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Research Article

**DOES LOVE REALLY HAVE NO BOUNDARIES? ANALYZING
THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND KAZAKHSTANI WOMEN'S
MARRIAGES TO TURKISH MEN**

Zhanar NAKIPBAYEVA ¹

¹ Institute for Applied Research, Academy of Public Administration under the President
of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 010000, Kazakhstan

zhanarnakipbayeva@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-3422-841X

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the motivations behind the marriages of Kazakhstani women to Turkish citizens and examines the broader implications of these unions, particularly regarding the emigration of highly qualified young Kazakhstani women of reproductive age. Employing a qualitative research approach, the study is based on in-depth interviews with 23 Kazakhstani women who have married Turkish men. The collected data were analyzed through text analysis to identify key patterns and drivers of these cross-national marriages. The findings reveal that the motivations for these marriages vary significantly. While love and emotional attachment play a crucial role, other factors such as economic stability, social security, and the perception of Turkish men as responsible family-oriented individuals also contribute to these marriage decisions. Additionally, sociocultural similarities between Kazakhstan and Türkiye, family influence, and religious alignment emerge as important determinants. Some women see marriage to a Turkish citizen as a means of personal development and access to better economic opportunities, while others emphasize the support, reliability, and traditional values they find in their Turkish partners. Given the growing trend of international marriages, the study highlights the need for further sociological and demographic research to assess the long-term impact of such unions on Kazakhstani society. It also calls for policies that address the social and economic factors influencing marriage migration.

Keywords: Foreign marriages, International marriages, Kazakh women, marriages, Türkiye, Kazakhstan, Kazakh-Turkish marriages.

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INTRODUCTION

Thanks to today's technological developments, the restrictions of time and space have largely been eliminated, and the possibility of individuals coming together from different cultures has increased. Cultural interactions have increased through technological developments, increased global transportation (e.g., the development of transportation facilities), and the relocation of economic centres. For example, individuals travelling to other countries in the scope of tourism activities have the opportunity to meet individuals from different cultures; cultural interaction takes place in this way. When individuals from different cultures meet, they can decide to become a family, and so intercultural marriages happen. Although such intercultural marriages have occurred in many societies in the past, this case continues to increase in the global world (Ersoy Celik and Sala, 2021: 138).

In the scientific literature, it can be noted that heterogeneous marriages are defined differently due to socio-cultural, geographical, legal, and other factors. For example, when examining all the studies related to these marriages in the literature, it has become clear that they are referred to by different terms. For instance, in Kazakhstani literature, marriages between South Korean men and Kazakhstani women of Korean descent are referred to as "international marriages" (Yem, 2013), while in Türkiye, marriages with all foreign brides are referred to as "foreign marriages" and "mixed marriages" (Altun and Dinc, 2016). Turkish-German marriages are called "mixed marriages" (Saglam, 2006), and marriages between Russian and Turkish citizens are named "transnational marriages" and "hybrid marriages" (Deniz and Ozgur, 2013). In Russia, marriages of Russian women with foreigners, as well as all marriages with foreigners, are referred to as "international marriages with a foreign spouse" (Koludarova, 2010), "marriage with a foreigner" (Koludarova, 2015), "international marriage with a foreigner" (Korneeva, 2006), while marriages between citizens of Asian countries and citizens of other countries are referred to as "cross-border" (Pochagina, 2008). Marriages between Russian men and Turkish women (Korosteleva and Nas, 2011), and marriages between South Korean and Russian citizens are also referred to as "mixed marriages" (Tangalycheva and Tsoy, 2011). In addition, studies conducted in English have referred to marriages between citizens of Asian countries (South Korea, North Korea, Japan, and China) either among themselves or with citizens of other foreign countries as "international marriage" (Piper, 2003; Morgan et al., 2007; Lee, 2008; Jones and Shen, 2008; Seah, 2012). Marriages between Filipino and American citizens (Rosario, 2005) are also termed "international marriage," while marriages of women from post-Soviet countries with Turkish men are referred to as "cross-border marriage" (Bloch, 2010).

Although researchers have used these definitions for marriages between citizens of different countries, they have named them differently according to the focus of their studies. For example, researchers focusing on culture have referred to these marriages as "intercultural marriages"; those studying migration and identity have called them "cross-border marriages," "transnational marriages," or "interethnic marriages"; while researchers focusing on citizenship and geographic boundaries have used terms such as "marriage with a foreigner" or "foreign marriage." In this study, since it focuses on the citizens of two countries, marriages between Kazakhstani and Turkish citizens are discussed and

referred to as “marriage with a foreigner/foreign marriage” from the perspective of citizenship. However, in this study, based on the definitions of KoludaroVA (2015), Korneeva (2006), and Altun and Dinc (2016), the term “marriage with a foreigner” has been deemed appropriate for marriages between Kazakhstani and Turkish citizens. The term “marriage with a foreigner” is conceptualized, similar to the definitions of Irastorza and DeVoretz (2009), KoludaroVA (2015), and Korneeva (2006), as “marriages between citizens of two different countries.”

Although the main topic of the article, “Marriage with a foreigner,” has become more common in Kazakhstan since the 1990s, it can be emphasized that there is a lack of sufficient scientific research and statistical data on this subject in the Kazakhstani literature. However, marriages between individuals from two different cultures, referred to as “mixed marriages” or “international marriages,” have been widely discussed in the Kazakhstani literature.

It is important to emphasize that the topic of mixed marriages is not a newly emerging issue for the multi-ethnic independent Kazakhstan. Aubakirova and Zhunusova (2017: 49) have highlighted that in the last decade of the 20th century and at the beginning of the 21st century, the marriage processes in Kazakhstan underwent significant changes. In this context, in their opinion, marriages with foreign citizens can be considered as a new aspect of marriage. Now Kazakhstanis are marrying citizens from all continents of the world, including Africa, South and North America, Australia and Eurasia (Aubakirova and Zhunusova, 2017: 48). Based on these researchers, it is possible to state that the nature of marriages in Kazakhstan, particularly mixed marriages, is undergoing qualitative changes. In other words, during these periods, a new type of mixed marriage emerged, involving marriages between citizens of two different countries. This topic has been frequently covered in the Kazakhstani media over the last 10 years with headlines such as “Marriages with foreigners increased in Kazakhstan”, “Why do women from foreign countries want to marry Kazakh men?”, “The pain of mixed marriages”, and “Men in the Southern Region marry foreign women more often”. They discuss the increasing number of marriages with foreigners in Kazakhstan after the years of independence, along with their causes and consequences. Although this is a frequently debated topic in newspapers and online media, according to Yem (2013), there is a lack of sufficient research and statistical data on “marriages with foreigners” in the Kazakhstani literature. It can especially be noted that there are no studies on marriages with foreigners involving women from countries that gained independence after the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Yem, 2015).

The topic of marriage with foreigners was first addressed as a scientific research topic in the Kazakhstani literature by Yem (2013, 2015). Yem (2013: 65) emphasized that as a result of the economic, social, and cultural relations that began to develop between ethnic Koreans in Kazakhstan and South Korea in the late 1990s, marriages emerged between Kazakhstani ethnic Korean women and South Korean men. In his study, Yem (2013) highlighted that gender imbalance is one of the key factors contributing to these marriages, which he refers to as “interethnic marriages.” In other words, as a result of the birth policies in South Korea, the number of men of marriageable age is lower than that of women, while in Kazakhstan, the number of women exceeds that of men. This disparity has led to marriages based on the demand-supply relationship in both countries. On the other hand, according to the researcher, one reason why ethnic Kazakh-

stani women marry Korean men is their desire to marry men who adhere to Korean traditions.

Although the issue of international marriages has not been widely discussed in the Kazakhstani scientific space and statistical data has not been systematized, scholars from the Eurasian region show interest in this problem, particularly in the motivations for entering such marriages, as evidenced by the results of the analysis of scientific literature. For example, researchers Anashkina and Pogodina, in one of their works, also emphasized the diversity of reasons for the marital emigration of Russian women, including issues of the post-Soviet society (economic, social, demographic), national and cultural characteristics, demographic problems in Western European countries, psychological and cultural needs and demands of some men in Western society, and finally, the opportunities provided by an open society (2011). Koludarova (2010, 2015), in turn, criticizes the quality of the Russian marriage market. She believes that the shortage of men, their early mortality, and deviant behaviour are the main reasons that motivate women to look for partners abroad.

According to Kartashova's research, the main reason for entering marriage in the modern world is love, the desire to be with one's soulmate and share joys and sorrows with them (2009: 133). Other researchers (Nomura, 2007; Suzuki, 2007) view this issue more broadly and link the increase in the number of international marriages to global processes such as military actions, international trade, student exchanges, tourism, the decreasing cost of travel, and migration. Pogodina (2009), Tyuryukanova (1996), Tsallagova (1996), Altun and Dinc (2016), and Deniz and Ozgur (2013) also note the significant role of tourism in the rise of international marriages, combined with migration.

This article attempts to understand and analyze the reasons that motivate Kazakhstani women to marry Turkish citizens. It also offers practical recommendations for reducing the number of cases of emigration among young, qualified Kazakhstani women of reproductive age who marry foreigners.

METHODOLOGY

Russian scholar Petrenko (2011: 75) emphasized that knowledge is not a passive reflection of reality, but is constructed based on the individual's interaction with the world, and it depends on the individual's motivations, the language of explanation, the operational tools used, etc. As a result, the culture of society and the personal characteristics of the individual shape their "worldview". In this study, the author attempts to understand the reasons for entering into marriage with a foreigner, thus aiming to construct their reality based on their own interpretations. Therefore, it can be said that the theoretical foundation of this research is based on social constructivism. Constructivism is an approach in which knowledge is not seen as a passive reflection but as an active construction of cognitive objects and events in the subject's consciousness. This approach includes ideas about language and the socio-historical conditions of consciousness, as well as theories of multiple alternative methods of conceptualizing events and the pluralism of truth. The main idea of constructivism is that knowledge is not a reflection of reality, but an active construction of representations of the world in the subject's consciousness (Ulanovsky, 2009: 37).

The article was prepared as part of a study conducted by the author for use in their dissertation in 2019. In-depth interviews were used for data collection. The obtained data were coded based on text analysis. A total of 22 women participated in the study, selected using the snowball sampling method based on criteria such as age, place of residence (Kazakhstan and Türkiye), professional characteristics, and others. Of the 22 women surveyed, 9 live in Kazakhstan and 13 in Türkiye.

The analysis of the socio-demographic situation of the study participants shows that their age range is between 29 and 55 years. The average age of women at marriage is 26-27 years. In this context, the youngest age of marriage for women was 19 years, while the oldest was 33 years. Looking at their marital experience, it can be noted that women have been married from 5 months to 25 years. Most women have an average marriage duration of 9-10 years. In this context, it can be said that the majority of participants (9 people) have been married for 6-10 years, five people have been married for 1-5 years, four people have been married for 11-15 years, and four people have 16-25 years of marital experience. The number of children in the marriage ranges from 1 to 4 children. Although those with 3 children (2 families) and 4 children (2 families) were in the minority, it was noted that 2 families had no children.

Looking at the participants' education level, it can be emphasized that the majority have higher education. Fourteen women hold bachelor's degrees, and four have master's degrees. Two participants are continuing their doctoral studies in Ankara, Türkiye. Two participants are high school graduates. Additionally, among the participants, there are those who received their education both in Türkiye and abroad. Four participants received their education in Türkiye before marriage, while two participants were educated in the UK and the USA.

Although the majority of participants had higher education, it was noted that most of them (10 women) did not work in fields related to their education, and seven women were not employed at all. It can be said that only four women work in areas related to their education. It is clear that the employed women are working in the clothing and cosmetics sales industry, in their own business related to electronic libraries and language courses, as freelancers in the private sector, as cooks, singers, and sellers. Additionally, one participant is pursuing a doctoral degree.

It was also noted that the longest marriage duration for women is 25 years. This indicates that Kazakh-Turkish families are not a new phenomenon for modern society, but rather a phenomenon that began during the years of Kazakhstan's independence.

Since the study is based on a qualitative approach, no hypotheses are formed, and surveys are not prepared in advance. However, during the research, problem questions are created, which open the way to the main questions. The research questions of this study are constructed as follows: How do women describe the reasons for marriages between Kazakh women and Turkish men? What do Kazakh women think about the prospects of their own marriage? How and where did they meet their future husbands?

The coding was determined based on the women's place of residence (Kazakhstan or Türkiye), age, as well as order number. For example, the code KzK2,

34 years old refers to an excerpt from the conversation of the second registered woman, who lives in Kazakhstan and is 34 years old, according to the list of transcriptions.

THE DEPICTION OF THE REASONS FOR MARRIAGES BETWEEN KAZAKHSTANI WOMEN AND TURKISH MEN FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF WOMEN

The Attractive Characteristics of the Man: He Was a Huge Mountain Standing Behind Me. Currently, marriages are primarily based on free partner choice, personal feelings, and responsible decision-making. According to research, the main reasons for marriage today are love, the desire to be with the person they love, and to share “joys and sorrows” with them (Kartashova, 2009: 133).

Based on this explanation, it can be said that the feeling of mutual love and affection plays an important role in the decision of Kazakhstani women living in Kazakhstan or Türkiye to marry Turkish men. More specifically, the attractive characteristics of Turkish men led Kazakh women to feel love and affection for them. Kazakhstani women, who had never considered marrying a foreigner before, began to take notice of Turkish men’s qualities after getting to know them more closely, and eventually fell in love. As a result, these women, who developed feelings of love or affection, no longer viewed Turkish men as foreigners. Therefore, for these women, their marriage is not seen as a marriage with a foreigner. In general, from the women’s statements, it can be understood that marriage is considered an irrational act if there is no feeling of love and affection involved.

“If there is no love, then marriage doesn’t happen. Love is important. Let’s call it a marriage with the love I deem suitable. Love is important in this marriage” (KzK2, 34 years old).

When Kazakhstani women were asked about the reasons that played an important role in their marriage to a Turkish man, it was noted that they characterized the men they married as kind-hearted, humane, helpful, and good people. Based on this explanation, it can be said that the emergence of love or sympathy for Turkish men and the subsequent decision to marry were strongly influenced by the men’s kind-hearted, helpful, and humane character. In this context, women who know Turkish men as helpful reported that they support people in need or try to solve their problems, even if they do not know them.

The Turkish man’s sense of responsibility toward the family also emerged as a feeling of love or sympathy among Kazakhstani women, which later played an influential role in their decision to marry. More specifically, the participants paid close attention to the man’s behaviour and responsibility toward the family when evaluating their marriage decision. This is because the participants’ primary goal was to establish a strong family. Therefore, before marrying a Turkish man, the participants observed his behaviour and views regarding the family. In this context, for almost all of the participants, the Turkish man’s devotion to his family and responsible behaviour played a significant role in approving the marriage decision. Especially for women, the Turkish man’s ability to care for his family and wife significantly influenced their decision to marry. “He is a real man, responsible to his family, and devoted to his family” (TrK8, 36 years old).

Kazakhstani women, when considering marriage with a Turkish man, have paid attention not only to his responsibility towards the family but also to his responsibility towards children. The participants believed that in the future, their children should be raised in a family where both the mother's and father's roles and functions are fulfilled. In this context, when evaluating a Turkish man as a potential spouse, the women also considered whether he had the ability to be a good father. Additionally, participants who were influenced by negative examples in their social environment decided to marry, thinking that Turkish men could be good fathers to their children. In this regard, some Kazakhstani participants seemed to compare the behaviour of Turkish and Kazakhstani men towards children based on their responses. Overall, during the interviews, it was noticed that the Kazakhstani participants saw Turkish men as having the potential to be "good fathers" "Another thing I like about Turks is that they do not abandon their children, they can abandon women, never children" (KzK4, 33 years old).

"In Kazakhstan, there was a lot of such a situation at that time, men did not take care of their children after divorce. My sister had a similar situation, they divorced. Then her husband did not even come. I mean, I saw many men who were irresponsible. This was very important to me. A man should be responsible for his child and family, he should take care of them. I think I made the right choice in this regard" (TrK 11, 30 years old).

After Kazakhstani women met Turkish men, they began to see their potential as good spouses and good fathers and started to feel a sense of trust. In other words, after witnessing the responsible behaviour of Turkish men towards their families, Kazakhstani women trusted that they could be happy in marriage with them. As a result, the image of the Turkish man as a "trustworthy man" in the eyes of women played an important role in their decision to marry.

Kazakhstani women who value the personal qualities of Turkish men have noticed that they provide support in all matters before marriage. Therefore, the material and, particularly, emotional support shown by the man after a meeting has also been an important factor in the participants' decision to marry. In other words, a man who is considered as a potential spouse positively influences a woman's decision to marry when he helps her solve problems, realize her dreams and goals, and is by her side when she is sick. It is possible to explain how important it is for women, who have to bear all the responsibility and be strong before encountering their husbands, to have a man who can take on all the burdens and provide support in their decision to marry, using the example of participant TrK3 (50 years old). While describing this situation, TrK3 (50 years old) characterized her Turkish husband with the expression "he was someone I could lean on."

"I have been attending boarding schools since I was very young, away from my mother and father. Therefore, from the age of 7 or 8, I can say that I reached this point by doing everything on my own, making my own decisions, and scratching my way up. So, when I met my husband and married him, he was like a huge mountain standing behind me. I felt a sense of relief, thinking that finally, I wouldn't have to do everything myself, that I had someone who was my supporter, my helper, someone I could trust and love. Honestly, that was a huge help and support for me; I

felt relieved. Until I turned 26, I faced many difficulties, but I dealt with all of them alone. Then, after my boyfriend stood by me and married me, I can honestly say I found peace. He was someone I could lean on” (TrK3, 50 years old).

Among women who marry Turkish men, there are participants who have the principle of “never marrying a foreigner”. However, the supportive character of Turkish men has led to the breaking of this “never” principle. More specifically, the participant TrK9 (29 years old), who is currently studying in Türkiye, experienced difficult times at a certain point in her life. Before meeting her Turkish husband, TrK9 (29 years old) emphasized that she considered herself a “nationalist” and therefore thought she would “never marry a foreigner”. However, during a turning point in her life, the participant mentioned that her Turkish husband was always by her side at that time, offering support. According to the participant, while trying to overcome these difficulties, the support provided by the Turkish man was a significant factor in breaking her previous “never” principle and in her decision to marry.

In addition, participants have mentioned that one of the reasons for marriage is that the Turkish man they are going to marry helps them solve their problems. According to the participants, aside from the Turkish man’s ability to face problems rather than avoid them, his ability to take responsibility and solve their issues has been a positive factor in evaluating him as a potential spouse. As emphasized earlier, for the participants, the ability of the person they are going to marry to take responsibility for his family and wife has been an important factor. This helps explain why participants value this characteristic of the man when making their marriage decisions. In this context, some participants have shared that the man they are going to marry not only helps solve their problems but also the problems of their family, and this has had a significant influence on their decision to marry. More specifically, participant TrK11 (30 years old), who came to Istanbul to meet her future husband’s family before marriage, realized his problem-solving qualities. Additionally, the participant considered these qualities of the man as responsible behaviour toward his family and wife, and this led her to decide to marry him.

Kazakhstani women have also placed importance on the gender roles of the person they are going to marry. For women, the masculine characteristics of men have been significant. These masculine traits have influenced women’s decisions to marry. When explaining their reasons for marriage, women often describe the man they marry as “he is a real man” or “he has a masculine character,” emphasizing that this was a key factor in their decision to marry. “In other words, the masculine traits of a man are very important. And with a subtle sense, a woman feels whether she can trust the man or not” (TrK13, 38 years old).

Understanding Each Other with the Man: As Long as Minds Are Aligned. In the previous section, it was mentioned that love and the desire to spend life with someone they love are prominent reasons for marriage today. However, researcher Kartashova (2009: 134) notes in her study that when participants were asked about the reasons for marriage if the answers included “spiritual closeness” and “shared views and interests,” they would choose these concepts, disregarding the “love” motif, and select “spiritual closeness” and “shared views and interests” instead.

Based on this explanation, it can be said that for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men, the motifs of spiritual closeness, shared views, and common interests play an important role. When considering marriage to a Turkish man, Kazakhstani women also value whether they are compatible with him. For women, being able to get along with the man they are going to marry, finding common ground and shared interests, and having similar outlooks on the future have all been influential factors in their decision to marry.

Before marriage, the Turkish man became a good friend with whom the Kazakhstani woman could share everything. This was an influential factor for women who had never considered marrying a foreigner before. For these women, being in harmony with their spouse was considered more important than their ethnic background when it came to marriage. In this context, participants who prioritized mutual understanding in their marriage decisions emphasized that they were able to share their thoughts and perspectives with their husbands.

Family and Family Approval: Similarities, Good Relationships. One of the important reasons for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men is the family factor. More specifically, the socio-economic status of the man's family, personal relationships within that family, structural and cultural similarities between her own family and the man's family, and the approval of her own family have all played a significant role in the decision of Kazakhstani women to marry Turkish men.

Although Kazakhstani women may not view the Turkish man they are going to marry as a foreigner, they understand that the marriage will involve a different socio-cultural structure. In a marriage with a different socio-cultural background, Kazakhstani women have been aware that they will undergo transformations, such as changing their country, and social environment, being away from their family and friends, and adapting to a new setting. However, not all women marrying Turkish men have considered these transformations in their new lives. Generally, those women who were uncertain about this thought realized after marriage that they would migrate to Türkiye and live there. In this context, Kazakhstani women have understood that after moving to Türkiye, their new family will be their husband's Turkish family. On the other hand, some participants have been in a dilemma, considering whether to marry or not. Therefore, it is clear that these women took the man's family into account when evaluating marriage with a Turkish man. Kazakhstani women with this perspective decided to meet their future husband's family before marriage and assess the situation based on the family's circumstances and the relationships between the man and his family.

In this context, Kazakhstani women living in Türkiye or those who had the opportunity to come to Türkiye found it appropriate to visit their future husband's family first in order to finalize their decision to marry. On the other hand, women who were unable to visit Türkiye met their husband's social environment in Kazakhstan (relatives, siblings, and friends) and assessed their decision based on the relationships within that environment.

The positive impressions Kazakhstani women had after meeting the Turkish man's family and relatives played a role in their subsequent marriage decisions. In this context, women not only valued elements such as the warm welcome,

close relationships, and friendliness within the man's family, but also paid attention to the socio-economic status of the family and social environment.

Additionally, among the participants, there were those who found similarities between the family structure and upbringing of the Turkish man and their own family. From the responses given during the interviews, it became clear that the similarity between the Turkish man's family and the participant's own family was an important factor in their decision to marry him. This explanation is supported by the statements of participants TrK4 (38 years old) and TrK5 (36 years old). For example, participant TrK4 (38 years old) highlighted the similarity in the upbringing within the families as an important factor in her decision to marry the Turkish man, while participant TrK5 (36 years old) emphasized the similarity in the family structures, in addition to the upbringing, as a significant reason.

As previously mentioned, Kazakhstani women had never considered marrying a foreigner before meeting Turkish men. Therefore, when a Turkish man proposed marriage, it took these women a long time to approve the decision. The reason for the delay in their decision was their reluctance to leave their familiar life, social environment, and especially their country, and move abroad after marriage. It is important to note that this explanation does not apply to all women. More specifically, women who were undecided about marrying a Turkish man included those who had never considered marriage to a foreigner before and those who had negative past marriage experiences. In this context, it can be said that the influence of the woman's family played a role in positively evaluating the decision to marry a Turkish man for those women who were unsure. In other words, the support provided by their families was crucial for Kazakhstani women who were uncertain about their decision to marry a Turkish man in ultimately reaching a marriage conclusion.

The Man's Economic Strength: There Was Love, But There Was Also Calculation. The economic factor has been one of the important reasons for Kazakhstani women marrying Turkish men. In this context, it can be said that women place importance on two elements: first, the man's economic situation, and second, his economic behaviour.

Kazakhstani women do not hide the fact that they value the economic situation of the Turkish man and his family when considering marriage. For example, for participant TrK11 (30 years old), who met her husband while she was a student, the financial support provided by him and his family, in addition to her sympathy for him, was an important reason for her to consider marriage. Furthermore, participant TrK11 (30 years old) expressed that she did not want to experience the difficult economic times she went through during her childhood in her own marriage.

“...He helped me a lot while we were seeing each other. He and his family. I was working in a restaurant at the time. His father paid my university tuition, telling me ‘Don’t work, focus on your studies.’ Since my father had passed away, I only had my mother, and I had to work because my mother’s pension wasn’t enough to support my education. They helped me a lot. I just wanted to be a well-off wife, like every woman dreams. Because we grew up in financial difficulty. We are from a large family, and my mother raised us on her own. There were many struggles. That’s

why I didn't want a life filled with such difficulties. I never wanted that. So, when I saw that his family was in a good financial situation, I wanted to marry him. But if I hadn't liked my husband, I wouldn't have cared about his good financial situation, I wouldn't have married him. I think it was the combination of both reasons that made me choose him. It turned out that way, luckily " (TrK11, 30 years old).

Additionally, participant TrK5 (36 years old) explained several reasons why she considered the financial situation of the Turkish man she was going to marry. After marrying the Turkish man, she realized that moving to Türkiye and adapting to the new social environment would take some time. Therefore, considering that she would leave her work life and social environment in Kazakhstan to move to another country, she aimed to secure her life in that country through her future husband's financial situation. More specifically, participant TrK5 (36 years old), who had a stable job in Kazakhstan and earned her own living without relying on anyone, understood that finding a job in Türkiye would take time and that she would rely financially on her husband. Therefore, she decided to make use of her free time during the adaptation process in Türkiye by starting an education to improve herself. Additionally, she mentioned that she was responsible for her child from a previous marriage and that she needed to think about his future as well.

On the other hand, Kazakstani women have placed more importance on the Turkish man's ability to earn money rather than his financial situation. In other words, for these women, it was not the man's good financial status that mattered, but his ability to make money and his hardworking nature. This group of women did not aim to build a marriage based on great wealth, but instead focused on creating an economically stable family that could meet the needs of their children and themselves at a sufficient level.

"There was logic. He would be a good husband and a good father, he knows how to earn money, and he won't let me go hungry. ... Maybe I chose my husband because of this. Because my husband can make money from nothing. He won't let me go hungry. He is hardworking. Even if we are in a tough situation, he won't let me go hungry. This is the main reason I chose my husband" (TrK2, 33 years old).

Looking at the socio-demographic situation of Kazakstani women, it is clear that they were employed in stable jobs in Kazakhstan before marrying a Turkish man. Therefore, for participants who were able to earn their own money, it was not as important what job the man held or how much he earned. However, it was significant that the man had a job, meaning his employment status was an important factor.

In addition, the generous character of the Turkish man has also been a factor influencing the marriage decision of Kazakstani women. This explanation is supported by the responses given by women during interviews, where they characterized the Turkish man as "not stingy." In this context, it can be said that the Turkish man portrayed himself as a generous person during the initial stages of their acquaintance in order to win the Kazakstani woman's heart. More specifically, the flowers, gifts, financial support, etc., that the Turkish man brought to win the woman's affection created the impression in the women's minds that he could be a good partner in the future.

The relationship between the participants' economic motives, their ages, and their marriage experiences has also been examined. In this context, no significant relationship was found between the participants' economic motives and their ages. However, when looking at the relationship between economic motives and marriage experience, it is evident that women who married in the last ten years placed more emphasis on economic motives. Among participants with more than ten years of marriage experience, there were no women who highlighted economic motives as playing a role in their decision to marry.

Last Chance to Marry or Aging: "Your Age Is Passing," "You Won't Find a Good One," "My Family Kept Saying". The age of Kazakstani women has also been an influential factor in their decision to marry a Turkish man. More specifically, Kazakstani women, while considering marriage to a foreigner, were aware of whether their age was suitable or had passed for marriage. In this context, women who were already conscious of their age, societal influences also played an important role in shaping their decisions. In this section, two other reasons are discussed as influencing factors in the marriage decision based on the woman's age. The first is the reactions of the woman's family regarding her age, and the second is the absence of Kazakstani men around her who were proposing marriage or taking serious steps toward a relationship.

When looking at the age of women who married Turkish men, it is noticeable that their average marriage age is around 26-27 years. It can be understood from their responses during the interviews that this age had an influence on their decision to marry. Generally, women who married between the ages of 26-30 made the decision to marry after realizing that their age was suitable for marriage. In other words, the participants who considered marrying a foreigner were aware that their age was appropriate for marriage both socially and health-wise, and that there was no serious person around them offering marriage proposals.

"I was 29 years old. I had to get married. I didn't have that many serious reasons. I mean, the important thing was that I was at the age to get married. 29 years old! Until that time, there hadn't been a man who wanted to marry me" (TrK10, 35 years old).

For Kazakstani women, it has been found that the character of the man they will marry and the ability to get along well with him are important. For them, it has been significant to spend the remaining part of their lives with a good man with whom they can communicate effectively. This explanation can be better illustrated by the example of participant TrK7 (37 years old). Participant TrK7 (37 years old) is one of those who made the marriage decision based on the age factor. When thinking about marriage with a Turkish man, the participant considered him to be a good person with whom she could get along. Therefore, the participant decided not to miss the opportunity to marry this man.

The influence of their families on Kazakstani women's marriage decisions has also been a significant factor. In this context, it has been noted that the mothers and fathers of the women intervened in their marriage decisions and tried to have an influence on their choices. This family pressure has not had a positive effect on the participants' socio-psychological well-being. Therefore, the opinions of the family regarding the participants' age and marital status have been influential in their decision to marry.

Based on all these explanations, it can be said that Kazakstani women who consider age as an important factor in their marriage decisions with Turkish men are actually aiming to establish a solid family. On one hand, these Kazakstani participants realized that their age was either perfect for marriage or that they were late in making the decision, while on the other hand, they were aware that there were no Kazakstani men around them who were ready for a serious relationship or who had proposed marriage.

Religious Affiliation: From Ourselves. Religion, the understanding of religion by individuals and society, and their religious affiliation have been and continue to be one of the most significant foundations of identity in human history (Popova & Vereshagina, 2015: 55). Religion plays a crucial role in the formation, shaping, transformation, and external perception of social identities, both on an individual and collective level. Especially religious beliefs, which form a system of values and create a strong consciousness that influences life practices, can determine the conditions under which social groups coexist. Sometimes, despite coming from very different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, communities may be considered as a whole due to shared religious beliefs (Goker, 2015: 101). According to Kastoryano (2000: 136), religion emerges as a response to the loss of reference when entering a new society, thereby establishing social bonds. In this sense, religion is regarded as an effective integrative force in the cohesion of the group.

Kazakstani women who identify as Muslim consider the religious affiliation of the Turkish man when making marriage decisions. The fact that women take religion into account as an important factor in their marriage decision can be linked to their desire to align themselves with a group based on religious identity, as Kastoryano (2000: 136) suggested. For instance, when examining the reasons for the marriage of participant KzK6 (39 years old), it is evident that the woman evaluated the man based more on his faith than his ethnicity. In other words, for the devout participant KzK6 (39 years old), the man being Muslim was an important factor. This participant believed that life in marriage would be difficult for a religious woman if she were married to a man who was not religious.

In addition, for another participant, KzK7 (37 years old), who considers herself Muslim but does not regard herself as devout, the Turkish man's being Muslim played an influential role in her marriage decision. In this context, the role of religious identity in the woman's decision is confirmed by her explaining the Turkish man as "one of us" due to his being Muslim.

Kazakstani Culture: He loves Kazakhs very much. Among Turkish men, there are those who have either visited Kazakhstan at least once or worked in the country for a short or long term before establishing a relationship with a Kazakstani woman. The fields of work for these individuals have included art, education, and construction. Therefore, these Turkish men have knowledge and experience about Kazakhstan and its culture, and they do not feel foreign to Kazakh culture.

This situation has positively influenced Kazakstani women who are considering marriage to a Turkish man. The women believed that they would not face cultural difficulties in their marriage with a Turkish man. For example, a Kazakstani woman from Kazakhstan (TrK12, 55 years old), who continues to promote the

culture of the Turkic world in the field of arts, mentioned that her Turkish husband had worked in Kazakhstan before their marriage. For this participant, who introduced herself as a nationalist of the Kazakh people, her Turkish husband's knowledge of Kazakh, familiarity with Kazakh traditions, and deep love for Kazakhs played a significant role in her decision to marry him.

Additionally, another participant, TrK5 (36 years old), who married a Turkish man, mentioned that she discussed the rules of marriage with her husband before their wedding. During these discussions, the participant expressed her desire to continue the Kazakh culture in their marriage. In this context, it was a significant factor for her that her Turkish husband, who had not visited Kazakhstan before and had no prior knowledge of Kazakh culture, accepted the continuation of Kazakh culture and relationships with Kazakh friends in their marriage, which would be lived in Türkiye. This acceptance was an important reason for her decision to marry.

“I told him, ‘I won’t give up on my own culture and traditions just because I’m marrying you. For example, if we get married tomorrow and have a child, I will do everything according to Kazakh tradition. I will meet with Kazakhs and my friends.’ I made it clear to him that after marrying him, I would not be entirely dependent on him. I told him, ‘I won’t let you say “I own you, do whatever I want.” If you want to marry me, you will accept me like this” (TrK5, 36 years old).

Kazakh women who met Turkish men in Kazakhstan did not plan to disrupt their own lives and migrate to Türkiye. Therefore, they discussed this matter among themselves before marriage. For instance, participant KzK8 (36 years old) explained to the Turkish man she was going to marry that she could not live in another country besides Kazakhstan and that she wanted to continue her marriage in Kazakhstan. In this context, the Turkish man agreeing to continue living in Kazakhstan played a significant role in the participant's decision to marry.

An example of the influence of the family on a Kazakhstani woman's marriage decision can also be seen in the statements of participant KzK2 (34 years old). More specifically, although this participant's family accepted her marriage to a Turkish man, they did not want her to migrate to Türkiye. Therefore, her family set the condition that the marriage with the Turkish man should continue in Kazakhstan.

Fate: For example, when I was a child playing or singing songs on stage at school, I used to sing Turkish songs. Fatalism is generally defined as the belief that everything that happens in life is predetermined by a supernatural power, that the destiny set in advance cannot be changed, and that one cannot escape this predetermined fate by making an effort or taking action. It is accepted as an inevitable aspect of life, where the individual cannot control their own life and has no choice but to follow the course of events set by fate (Kasapoglu, 2008; Rougier, 2011; Sobol-Kwapinska, 2013; cited in Kaya and Bozkur, 2015: 937).

In the framework of Kaya and Bozkur's (2015) explanation, the fatalistic perspective of Kazakhstani women on marriage with Turkish men can be clarified. These women have linked the reasons for their marriage to fate. For example, participant TrK10 (35 years old) interpreted her inability to marry until the age

of 29 and the lack of any marriage proposals before that as a reality determined by fate, followed by the appearance of a Turkish man.

Another participant, TrK1 (34 years old), who views her marriage to a Turkish man as solely determined by fate, believes that her marriage was decided by a supernatural force. In other words, for this participant, who had never previously considered marrying a Turkish man, the only reason for her marriage at a young age is seen as fate. She describes a connection between her childhood activities—singing Turkish songs, dancing to them—and later marrying a Turkish man. She explains that this relationship between her actions and marriage happened without her conscious will, and she cannot find any rational explanation other than fate for these events.

“I can say it was fate. Because I never thought that I would definitely marry a Turkish man. For example, when I was a child playing or singing songs on stage at school, I would sing Turkish songs. I would dance to Turkish songs. But this wasn't done with the intention of marrying a Turkish man, it wasn't something planned. It was just something that came from within me. Now my friends joke and say, 'You must have known back then you were going to marry a Turkish man.' But I never had the thought that I must marry a Turkish man” (TrK1, 34 years old).

Participants who had previously thought “I will never marry a Turkish man” also could not explain their marriage to a Turkish man except as fate. For example, participant TrK2 (33 years old), who studied in Türkiye before marriage, returned to Kazakhstan solely to avoid marrying a Turkish man. However, after meeting a Turkish man in Kazakhstan and marrying him, she explained her decision to return to Türkiye as a life path determined by fate. Similarly, participant TrK9 (29 years old) had the belief that “no, I will never marry a Turkish or a foreigner” before meeting a Turkish man, but after migrating to Ankara for education, meeting a Turkish man, and marrying him, she attributed this to fate.

CONCLUSION

The marriages of Kazakhstani women who participated in this study with Turkish men were formed after they met Turkish men, especially in the work environment, and were influenced by their characteristics, leading to the transformation of these friendships into marriage decisions. The women attributed the reason for the transformation of their friendship with Turkish men into marriage to their belief that they could achieve a good and quality marital life in the future and that they could reach this goal through marriage to a Turkish man. In the marriages of Kazakhstani women with Turkish men, the reasons for their decisions include the men's “good character, understanding, supportive nature, being of the same religion, respecting Kazakhs and Kazakh culture, the approval of their family and friends, being educated, thinking they could live a prosperous life with a modern partner, believing that they could have opportunities for self-development, and especially their belief that they could fulfil similar gender roles in both countries, especially those of ‘wife,’ ‘bride,’ and ‘mother.’” On the other hand, the acceptance in both Kazakh and Turkish cultures that “a woman should not be of an advanced age for marriage” and the desire not to be left unmarried, along with their “fatalistic” approach, have played a significant role in their marriage decisions. Whether they lived in Türkiye or Kazakhstan, Kazakhstani women describe their marriages to Turkish men as marriages based

on “love” and “sympathy.” However, despite this definition, it can be said that Kazakhstani women also evaluate their marriages with Turkish men from a rational perspective, considering what these marriages will bring to their lives.

Before meeting Turkish men, Kazakhstani women generally believed they would marry a Kazakhstani man and continue their marriages in Kazakhstan as Kazakh brides, following the traditional norms of monogamous marriages in their culture. They even held a firm stance, thinking “I will never consider marrying a foreigner.” However, their perspectives changed after meeting Turkish men. These women compared their marriages with Kazakhstani men to those with Turkish men and noted that Kazakhstani men were not yet ready to take on responsibilities for building a family. They also pointed out that Kazakhstani men often saw themselves as superior to women in family life. As a result, they believed they could be unhappy in marriages with such men. It is worth noting that among the surveyed women, there were quite a few divorced individuals, and all of them entered their first marriages in Kazakhstan with representatives of their own nation.

Additionally, similar to traditional Turkish culture, the traditional belief that Kazakhstani women should marry before getting older is also prevalent. This belief emphasizes the importance of Kazakhstani women marrying before they get too old (before remaining single). To avoid societal pressure regarding the appropriate marriage age and to ensure they marry before reaching an age deemed unsuitable for marriage by society, Kazakhstani women view the Turkish men they meet as potential spouses.

In this study, an important reason for Kazakhstani women’s marriages to Turkish men is that, as single women, they were overwhelmed by numerous duties and responsibilities in their home country. They hope that Turkish men can share these burdens with them. In this context, Kazakhstani women believe that, instead of trying to solve their problems on their own, Turkish men will support them in overcoming these issues. On the other hand, Kazakhstani women also hope that through marriage to Turkish men, they will be able to overcome the financial difficulties they face.

On the other hand, Kazakhstani women believe that the political and economic situation in Kazakhstan strengthens their concerns about the future, and in this regard, they view marriage to a Turkish man from a more developed country like Türkiye as an advantageous option. For Kazakhstani women who are worried about their future, marriage to a Turkish man represents a chance to live in a more developed country, to improve themselves, and especially to start a higher quality of life. However, the situation is somewhat different for women who continue their marriages in Kazakhstan. Even if these women marry Turkish men, they wish to continue living in Kazakhstan and have succeeded in making their Turkish husbands accept this desire. As seen from the findings, Kazakhstani women have been able to make this arrangement because their Turkish husbands have stable jobs and earn money in Kazakhstan.

The literature analysis shows that marriages with foreigners are not only a trend in Kazakhstan’s or Turkish society. This is a global process, linked to the development of migration and digital technologies, which is actively growing. However, for a country like Kazakhstan, with a population of about 20 million, this signifies not only a demographic crisis but also a loss of the social and pro-

fessional potential of citizens leaving the country. Therefore, it is essential to record statistics on the number of women who migrate to other countries with the purpose of marrying foreigners and to track annual trends.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study involving human participants has completed and fulfilled the ethical guidelines requirements. The participants provided written informed consent before taking part in the study and were informed about its objectives.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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