

**THE ROLE OF RELIGION IN INTER-ETHNIC MARRIAGES IN TURKESTAN:
INSIGHTS FROM FIELD RESEARCH IN FIVE VILLAGES OF THE TURKESTAN
REGION, KAZAKHSTAN**

Author(s) / Szerző(k):

Nazira Abdinassir¹

University of Debrecen (Hungary)
(Kazakhstan)

Cite: Abdinassir, Nazira (2024). The Role of National Values in Interethnic Marriages in
Idézés: Turkestan: Insights from Field Research in Five Villages of the Turkestan Region,
Kazakhstan. The Ministry of Water and Irrigation in Jordan. *Különleges Bánásmód
Interdiszciplináris folyóirat [Special Treatment Interdisciplinary Journal]*. 11(SI), 7-23. DOI:
<https://doi.org/10.18458/KB.2025.SI.7>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

EP / EE: Ethics Permission / Etikai engedély: KB/2025/0001

Reviewers: *Public Reviewers / Nyilvános Lektorok:*

- Lektorok:**
1. Biczó, Gábor (Prof., PhD), University of Debrecen (Hungary)
 2. Mező, Katalin (PhD), University of Debrecen (Hungary)

Anonymous reviewers / Anonim lektorok:

3. Anonymous reviewer (PhD) / Anonim lektor (PhD)
4. Anonymous reviewer (PhD) / Anonim lektor (PhD)

Abstract

This study investigates the role of religion in shaping inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan, specifically focusing on five rural villages: Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Hantagy, and Sayram. With a historically diverse population composed of various ethnic groups—such as Kazakhs, Uzbeks, and Tatars—the region presents a unique case for examining how religious practices influence family life, marriage dynamics, and ethnic integration. Based on 45 semi-structured interviews conducted during the first phase and 40 interviews and observations during the second phase of fieldwork, the study reveals that religion is a central component in everyday family interactions, impacting child-rearing, marital relations, sexual education, and broader social integration. A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative data from interviews and participant observations with quantitative data from

¹ Nazira Abdinassir, Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnography, University of Debrecen (Hungary). E-mail: nazzira.abdinassir@gmail.com. OrcID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6518-4996>

structured questionnaires, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of religious practices. The findings highlight that religion not only informs inter-ethnic marital dynamics but also 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 contributing to the understanding of "lived religion" in diverse social settings.

Keywords: Inter-ethnic marriages, religion, Turkestan, family dynamics, lived religion, cultural integration

Discipline: Cultural Anthropology

Absztrakt

A VALLÁS SZEREPE A NEMZETISÉGEK KÖZÖTTI HÁZASSÁGOKBAN TURKESZTÁNBAN: TEREPKUTATÁSI TAPASZTALATOK KAZAHSZTÁN TURKESZTÁN RÉGIÓJÁNAK ÖT FALUJÁBÓL

Jelen tanulmány a vallás szerepét vizsgálja a nemzetiségek közötti házasságok alakításában Kazahsztán Turkesztán régiójában, különös tekintettel öt vidéki falura: Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Hantagy és Sayram. A történelmileg sokszínű népességgel rendelkező régió – ahol kazahok, üzbégek és tatárok egyaránt élnek – egyedi esettanulmányi helyszínt kínál annak megértéséhez, hogy a vallási gyakorlatok miként befolyásolják a családi életet, a házassági dinamikát és az etnikai integrációt. Az első kutatási szakaszban 45 félig strukturált interjú, a második szakaszban további 40 interjú és megfigyelést végeztek. A tanulmány rávilágít arra, hogy a vallás központi szerepet játszik a mindennapi családi interakciókban, hatással van a gyermeknevelésre, a házastársi kapcsolatokra, a szexuális nevelésre és a szélesebb társadalmi integrációra. A kutatás vegyes módszertani megközelítést alkalmazott, amely kvalitatív adatokat (interjúk és résztvevő megfigyelések) és kvantitatív adatokat (strukturált kérdőívek) ötvöztet, lehetővé téve a vallási gyakorlatok átfogó elemzését. Az eredmények rámutatnak arra, hogy a vallás nemcsak a nemzetiségek közötti házassági dinamikát alakítja, hanem megerősíti a kulturális és családi szerepeket is a tágabb társadalmi struktúrán belül. A tanulmány hozzájárul a vallás, az etnicitás és a családi élet metszéspontjának megértéséhez, kiemelve a vallási rugalmasságot és alkalmazkodást a mindennapi élet kihívásaihoz. Emellett hangsúlyozza a nők szerepét ezekben a házasságokban, különösen a vallási és kulturális elvárások közötti közvetítésben, ezáltal hozzájárulva a „megélt vallás” (lived religion) sokszínű társadalmi kontextusokban való elemzéséhez.

Kulcsszavak: nemzetiségek közötti házasságok, vallás, Turkesztán, családi dinamika, megélt vallás, kulturális integráció

Diszciplína: kulturális antropológia

Preface

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, the intersection of ethnicity and religion is a significant factor 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. Information on religious features and the role of religion in society were gathered from 85 semi-structured interviews conducted in the Turkestan villages of Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Hantagy, Sayram, serving as the foundation for a more in-depth investigation of this topic.

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, the process of marriage, family planning, and the integration of a new daughter-in-law into the family. Religion was also shown to affect social interaction, hosting guests, organizing festivities, and celebrating religious holidays. Furthermore, the data illustrates 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 boundaries not solely through shared cultural content but through practices and interactions that emphasize difference and the maintenance of group identity. Within the context of inter-ethnic marriages in Turkestan, religious practices emerge as critical in both 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 underscores 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, impacting marital

dynamics, child-rearing, and gender roles. Furthermore, Nancy Ammerman's concept of lived religion (2007) is crucial in understanding how religion operates in daily life, beyond institutional doctrines. Ammerman emphasizes 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 understanding how religious values are transmitted and negotiated within families. He argues that parent-child pairs function as dynamic units, reflecting shared beliefs and practices while being shaped by cultural context and individual differences. This perspective is highly relevant to inter-ethnic marriages, where religious socialization across generations becomes a complex negotiation of both cultural and religious identities. Vermeer's insights help contextualize how inter-ethnic families pass down religious values, particularly in mixed marriages, where children often navigate questions of religious identity, adopting either a singular religious affiliation or a more fluid, bi-ethnic identity. His work on methodological diversity in studying religious socialization also enriches the present study's approach to analyzing 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,

reaffirming Barth's idea that ethnic boundaries are sustained through everyday practices. Yet, as Redfield highlights, prolonged interaction fosters the development of hybrid cultural and religious practices, demonstrating 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, serving as markers of ethnic identity in both homogeneous and inter-ethnic families.

Methodology

This study investigates the role of religion in inter-ethnic marriages in the Turkestan region of Kazakhstan, with a focus on five villages: Zhana Iqan, Shornak, Turki Poselkasy, Hantagy, and Sayram.

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative research techniques to explore religious practices, the integration of religious and ethnic values, and their influence on various aspects of inter-ethnic marriages, including everyday life, family dynamics, and sexual education. Qualitative research served as the primary method for the study, facilitating an in-depth exploration of how religion and ethnic identity interact within inter-ethnic marriages. Specifically, semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect detailed narratives from participants about their lived experiences, religious practices, and family life. Participant observation was also employed to observe daily routines and religious observances in the community, particularly during events such as marriages, family gatherings, and religious celebrations (Kvale, 1996). Additionally, quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to capture demographic information and general

patterns in religious observances and family life among the participants. The instrument also included Likert-scale questions to measure the degree of religious adherence, perceived integration of religious and ethnic values, and the level of tensions in interfaith or inter-ethnic marriages. This provided complementary data to the qualitative interviews, enabling the identification of broader patterns in religious behavior across different households.

The methodology of this study followed a carefully structured research plan, designed to systematically investigate interethnic marriages within the target area, with a particular focus on the role of national values in shaping these unions. As part of a larger ongoing research project on interethnic relations, this phase concentrated specifically on how shared or conflicting national values influence family dynamics, marital roles, and intergenerational transmission of identity and traditions within these marriages.

Two extensive research trips were conducted to collect qualitative data. During the initial visit, critical groundwork was laid by establishing strong relationships with the village administration, ensuring the necessary permissions to conduct interviews were obtained. This foundational stage was essential in facilitating the research process and gaining the trust of the local communities.

During the first phase of fieldwork, 23 families participated, providing 45 semi-structured interviews that revealed rich qualitative data about the religious and cultural dynamics within interethnic marriages, especially among Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tatars, and Russians. The second research trip built on these findings, with the researcher contacting 20 additional families and conducting 40 more interviews. In total, 85 semi-structured interviews were collected, offering a comprehensive dataset for analyzing the intersection of religious practices with ethnic identity and family life.

This phase of the study exclusively focused on Kazakh, Uzbek, Tatar, and Russian communities, concentrating on the most prominent ethnicities in the region. The collected data played a central role in addressing the study's objectives, particularly in exploring how 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.

Particularly, these interviews explored several key topics, including (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; (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, enabling comparison between the responses. Each interview was recorded (with the participant's consent), transcribed, and later analyzed 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 prior to conducting interviews or administering questionnaires. To ensure confidentiality, all identifying information was anonymized in the study results.

Description of the research locations

The territory of the Turkestan region spans an area of 117.3 thousand km², with the city of Turkestan serving as its administrative center. It is bordered by the *Ulytau* region to the north, the *Zhambyl* region to the east, *Kyzylorda* to the west, and the Republic of Uzbekistan to the south. The region includes 11 administrative districts, 4 city *akimats*, 7 cities (excluding *Shymkent*), 13 settlements, 171 rural districts, and 932 villages. Over the past two years, the state has focused significant attention to the city of Turkestan, constructing numerous new ultra-modern buildings and crowning it as the cultural and spiritual capital of Kazakhstan.

The region was originally established as South Kazakhstan Oblast in the Kazakh SSR of the Soviet Union and was referred to as *Chimkent Oblast* between 1962 and 1992. *Shymkent* served as the administrative center until 19 June 2018, when it was excluded from the region to be administered directly under the government of Kazakhstan. Consequently, the administrative center was moved

to Turkestan, and the region was renamed as the Turkestan Region.

Zhana Iqan rural district is an administrative unit of the Sauran district of the Turkestan region. It includes the villages of Ibaata and Oyik, with Ibaata serving as the center. According to the 2009 census, the population of the district was 6,253. It is characterized by its significant Uzbek population, which lives in close contact with the local Kazakhs. This has earned it the colloquial nickname of "Uzbek village" among residents.

Shornak rural district is an administrative unit of the Sauran district in the Turkestan region. It includes the villages of Shornak, Kosmezhgil, Asha, and railway junction No. 32, with Shornak serving as the district center. According to the 2009 census, the population of the district was 11,102. Locally it is known as the "Kazakh-Uzbek village". Historically the district played a role as an area for cotton picking, a preparation point for the Turkestan ginning plant, and a grain receiving point. Farms were organized on this basis. In the 18th century, the ancient city of Shornak was located here. It includes the villages of Zhuynek, Shekerbulak, and Shypan, with the district centered around the village of Zhuinek. According to the 2009 census, the population of the district was 8,646.

Turki Poselkasy, officially known as the Bekzat region, is a rural district in Turkestan. Locally referred to as *Түркі поселкасы* [Turkish settlement], it is primarily inhabited by Meskhetian Turks, from which its name is derived. Information about the rural district is scarce both online and in territorial databases. Nevertheless, fieldwork research has yielded some basic information about the location from the village's administrative sources. (АКОРДА 2018: Публичное подписание Указа «О некоторых вопросах административно-территориального устройства Республики Казахстан».

https://www.akorda.kz/ru/events/akorda_news/akorda_othe_r_events/publicnoe-podpisanie-ukaza-o-nekotoryh-

<voprosah-administrativno-territorialnogo-ustroistva-respubliki-kazahstan> – 01.04.2024.)

Kantau, known in Kazakh as *ken tau* [Ore Mountain], is a city under the regional jurisdiction of the Turkestan region. It is situated at the southern foot of the *Karatau* ridge, 24 km northeast of the city of Turkestan and 190 km from *Shymkent*. *Kantau* itself covers an area of 7104 hectares and has a population of 67,713. The administrative jurisdiction of the city includes several villages: *Achisay* (8402 hectares, 2176 residents); *Bayaldyr* (1562 hectares, 1528 residents); *Hantagy* (1610 hectares, 6364 residents); *Karnak* (includes the central village of *Karnak* and the village of *Kushata*; 42,571 hectares, 11,703 residents). (АЯҒАН, Б. (2005) «Казахстан» Национальная энциклопедия. Алматы: Қазақ энциклопедиясы, https://rusneb.ru/catalog/000200_000018_RU_NLR_bibl_17_06457/ - 04.04.2024.)

Figure 1. Kazakhstan and the Turkestan Region.
Source: <https://rus.azattyq.org/a/30611190.html>



Figure 2. Map of Kazakhstan by the Distribution of Ethnic Groups.

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

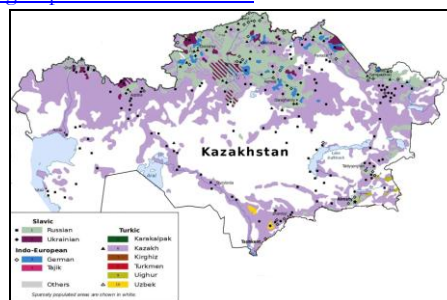


Figure 3. Map of the Turkestan Region.

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



The framework of the study

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 all of the collected material in depth, homogeneous marriages were specifically selected in order to facilitate a more accurate comparison and better understanding of interethnic marriages. Based on the analyzed data and the established database, the respondents were categorized into the following groups, encompassing all marriage units: Muslim households: Kazak-Uzbek, homogeneous Uzbek marriages under study; Christian households: Russian-Tatar, homogeneous Russian marriages under study; Mixed-religious households: Uzbek-Russian, Kazakh-Russian inter-ethnic marriages;

Table 1. 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 mixed marriages	Muslim households	7	14
Homogeneous Uzbek		7	14
Tatar-Russian mixed marriages	Christian households	5	10
Homogeneous Russian marriages		3	6
Uzbek-Russian mixed marriages	Mixed-religion households	4	8
Kazakh-Russian mixed marriages		4	8

Results

Religious practices and adhering to religious rules in inter-ethnic marriages in everyday life

This part of the paper examines how couples in mixed Russian-Uzbek and Kazakh-Uzbek marriages integrate religious rituals such as prayer, fasting, and the celebration of religious holidays into their everyday routines.

Nancy Ammerman (2007) emphasizes, 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 behaviors 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 emphasizes the dynamic nature of religious practice, showing how adherents can both embrace and resist religious norms, crafting a lived spirituality that reflects their everyday lives. This work contributes to the understanding of "lived religion," focusing on the real-life challenges and adaptations people make while practicing faith within complex social environments (Ammerman, 2007).

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

Kazakh-Uzbek inter-ethnic marriages

The marriages examined in this paragraph are categorized as Muslim households, specifically Kazakh-Uzbek mixed marriages, based on the collected data. Among Uzbeks, specific rituals such as bride acceptance, 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 like sacrifices during key holidays, the preparation of traditional dishes tied to these customs, and the adherence to national attire during funerals and other major life events highlight how both 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 not merely through shared cultural content but through everyday interactions and ritualized 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 interethnic 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 act as crucial mechanisms for reinforcing both ethnic and religious boundaries, illustrating how religion functions as a key factor in shaping ethnic identity through daily practices and communal interactions.

This process of boundary maintenance through religious and cultural rituals also resonates with Redfield's theory of acculturation (Redfield et al., 1936), which explores how cultural exchange and adaptation emerge through 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 environments of ongoing cultural interaction.

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 are adapted to the everyday practices of Kazakh households (Note: 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 (Denny, 2016; Esposito, 2005)). The requirement to pray five times a 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 for situations in which prayers might be delayed.

Additionally, while every Muslim who is physically and financially able must perform the Hajj pilgrimages to Mecca, 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 are able to afford it, as Islamic law prioritizes the well-being of the family.

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 fulfill this duty due to financial hardship are addressed within 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, although 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 are able to complete it later without compromising their well-being. This flexibility aligns with the broader principles of Islamic jurisprudence that prioritize 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 characterized by male dominance. In her interview, she expressed a deep commitment to the teachings of her new community and the standards of the Islamic faith. 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 neighbors. She highlighted her determination to raise her children in accordance with these values, emphasizing 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 acknowledgment 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, protecting their rights to consent in marriage and

to seek divorce under certain conditions (Jawad, 1998). This interplay of religious and cultural identities, along with 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), which highlights how prolonged exposure to a different cultural and religious environment can lead to the adaptation and blending of practices. The Russian woman's adoption of Islamic values and her acknowledgment 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, illustrating a blend of traditions and the complexities of maintaining both personal and communal identities.

Family and marriage dynamics

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. Utilizing 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 in order to assess how these elements are operationalized in the respective families.

Homogeneous Uzbek 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', to his wife, an obligation rooted in Islamic law. This obligation serves not only as a symbolic gesture but also as legal protection for the wife, granting 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 researched settlements, the 'Bride price' («ҚАЛЫҢ МАЛ») system operates somewhat differently, as locals have established their own rules for the marriage system. It is important to note that Bride price is distinct and separate from mahr (Note: 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 woman'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 (Quran 4:4; Ali, 2002))

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 bride price, there is another essential requirement called «Жақай» (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 and new furniture, as well as 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.

Within the homogenous Uzbek family investigated, 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 сындыру» breaking bread and «бата беру» giving blessings.

In Islam, the importance of respecting elders and seeking their blessings is deeply rooted in both religious texts and cultural practices. Numerous

hadiths emphasize the value of showing respect to elders, associating it 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" (Sunan Abu Dawood, 4943). 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 [13, 14].

On the day of the wedding, before the celebratory festivities begin, the couple participates in a ceremonial marriage at the mosque in accordance with 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 analyzed in this section is categorized as a Christian household. As noted earlier, in the villages examined, the religion of the husband 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 factors such as 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 methodological diversity 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 can also carry a risk of 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 characterized 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 (жері нан) 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, representing completeness or spiritual fulfillment, as reflected in the Qur'an and hadith literature. The act of baking bread is seen as a form of charity (*ṣadaqah*), 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 (Al-Qaradawi, 2013; 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 allowed to make independent decisions regarding their religious identity upon reaching adulthood, with the parents refraining from exerting pressure. They support their children's choices, allowing them to form their own beliefs based on their personal experiences, societal influences, and 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 insights into the influence of parents on their children, as demonstrated by the observed interactions and familial dynamics.

Integration of religious and ethnic values

This chapter focuses on how religion interacts with local customs and traditions, particularly in mixed-ethnicity marriages.

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 in contexts where different religious backgrounds converge, influencing 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, leading 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. The wife, despite her Russian ethnicity and Christian upbringing, has lived in the village for over 15 years and has assimilated into the local Kazakh culture, adopting 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 the religious duties and rituals of her Christian faith, including important celebrations like Easter (Note: Easter is a central Christian holiday celebrating the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, which is believed to have occurred three days after his crucifixion. It is considered the most important event in Christianity, symbolizing hope, renewal, and the victory of life over death. Easter is typically observed with church services, feasts, and various customs like egg decorating, symbolizing new life - Insert Easter Reference). 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 neighbors 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 emphasized that celebrating Eid with neighbors 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 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 area researched, 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. 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, creating a unique fusion of religious and local practices.

Sexual education and gender roles

This chapter 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, influencing 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, reinforcing 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 behaviors.

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 behavior 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 subject to strict regulations, such as wearing conservative clothing, refraining from public appearances, and avoiding evening gatherings. These restrictions are aimed at preserving the perceived honor of both the individual and her family. A girl who fails to conform to these standards risks drawing shame, and engaging in premarital sexual activity is regarded as a profound disgrace, bringing dishonor not only to herself but also to 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, reflecting 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 familiarize themselves with

cultural customs and traditions. These are considered 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.

Conclusion

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 encompassing 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 85 semi-structured interviews and participant observations highlight that religion is not merely a set of beliefs but a practical framework that guides various aspects of life, including parenting, social interactions, and cultural celebrations. The integration of 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, 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, emphasizing 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.

References

- Abu Dawud, I.H. (2008). *Sunan Abu Dawood*. Riyadh: Darussalam Publishers.
- Al-Qaradawi, Y. (2013). *The Lawful and the Prohibited in Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.
- Ali, A.Y. (2002). *The Holy Quran: Text, Translation, and Commentary*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.
- Ammerman, N.T. (2007). *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*. Waveland Press.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Bukhari, S. (1995). *Sahih al-Bukhari: The Early Years of Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Book Trust.
- Cerchiaro, F. (2020). Identity loss or identity re-shape? Religious identification among the offspring of 'christian-muslim' couples. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 35(3), 503–521.
- Denny, F.M. (2016). *An Introduction to Islam*. New York: Routledge.
- DeWalt, K.M. and DeWalt, B.R. (2010). *Participant Observation: A Guide for Fieldworkers*. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Esposito, J.L. (2005). *Islam: The Straight Path*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Jawad H.A. (1998). *The Rights of Women in Islam: An Authentic Approach*. London: MacMillan.
- Koffi, A. and Kawahara, K. (2008). Sexual abstinence behavior among never-married youths in a generalized HIV epidemic country: Evidence from the 2005 Côte d'Ivoire aids indicator survey. *BMC Public Health*, 8(1), 1–15. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-8-408>
- Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Miles, M.B. and Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Navarro-Prado, S., Sánchez-Ojeda, M., Fernández-Aparicio, Á., Vázquez-Sánchez, M., Pino, F. and Arrebola, I. (2023). Sexuality and religious ethics: analysis in a multicultural university context. *Healthcare*, 11(2), 2–13. DOI <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare11020250>
- Nysanbayev, A. (1998). *Kazakhstan: National Encyclopedia*. Almaty: Publisher: Kazakh Encyclopedia. <https://kazneb.kz/en/about>
- Patton, M.Q. (2002). *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Redfield, R., Linton, R., & Herskovits, M.J. (1936). Outline for the study of acculturation. *American Anthropologist*, 38(1), 149–152. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/662563>
- Schimmel, A. (1994). *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*. New York: State University of New York Press.

- Vermeer, P. (2014). *Religion and family life: An overview of current research and suggestions for future research*. *Religion*, 5(2), 402–421. DOI <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5020402>
- Voas, D. (2009). The maintenance and transformation of ethnicity: Evidence on mixed partnerships in Britain. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 35(9), 1497–1513. DOI <https://doi.org/10.1080/13691830903125943>