some values may be more pronounced in the cultural practices of specific communities, while others may be more subtly preserved or even adapted to reflect regional or historical variations. Therefore, in analysing the national values of each group, the author sought to highlight and identify the most prominent elements, considering both the similarities and differences between these values across the sampled Central Asian peoples. This tailored approach ensured a more comprehensive understanding of the role these values play in the formation of social structures and the organization of family dynamics within

these communities.

The approach outlined above aligns with insights from previous anthropological research, which emphasises that even shared values can be interpreted and emphasised differently depending on the historical, social, and cultural context of each group (Smith, 2003; Mardin, 2005). Thus, understanding these national values in a more nuanced way necessitates a careful examination of their relative strength and significance within the unique worldviews and traditions of each group. Based on the data gathered from the participants, the primary national values of the key ethnic groups examined can be succinctly outlined. These values are integral to each group's cultural identity and shape their social interactions, particularly within the family structure. The characteristics of these values can be summarised as follows.

Kazakh: As the dominant ethnic group in the region, Kazakh values emphasise respect for elders, hospitality, and preserving kinship ties. These principles form the foundation of family life. They define marital roles, assign intergenerational responsibilities, and uphold communal solidarity.

Uzbek: Uzbek culture prioritises strong familial cohesion, a sense of honour (*nomus*), and the integration of Islamic principles into their daily practices. These values often guide decision-making in marriage, child-rearing, and community interactions

Azerbaijani: Azerbaijani families often prioritise respect for cultural heritage, strong community ties, and the importance of mutual respect in marital and familial relationships. Traditional norms influence gender roles within Azerbaijani families. These roles reflect a tension between modern expectations and historical practices.

As observed during fieldwork, the cultural frameworks of Kazakh, Uzbek, and Azerbaijani families are deeply embedded in their historical and social environments, which then reflect unique approaches to kinship, identity, and communal values. Among Kazakhs, kinship functions as a foundational social structure. Extended family networks help reinforce a collective identity, where respect for elders is not merely a moral norm but a means of transmitting ancestral knowledge and ensuring continuity. Hospitality, a central cultural virtue, functions beyond social etiquette. It fosters social solidarity, which mirrors what Radcliffe-Brown (1952) and Malinowski (1922) describe in structural-functional terms as the reproduction of social cohesion through ritual and role-based obligation.

Uzbek families likewise emphasise communal stability, but this is strongly shaped by the moral framework of *nomus* (honour), which governs behaviour in key life domains such as marriage, child-rearing, and neighbourly relations. Islamic values, closely tied to cultural norms, provide stability and legitimacy. They support a value system that connects spiritual meaning to everyday decisions. This synthesis supports a cohesive yet flexible cultural model,

consistent with Bourdieu's (1991) notion of cultural capital as symbolic knowledge and practices that shape social outcomes and familial authority structures.

Azerbaijani families demonstrated an active negotiation between traditional values and contemporary change. While community cohesion and ancestral ritual remain important, many families display adaptive attitudes toward gender roles and household dynamics. These families maintain continuity with the past while integrating new practices, producing what Pieterse (2001) identifies as cultural hybridity—a fusion of inherited forms and emergent norms that together shape family life in a globalised context.

This theoretical framing gains greater relevance when applied to inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan, particularly among Kazakh-Uzbek and Kazakh-Russian families. Drawing on Edgar's (2022) oral history research in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, inter-ethnic unions can be seen as sites where official ideologies of unity (“friendship of peoples”) were internalised, but also quietly reinterpreted through the lived experiences of mixed households. These marriages reflect the aspirations and contradictions of identity formation in multiethnic contexts.

Kazakh-Uzbek families often share Central Asian values such as hospitality, respect for elders, and multigenerational family support. These shared norms facilitate smoother cultural integration and mutual understanding. The dynamics in such unions can be interpreted through the lens of hybridization theory (Pieterse, 2001), which views intercultural unions as generative spaces where cultural forms blend into new configurations. In these marriages, couples actively negotiate traditions—language, ritual, gender roles—forming hybrid family cultures that help maintain relationship stability.

In contrast, Kazakh-Russian mixed marriages tend to be structured more by differences in cultural orientation. Structural-functionalism helps explain how the Kazakh wife's traditions—such as maintaining language, religious rites, and kinship obligations—often become central to household stability. In line with Edgar's findings, these dynamics highlight that ethnic difference does not dissolve in such marriages, but is restructured through asymmetrical adaptation. The Russian husband, perceived as more detached from these traditions, adapts to his wife's cultural norms and maintains what Malinowski (1922) would describe as a functional equilibrium within the household.

Moreover, cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1991) explains how Kazakh women in such marriages often exercise soft authority through their knowledge and practices to pass on a coherent cultural identity to their children. In such families, language, education, and moral expectations reflect the dominant Kazakh framework, even as Russian influences may persist at the symbolic or practical level. Comparative insights from Pelkmans and Umetbaeva (2018) further support this. Their research on Kyrgyz-Russian couples demonstrates that ethnic

identities are often situationally performed, with partners emphasizing or downplaying their background to navigate gender expectations, societal pressures, or bureaucratic norms. Meanwhile, Ismailbekova's (2019) ethnography in post-conflict Osh underscores that inter-ethnic marriage can also be a site of vulnerability, especially in volatile political environments where cultural mixing is viewed as threatening.

Altogether, these theoretical insights show that mixed marriages in Central Asia are not just straightforward cases of assimilation or integration. Instead, they are dynamic spaces where partners constantly negotiate cultural values, social roles, and personal identities. Kazakh-Uzbek unions often have a sense of cultural blending and mutual adaptation, whereas Kazakh-Russian marriages more commonly reflect imbalances in cultural influence and inherited social capital. Still, both types of marriages reveal how deeply inter-ethnic relationships are shaped by the region's larger historical forces, starting from imperial legacies to ethnic politics and the complexities of the post-Soviet transition.

6.8. Kazakh-Uzbek and Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriages

In analysing interethnic marriages between Kazakhs and Uzbeks, Stuart Hall's concept of cultural hybridity offers insights into the negotiation of cultural values and family dynamics. Both Kazakh and Uzbek cultures prioritize respect for elders and strong family bonds; however, these values are expressed through distinct cultural norms shaped by history, societal expectations, and gender roles. Kazakh culture emphasises gender equality within the family, with more collaborative roles for both spouses. In contrast, Uzbek culture traditionally upholds a more patriarchal structure, with the husband in a more authoritative role, especially in decision-making.

Hall (1990) posits that this intersection of differing values leads to a hybridization of cultural expectations, with individuals selectively incorporating elements from both cultures. In inter-ethnic households, cultural blending creates a dynamic space for negotiation, where the two cultural identities are not fixed but continuously evolving in response to one another. This hybridisation reflects the fluidity and negotiation of cultural identities, which Hall characterises as central to the diasporic experience and the formation of new, hybrid identities in multicultural contexts. As couples navigate these cultural differences, they create new family structures reflecting their shared and divergent cultural heritages.

However, this blending of cultural norms also has the potential to create tensions. For example, the husband's traditionally dominant role in an Uzbek household may conflict with the wife's expectations for a more egalitarian partnership shaped by Kazakh values. This

tension highlights the ongoing negotiation of authority and power within inter-ethnic marriages, as couples strive to reconcile conflicting cultural norms and establish a balance that reflects their hybridized identity.

In the study, six Kazakh-Uzbek families participated in interviews. This includes four families with a Kazakh husband and an Uzbek wife, and two with an Uzbek husband and a Kazakh wife. One notable finding was that Kazakh partners, regardless of gender, tended to assume a dominant role within the family. In families where the husband is Kazakh, the wife generally adopts the husband's cultural practices and values and fully embraces Kazakh traditions. In one of the Kazakh-Uzbek families interviewed with a Kazakh husband, the wife conformed to Kazakh customs in various aspects, including the number of wedding guests, the traditions observed, and the celebration of family holidays. Despite the wife's relatives being Uzbek, their family organizes celebrations following Kazakh traditions, and the wife's relatives accommodate the son-in-law's preferences.

The hybridization of cultural practices also extends to language use. In families where the husband is Kazakh, the language of communication in daily life (including with children and extended family members) is primarily determined by the husband's preferences. The wives stated that they readily adopted these language practices and expressed appreciation for Kazakh cultural values, which helped to prevent tension in this aspect of family life. However, the wives also maintained their Uzbek cultural identity by speaking their native language with their relatives and preserving their traditions within their family networks.

Conversely, in families where the husband is Uzbek and the wife is Kazakh, the dominance of Kazakh national values continues to persist, particularly regarding the upbringing of children. Children are typically raised speaking Kazakh and are influenced by the predominance of Kazakh-speaking institutions, peers, and society. Uzbek husbands generally accept this and they understand the societal context in which their children are raised. In areas such as food preparation and interactions with the husband's extended family, Kazakh wives often adopt Uzbek cultural practices with ease. This pattern shows how cultural practices and values shift within these blended unions.

This analysis illustrates how the hybridisation of cultural values in mixed marriages can result in blending traditions and new sources of tension. Couples navigate these tensions through negotiation, adaptation, and selective integration of cultural elements. This creates a unique and dynamic familial and social environment that reflects the intersection of multiple cultural identities.

While Kazakh-Uzbek unions often evolve through mutual adaptation and cultural fusion, Kazakh-Russian marriages tend to exhibit more asymmetrical patterns of cultural

influence. These instances underscore distinct frameworks of negotiation, adaptation, and identity transformation based on the cultural and religious distance between partners.

Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriages demonstrate that Kazakh-Russian families frequently lack the culturally embedded practices typically found in Central Asian ethnic groups. Furthermore, differing religious beliefs—predominantly Muslim traditions among Kazakhs and Orthodox Christian backgrounds among Russians—introduce an additional layer of complexity. These divergences in both cultural and religious values present unique challenges to marital cohesion and necessitate greater negotiation to achieve harmony.

The current study included interviews with five Kazakh-Russian mixed families, comprising three families with a Russian husband and a Kazakh wife and two families with a Russian wife and a Kazakh husband. In the three families with a Russian husband, the Kazakh wife often took on the dominant role in everyday family life. In these families, the husband typically does not prioritise language, cuisine, or traditions, such as the language spoken at home, the food prepared, or the customs observed during special occasions. Likewise, the children's language use and education do not seem to be areas of significant concern. This dynamic can be explained through the frameworks of structural functionalism and cultural capital theory.

From the perspective of structural functionalism, the dominance of the Kazakh wife in these households can be seen as a mechanism to maintain familial harmony and stability within her cultural framework. According to Parsons (1951), families strive to uphold balance and cohesion, and in these instances, the wife's values, rooted in Kazakh traditions, supply the necessary cultural elements to ensure a functional family structure. The husband's relative indifference to certain cultural aspects denotes a functional adaptation to his wife's dominant cultural influence, fostering family cohesion through shared responsibilities and values.

In addition, cultural capital theory (Bourdieu, 1986) can be applied to better understand the dynamics in these families. The Kazakh wife, through her cultural capital in areas such as language, traditions, and values, enriches the family life and provides the children with a sense of cultural identity. Her influence in maintaining certain cultural practices shapes the family's cultural environment and contributes to the preservation of Kazakh heritage despite the inter-ethnic marriage.

However, the data also provided a case in which a Russian husband held the dominant role in the household, which presented a markedly different dynamic. One particularly illustrative account of identity transformation in inter-ethnic marriage comes from a 39-year-old Kazakh woman who shared her personal experience during the fieldwork:

When I was young, before getting married, my parents were opposed to me marrying a Russian man. For several years, some of my relatives even ceased speaking to me. However, I loved my husband dearly, and as I had nowhere else to turn, I accepted everything that was expected of me. I quickly integrated into his family, spoke their language, and embraced their customs and traditions. Since all of this was linked to religion, I eventually had to convert to Christianity.

This testimony exemplifies the deeply personal yet socially structured negotiations that occur within interethnic marriages. The woman's narrative reflects not only a voluntary emotional commitment but also a strategic adaptation to the sociocultural environment of her Russian husband's family. Her account highlights the asymmetric pressures often present in mixed marriages, especially when cultural expectations are closely tied to religious identity.

In this family, the Kazakh wife—despite her devout Muslim upbringing—fully embraced her Russian husband's cultural values, including converting from Islam to Christianity. Her transformation illustrates the fluidity of identity within inter-ethnic marriages and reflects core principles of social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), which explains how individuals may reshape their sense of self to achieve social acceptance and emotional security in new environments. As Adrienne Edgar (2022) notes in her study of mixed families in Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asia, cultural adaptation often disproportionately falls on spouses from minority backgrounds, particularly when their partner's family holds strong religious or national expectations.

The woman's shift in language, rituals, and religious affiliation highlights how deeply embodied such adaptation can become—where personal identity is continually negotiated at the intersection of love, loyalty, and social pressure. Her reflections during the interview, including comparisons between the Koran and the Bible, illustrate not only a religious transition but also a reframing of national and cultural belonging. This case exemplifies how inter-ethnic marriages can serve as complex arenas where personal agency interacts with broader structural forces—such as ethnicity, religion, and post-Soviet legacies—in the ongoing process of identity formation.

7. CONCLUSION

The dissertation thoroughly examines inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan Region, delving into their cultural, linguistic, religious, and sociopolitical dimensions through the lens of assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation theories. The findings, derived from two major fieldwork phases conducted in 2022 and 2024, encompass data from 85 interviews across five villages (Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Sayram, and Kentau-Hantagy) and prioritise the inter-ethnic marriages of Kazakhs with Uzbeks, Tatars, Russians, Azerbaijanis, and Turki Meskhetians. This diverse dataset highlights the multifaceted dynamics of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and social integration in a multiethnic society.

The study reveals distinct patterns of assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation across the studied villages. In Zhana Iqan and Kentau-Hantagy, the findings predominantly align with Berry's (1997) acculturation theory. These villages, characterized by marriages between Kazakhs and Uzbeks, Russians, or Tatars, demonstrate a balanced cultural negotiation process. Families in these contexts embrace hybrid identities, blending heritage traditions with dominant Kazakh cultural norms. The prevalence of bilingualism and bicultural practices highlights the flexibility and mutual adaptation evident in these communities.

In Shornak, the assimilation process, as described by Gordon (1964), emerges as the dominant dynamic despite the statistical prominence of the Uzbek population. In this context, Uzbek wives predominantly adapt to their Kazakh husbands' cultural and linguistic practices, suggesting a patriarchal influence that prioritises Kazakh traditions. Although elements of acculturation are present, the findings indicate that assimilation slightly overshadows acculturation due to the pronounced cultural integration observed in family practices.

Conversely, Turki Poselkasy and Sayram present a markedly different sociocultural atmosphere, aligning with the concept of dissimilation. These villages, particularly among Turki Meskhetians and Azerbaijani communities, exhibit a deliberate preservation of cultural distinctiveness. Turki Meskhetian families, in particular, demonstrate resistance to integration with dominant Kazakh cultural norms. Interviews indicate that local pressures and communal isolation contribute to this dynamic, as families strive to maintain their linguistic, religious, and cultural practices within tightly knit ethnic enclaves. However, the overlapping cultural identifiers between Azerbaijani and Turki Meskhetian communities – compounded by ambiguous census classifications – complicate the analysis. Azerbaijani participants, often reluctant to engage fully with the research process, further highlight the challenges of studying dissimilation in these contexts.

The study also highlights significant methodological challenges, particularly with

Azerbaijani participants in Kentau. Their unwillingness to consent to interviews or permit the use of recording devices emphasises the sensitive nature of inter-ethnic identity and the difficulty of capturing authentic insights in communities where anonymity and privacy are paramount.

These findings illuminate how inter-ethnic marriages reflect broader societal trends and pressures. While assimilation and acculturation dominate in contexts where cultural negotiation or patriarchal structures guide family life, dissimilation arises in communities where external pressures and strong ethnic identities foster resistance to integration. The nuanced dynamics within these marriages highlight the intricate interplay between tradition, modernity, and socio-political influences in shaping cultural and linguistic practices.

By bridging theoretical frameworks with empirical findings, this research contributes to a deeper understanding of the cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions of inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan Region. It not only validates key theories of assimilation, acculturation, and dissimilation but also highlights the importance of contextual, localized perspectives in interpreting these dynamics. Ultimately, this dissertation provides valuable insights into how interethnic families navigate identity and cohesion in a multiethnic society, laying the groundwork for future studies on multicultural integration and the evolution of cultural practices in Kazakhstan and beyond.

This dissertation offers a comprehensive analysis of inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan Region, focusing on their cultural, linguistic, religious, and sociopolitical dimensions. The discussion frames the findings within the context of the proposed hypotheses. The findings, drawn from extensive fieldwork and relevant theoretical frameworks, substantiate the research hypotheses and offer critical insights into the dynamics of cultural adaptation, identity negotiation, and social integration in a multicultural context. By synthesizing the conclusions of the individual chapters, the overall work highlights how inter-ethnic marriages serve as microcosms for broader societal trends in Turkestan, underscoring their role in shaping cultural identities and cohesion.

Hypothesis 1, which posited the coexistence of assimilation and acculturation processes in the research context, is strongly validated by the analysis. The findings in Chapter 3 indicate that these processes significantly influence the dynamics in inter-ethnic families, with assimilation often dominating in patriarchal structures, such as Kazakh-Uzbek marriages. Here, the cultural identity of the husband frequently guides family traditions and values. Conversely, acculturation flourishes in more egalitarian unions, such as Kazakh-Russian marriages, where cultural negotiation fosters the emergence of hybrid identities. These dynamics, analysed through ethnographic approaches, demonstrate that assimilation and acculturation are not

mutually exclusive but coexist and intersect, contributing to the reconstruction of cultural identities within inter-ethnic families.

Hypothesis 2, which aligns with dissimilation theory, proposes that inter-ethnic marriages can lead to the erosion of ethnic values. This hypothesis finds partial support in Chapter 4, which examines the cultural preservation of minority groups such as Meskhetian Turks and Azerbaijanis. While homogeneous families exhibit strong cultural resilience, inter-ethnic marriages often necessitate cultural exchanges, leading to adaptation and transformation. The findings reveal a tension between the preservation of traditional practices and the creation of new cultural forms, with harmony in marital relationships facilitating mutual understanding and cultural synthesis. Hypothesis 3 states that language functions as both a tool for communication and a marker of ethnic identity. This is confirmed by the findings presented in Chapter 5. The dominance of Kazakh as the primary language in mixed marriages reflects broader sociopolitical efforts to reaffirm Kazakh national identity while highlighting the adaptability of families in navigating linguistic differences. Multilingualism, observed in families comprising Uzbek, Azerbaijani, and Ahiska Turkish partners, illustrates the fluidity and negotiation of identities. Drawing on frameworks such as Berry's acculturation model and Fishman's language shift theory, the chapter demonstrates how language choice transcends practicality and becomes a sophisticated mechanism for negotiating cultural and social identities.

Hypothesis 4 posited that religious practices and ethnic values affect the shaping of family dynamics in interethnic marriages, which was substantiated by the findings in Chapter 6. Religion, particularly Islamic principles, emerges as a cornerstone of cultural identity and family cohesion in inter-ethnic marriages. The research illustrates how religious rituals, such as *mahr* and blessings from elders, play a pivotal role in marriage and child-rearing practices. Simultaneously, inter-ethnic families demonstrate flexibility in adapting religious practices to contextual challenges, promoting unity while respecting diverse beliefs. These dynamics highlight the evolving role of religion as both a preservative and adaptive force within mixed families.

Finally, the following point explores the interplay between national identity and inter-ethnic marriages. It also reveals how national values are retained and transformed within these unions. The findings suggest that national values serve as a framework for guiding family life and cultural inheritance, with adaptive strategies emerging to address changing social realities. This chapter underscores the importance of national identity in fostering cultural adaptation and social cohesion in post-Soviet societies.

In conclusion, this dissertation validates the proposed hypotheses and demonstrates the

intricate interplay of assimilation, acculturation, linguistic negotiation, and religious integration in shaping inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan Region. These marriages reflect broader cultural, linguistic, and social trends and offer valuable insights into the processes of identity construction and cultural cohesion in a multiethnic society. By bridging theory and practice, the study contributes to the fields of cultural anthropology, sociolinguistics, and migration studies. The present study provides a solid foundation for future research on multicultural dynamics and integration in Kazakhstan and beyond.

This dissertation has opened up new avenues for further research into inter-ethnic marriages and their cultural, linguistic, and social dimensions in Central Asia. Through presenting and discussing each chapter of this study at international conferences, I had the opportunity to engage with scholars from around the world, gaining valuable feedback, new ideas, and perspectives. These exchanges not only enriched the findings of this research but also inspired future studies that could expand on the themes explored here and delve into related areas of inquiry.

One particularly intriguing direction for future research involves studying the “Khoja” group (Malikov, 2017), a distinct and historically significant ethnic group found across Central Asia, including Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. During my fieldwork in the southern regions of Kazakhstan, where the Khoja group is also present, I observed their strong cultural identity and unique traditions. Further exploration of this group's dynamics—examining their historical context, social roles, and interactions with other ethnic groups—could provide new insights into the complexities of ethnic identity and cultural adaptation in multiethnic communities. This research could also offer valuable contributions to the broader anthropological discourse on ethnic hierarchy, religious identity, and cultural resilience in the region.

Another promising avenue for research lies in further exploring gender dynamics in inter-ethnic marriages. While this dissertation examined the integration of brides into their husbands' families, it would be equally insightful to study how sons-in-law are accepted into their wives' families. A comparative approach, considering both mono-ethnic and inter-ethnic contexts, could illuminate the differences in cultural expectations and gender roles. Such a study would provide a richer understanding of how traditional gender norms are upheld or challenged within inter-ethnic family settings and how these norms intersect with broader societal changes.

The celebration of family and ceremonial practices in inter-ethnic marriages is another area that warrants further exploration. Weddings, births, and other significant life events often serve as focal points for negotiating and expressing cultural identities. A deeper examination of how ethnic, religious, and socioeconomic factors influence these celebrations could provide a

clearer understanding of the blending or preservation of traditions. Comparing these practices between mono-ethnic and inter-ethnic families could reveal important patterns in how families adapt and innovate their cultural expressions within the context of interethnic unions.

Expanding the geographical scope to include comparisons with other Central Asian countries, such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, would further enhance our understanding of inter-ethnic marriages in the region. While this research focused on the southern part of Kazakhstan, conducting similar studies in neighbouring countries could shed light on shared cultural practices and unique national differences. Such comparative work could examine how historical legacies, migration patterns, and state policies influence inter-ethnic family dynamics across various contexts.

In addition to broadening regional scope, integrating interdisciplinary approaches into future research could offer new insights. Collaborations with sociologists, linguists, and political scientists, for instance, could help analyze the interplay between linguistic practices, social mobility, and political frameworks within interethnic families. Investigating how bilingual education policies shape linguistic habits in inter-ethnic households or how media representations influence societal perceptions of mixed marriages could open new dimensions of inquiry and contribute to a deeper understanding of these families' lived experiences.

This dissertation has laid a strong foundation for further research, and the feedback and discussions with scholars have highlighted the vast potential for expanding this work. Exploring the dynamics of the Khoja group, delving into gender relations, analyzing family ceremonies, and engaging in comparative studies across Central Asia are just some of the exciting directions for future inquiry. These studies could significantly contribute to the fields of anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies and can deepen our understanding of identity, tradition, and adaptation in a rapidly changing, multiethnic world. The evolving nature of inter-ethnic marriages offers a rich and dynamic context for ongoing research, which promises to yield meaningful insights into the complexities of cultural and social integration in diverse societies.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OF THE FIRST VISIT

Period: summer time 2022

Basic Information

- 1) Gender:
- 2) Age:
- 3) Location:
- 4) Educational background:
- 5) Occupation/profession:
- 6) Degree of Social Embeddedness (the nature of one's immediate social environment and the extent to which they are integrated within it)

Note: "Social embeddedness" refers to the social and cultural context into which individuals are born and raised, one they typically do not choose. For instance, if a person is raised in a village where Kazakhs are the majority and Russians are a minority, their outlook and interactions may be influenced by this demographic configuration.

Social Environment and Embeddedness

1. Could you describe the ethnic composition of your immediate neighborhood or community?
2. How would you characterize the relationships and coexistence among different ethnic groups in your settlement?
3. From your perspective, what are the interactions like among various ethnic communities in your city? How do they get along?
4. With what kinds of people do you typically form friendships?
5. Who are your parents, and what is their ethnic background?
6. With whom did you grow up (e.g., extended family, neighbors of different ethnicities)?
7. Where were you born?
8. In the place where you were raised, which ethnic groups were predominant? Which were in the minority, and how did that affect social relations?

Language

9. Which language do you use most frequently in your daily life?
 10. What languages are you able to speak?
 11. How important is it for you to maintain and use your native language?
 12. Does your spouse speak your native language?
 13. In what language do your children primarily communicate?
 14. How important is it to you that your children speak your mother tongue?
-

Religion

15. What is your religion, if any?
 16. What is your spouse's religion?
 17. What is the religious affiliation of your children?
 18. In what ways is your religion (e.g., Islam, Christianity, or a non-religious worldview) practiced in everyday life?
 19. How important is it for you to follow the religious rules or guidelines (e.g., of Islam or Christianity) on a daily basis?
 20. What specific beliefs or practices do you observe as part of your religion?
 21. How significant is the role of religion (e.g., Islam) in raising your children?
 22. Are there any activities prohibited by your religion? Do you personally adhere to these restrictions?
 23. How important is it to your family to celebrate religious holidays?
-

National Values

24. What is your nationality, and what are the core values associated with it?
 25. How important is it for you to preserve your national values and traditions?
 26. Do you actively strive to maintain your national values in everyday life?
 27. Does your spouse's nationality matter to you?
 28. Are you willing to allow your spouse to observe their own cultural traditions in daily life?
 29. What is your view if your child were to plan marriage with someone from another nationality?
 30. What is your opinion on interethnic (mixed) marriages?
-

Superstitions and Special Beliefs

31. Are there any common superstitions in your community specifically related to interethnic marriages?
-

Social Norms

32. Do you follow certain social rules or norms in your daily life?
33. Which social norms are most important for you personally?
34. What are the potential consequences of not adhering to these social norms?
35. In your experience, does nationality influence how important it is to follow these social norms?
36. If you are from another nationality, how have you contributed or adapted to the social norms of the Kazakh community?
37. How does your spouse perceive or respond to the social norms of your own nation?
-

Culture (Both Spouses' Perspectives)

Note: The following questions should ideally be posed separately to both spouses to understand each individual's perspective.

38. Do you follow your own cultural traditions, and does your spouse also follow these traditions?
39. Have any cultural norms been relinquished in your household (e.g., refraining from eating certain foods like pork)?
40. How does your spouse regard the social norms of your nation? Do they accept these norms?

Additional Questions on Culture:

41. Do you maintain the cultural traditions of your own nation?
42. Which customs distinguish your nation from others?
43. Do you observe the traditions of the local Kazakh community?
44. How important is preserving your cultural values?
45. In what aspects of daily life do you see the preservation of traditions?
46. What national holidays do you celebrate, and how do these celebrations reflect your culture?
-

Family Dynamics and Power Relations

47. Who generally takes the lead or holds decision-making authority in your everyday family life? What factors contribute to this dynamic?
 48. How does your spouse view equality within the family? Does your spouse consider themselves an equal partner?
-

Explanatory Concepts

- *Homogenous marriage*: A marriage between partners who share closely related cultures.
- *Contiguous marriage*: A marriage between partners of different ethnicities or cultural backgrounds who live in the same geographical area.
- *Resource marriage*: A marriage of convenience between partners of different nationalities, often driven by socio-economic or other practical considerations.

Note: The humanization of interethnic relations fosters the formation of interethnic families, illustrating how cultural adaptation, social integration, and mutual respect contribute to stable, harmonious marital relationships.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS OF THE SECOND VISIT

Period: 2024 autumn and spring

GENERAL QUESTIONS

- 1) Gender:
- 2) Age:
- 3) What is your nationality?
- 4) To which ethnic group do you consider yourself to belong?
- 5) What is your highest level of education?
- 6) What is your profession?
- 7) Please provide information about your current employment status.
 - a) If employed, is your employment in the private, public, or self-employed sector?
- 8) What is your mother tongue (native language)?
- 9) Do you speak any other language apart from your mother tongue?
- 10) Which language do you primarily use within your family?
 - a) If more than one language is used in the family, which language is dominant?
- 11) What is your religion (if any)?
- 12) What is your marital status?
- 13) If you have a spouse or partner, what is their ethnicity?

QUESTIONS FOR FAMILIES IN INTERETHNIC (MIXED) MARRIAGES

1. How long have you been living in your current relationship?
2. Are you officially married?
 - a) If yes, where was the marriage registered?
 - b) If not, could you explain the reason for not registering the marriage?
3. From which region or village do you originate?
4. From which region or village does your spouse come?
5. What is your couple's (you and your spouse's) native language?
6. Aside from your respective native languages, which language is most commonly used for everyday communication between the two of you?
7. Do you mix both of your native languages when communicating with each other?
 - a) If yes, could you provide an example?

8. What is your spouse's religion?
 9. How many children do you have together?
 10. Which language(s) does your child primarily speak?
 - a) If the child uses more than one language, which one is dominant, and in what way? (For instance, is the child more fluent in one language, or do the parents use one language more than the other when speaking to the child?)
 11. What is your child's religion?
 12. How did your immediate social environment (e.g., your parents, extended family) react to your interethnic marriage?
 13. What is the general opinion in your region or settlement regarding mixed (interethnic) relationships?
 14. How would you feel if your child were to marry someone from another ethnic group?
 15. Do you have friends who are in interethnic marriages?
 16. Do you have friends who are in marriages with spouses of the same ethnicity?
-

CULTURE

17. Are there any special customs in your culture? If so, could you describe them?
 18. If these special ethnic customs exist, in what forms are they preserved?
 19. If you have any specific ethnic traditions still present in your everyday life, how important are they to you? Please explain why or why not.
 20. How has the importance of your ethnic traditions changed in your daily life?
 21. Has the importance of your ethnic identity and traditions increased, decreased, or remained unchanged? Please explain the reasons and any relevant factors.
 22. In your opinion, what is the role of your spouse's ethnic values within your family life, and how would you assess their significance for you?
 23. How important is it for you that your child follows your own ethnic values?
-

NATIONAL CLOTHING STYLE

24. Are you aware of any traditional clothing items that emphasize your ethnic identity?
25. Do you wear clothing that symbolizes or highlights your ethnicity?
26. If yes, could you specify what kinds of clothing these are?
27. Why do you choose to wear these clothes? What importance do they hold in your life?

28. Do you wear any special ethnic garments on national holidays? If so, why?
29. Could you describe the typical characteristics of ethnic or traditional attire as they relate to age or life stage?
30. Are there any specific rules governing how to wear traditional clothing?
31. Are there any norms or guidelines related to using these types of ethnic garments?
32. What is the role and importance of national ornaments in your life, and in which aspects of everyday life do they appear?

Additional note: You should also inquire about your interviewee's knowledge of their spouse's ethnic traditions, including language use, ethnic attire, cuisine, and religious practices. For example:

- Do you know any particular dishes that are characteristic of your spouse's ethnic group?

NATIONAL DISHES

33. Are you familiar with any dishes that are considered special or traditional in your own ethnic community?
34. Do you prepare any ethnically distinctive meals in your everyday life?
35. Do you prepare any traditional ethnic dishes during national holidays? If yes, which ones?

QUESTIONS FOR FAMILIES IN SAME-ETHNICITY MARRIAGES

36. Have you ever been in a mixed marriage before?
37. Do you know of any families in mixed marriages living in this village or neighborhood?
38. What do you think about families who are living in interethnic marriages?
39. How would you estimate the number or proportion of interethnic marriages in your settlement?
40. If the number of interethnic marriages in the settlement is increasing, is that acceptable to you?
41. How do you perceive the general attitude in your settlement toward the increasing number of interethnic marriages?
42. Can you imagine having an ethnic background different from that of your spouse or partner?

43. Do you believe it is problematic that people living in mixed marriages introduce new cultural elements into the community?
44. In your opinion, what influence do people in mixed marriages have on the practice of ethnic coexistence in the settlement?



Photo 3. *With one of Akimat's employee (village council) of the Shornak (2022).*



Photo 4. *Shornak village, akimat (village council) (2022).*



Photo 5. *Shornak village (2022).*



Photo 6. *Visiting of local akimat (village council) (2022).*



Photo 7. In the entrance to Zhana Iqan (2022).



Photo 8. Passport of Zhana Iqan including basic statistical data at the entrance to the village (2022).



Photo 9. *Uzbek homogeneous family in Zhana Iqan (2022).*



Photo 10. *One of the typical street in Zhana Iqan (2022).*



Photo 11. *Uzbek from Uzbek-Russian inter-ethnic marriage, Zhana Iqan (2022).*



Photo 12. *Azerbaijan woman from Kazakh-Azerbaijan inter-ethnic marriage, Zhana Iqan (2022).*

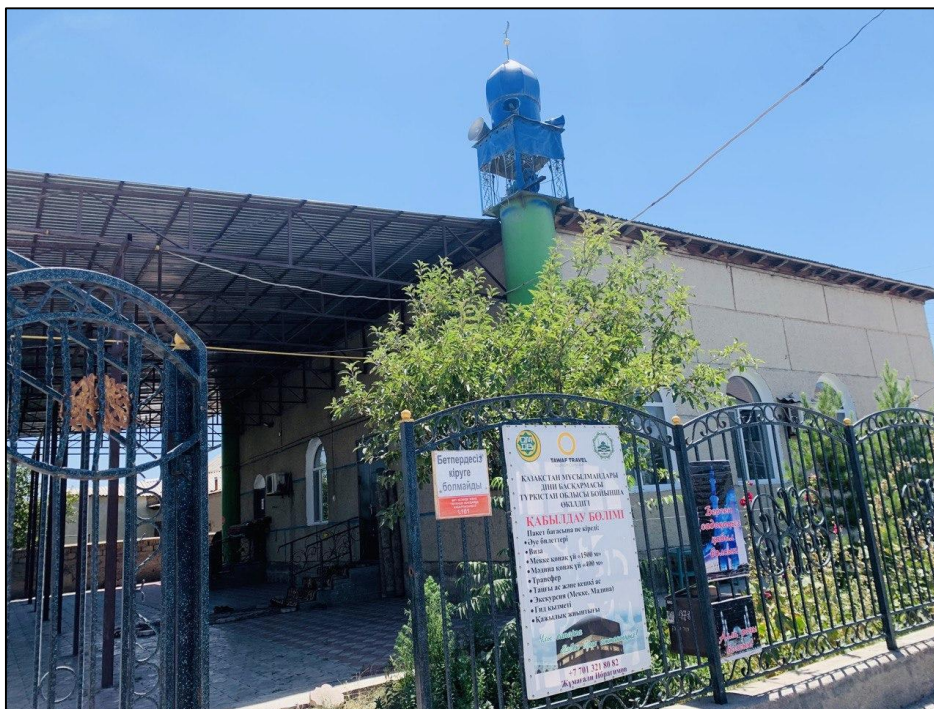


Photo 13. Mosque, Turki poselkasy (2022).



Photo 14. Active members of the village, Turki poselkasy (2022).



Photo 15. *Passport of Hantagi including basic statistical data (2022).*



Photo 16. *An ordinary summer day in Hantagi (2022).*



Photo 17. *During the interview with the local Russian homogenous family, Hantagy (2022).*

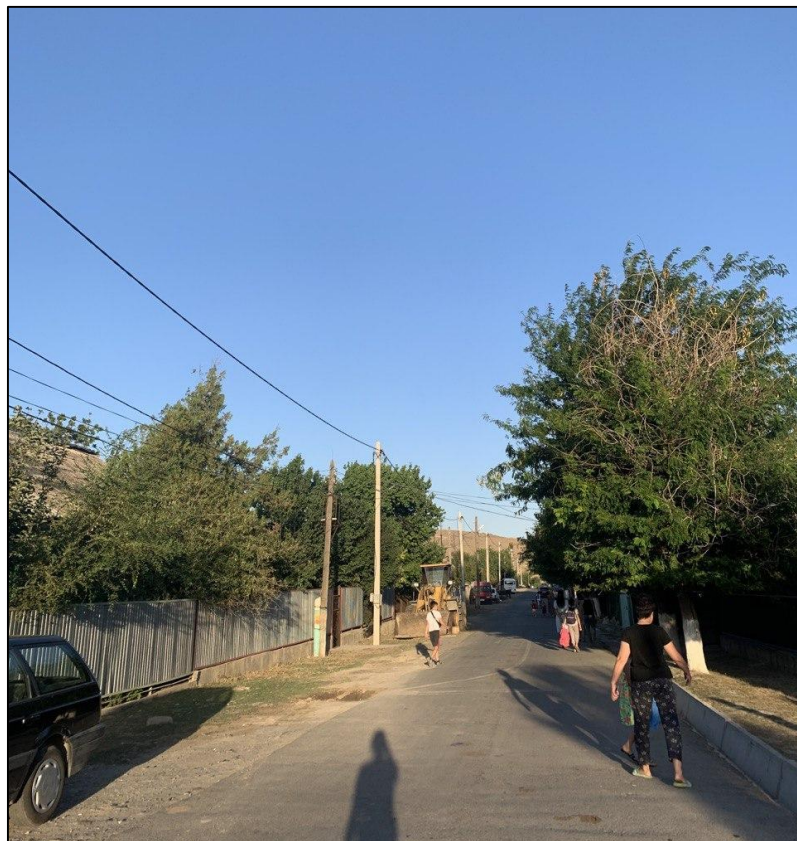


Photo 18. *One of the typical street of Hantagy (2022).*



Photo 19. *Kazakh man from Kazakh-Tatar family, Hantagy (2022).*



Photo 20. *Russian woman from Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriage, Kentau - Hantagy (2022).*

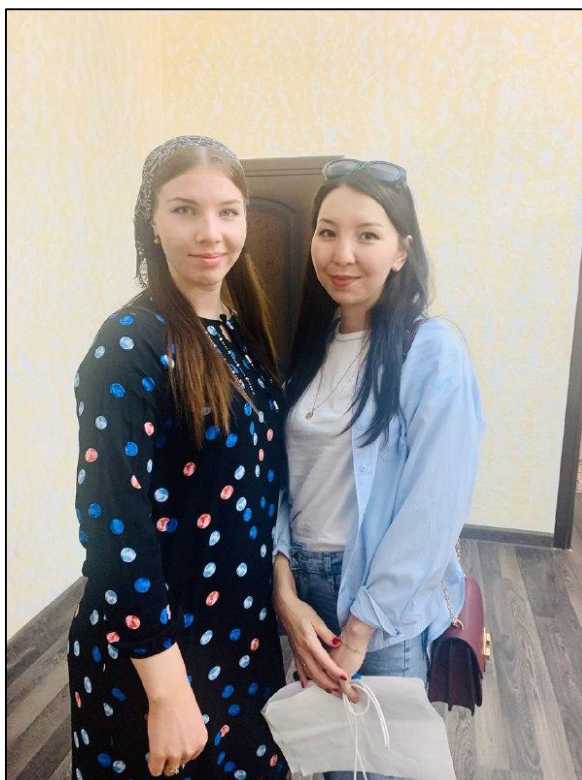


Photo 21. *Russian woman married into a Turkish Meskhetian family, Sayram region (2022).*



Photo 22. *Turki Meskhetian woman from the Turki Meskhetians homogenous family, Sayram region (2022).*



Photo 23. Active members of the region and Kazakh-Turki Meskhetian family, Sayram region (2022).



Photo 24. One of typical street of Turkestan region (2022).

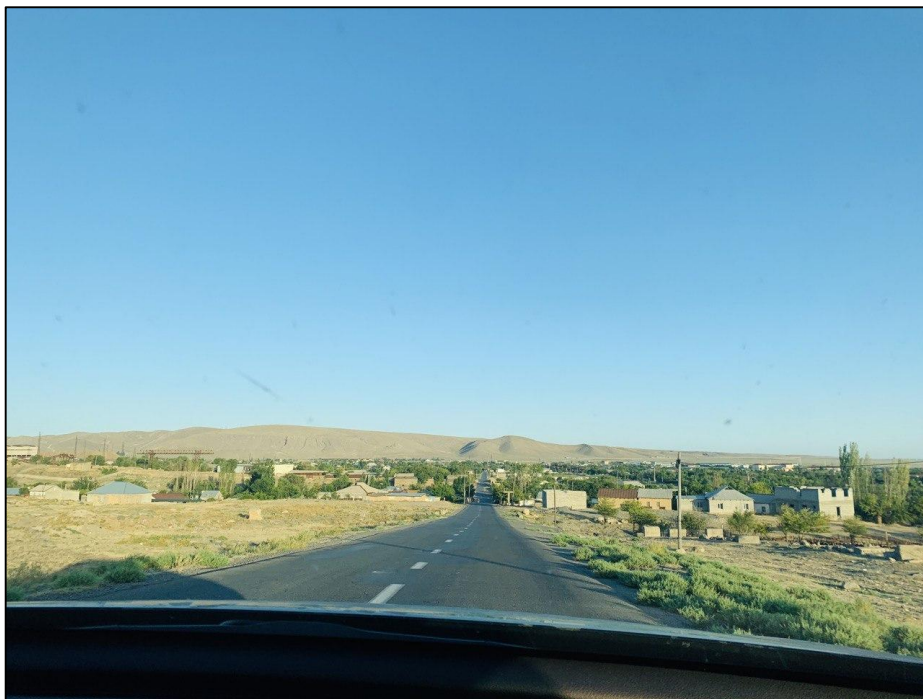


Photo 25. *Traveling from one village to the second, Turkestan region (2022)*



Photo 26. *Preparing the traditional meal – plov in the Turkestan region (2022).*

APPENDIX D: PHOTOS FROM THE SECOND RESEARCH FIELDWORK

Photo 1. *Entrance to the village, Turkestan region, Shornak (2024).*



Photo 2. *Visiting the administration of Shornak (2024).*



Photo 3. *Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriage, Shornak (2024).*



Photo 4. *Kazakh man from Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriage, Zhana Iqan (2024).*



Photo 5. *Russian woman from Russian-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriage, Zhana Iqan (2024).*



Photo 6. *Second visit akimat, Zhana Iqan (2024).*



Photo 7. *Uzbek woman from Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriage, Zhana Iqan (2024).*



Photo 8. *Kazakh man from Kazakh-Azerbaijan inter-ethnic marriage, Kentau – Hantagy (2024).*



Photo 9. Azerbaijan man from Azerbaijan-Kazakh inter-ethnic marriage, Kentau – Hantagy (2024).

APPENDIX E: STATISTIC DOCUMENTS FROM THE VILLAGE COUNCIL,
TURKI POSELKASY (2022)

Туркистан Қаласы
Бекзат молда ауданы.
"Түрік аулы"
Әсер аумағы
Тегіс әсерде орналасқан.
Ағемі күшті.

Ауылдың әлеуметтік портреті

№	Корсеткіштер	Ағемі саны	Бекзат молда ауданы Түрік аулы
1.	Тұрғындардың саны ақп. т.т.	2350	2350
2	Экономикалық белсенді халық	1200	1200
3	Зейнекерлер	214	214
4	Мектеп жасына дейінгі (1-6 сынып)	427	427
5	Мектеп жасына дейінгі	586	586
5)	Әулетпен қатынас	341	341
7	Әулетпен қатынас	126	126
8	Мүгедектер	37	37
9	Қос баланы өсіне	46	46
10	Мектеп жасына 14-29	803	803
	Орталықтар	-	-

Photo 1. Statistic data of Turki Poselkasi population (2022).

Туркистан Қыстағы
Бекзат мектеп ауданы.
"Турік аулы"

Әсер аумағы
Тегіс өсерде орнамаған.
өскені күшті

Ауылдың демографиялық портреті

№№	Корсеткіштер	өскені сана	Бекзат мектеп ауданы Турік аулы
1.	Турік өскені сана өскені сана, ішінде	2350	2350
2	Экономикалық белсенді халық	1200	1200
3	Зейнекерлер	219	214
4	Мектеп өскені сана депінгі (16-жасына)	427	427
5	Мектеп өскені сана	586	586
6)	Ауылдың қоныс	341	341
7	Ауылдың өскені сана	126	126
8	Мүгедектер	37	37
9	Қон басын өскені сана	46	46
10	Мектеп өскені сана 14-29	803	803
	Өскені сана	-	-

Photo 2. Statistic data of Turki Poselkasi population – continuation (2022).