



Ata, Gülnaz; Sarioğlu Kemer, Ayşegül; Kabataş Yıldız, Mükerrerem; Kemer, Hüseyin (2025). Is It Possible to Talk about Public Health in East Turkestan, Where Human Rights are Violated, *Uluslararası Uygar Araştırmaları Dergisi*, Sayı: 2025/25, s. 100-110.

IS IT POSSIBLE TO TALK ABOUT PUBLIC HEALTH IN EAST TURKESTAN, WHERE HUMAN RIGHTS ARE VIOLATED?

[Derleme/ Review Article]

Gülnaz ATA*

Ayşegül SARIOĞLU KEMER**

Mükerrerem KABATAŞ YILDIZ***

Hüseyin KEMER****

Geliş Tarihi: 16.02.2025

Kabul Tarihi: 10.04.2025

Abstract

East Turkestan, which has been subject to Chinese invasions for centuries and came under the control of the People's Republic of China in 1949, has been subject to a series of unprecedented human rights violations since then. East Turkestan people are being forced to migrate by the Chinese government, and those who migrate are being tracked down and pressured and blackmailed into returning to mandatory detention camps. It has been documented that Muslim Turks in particular have been subjected to mass and arbitrary detention and arrest in camps called "re-education" since 2014. It is known that Uyghurs are forced to work in physically unbearable jobs without any pay in these camps, are deprived of their basic needs, are kept in unventilated cells and in unhealthy conditions, and are subjected to severe inhuman torture and rape. One of the human rights violations of the Chinese government against East Turkestan people is the so-called "paired relatives" policy. In addition, the fundamental rights of women are being violated, and their freedom of belief, thought and sexuality are being interfered with through the policies of forced abortion and birth control that violate human dignity implemented against women in East Turkestan. As if all this were not enough, the nuclear tests carried out by China in East Turkestan are causing widespread environmental and health problems. In this review, the effects of China's long-standing human rights violations on the public health of East Turkestan are discussed with the relevant literature.

Keywords: East Turkestan, Human Rights, Nursing, Public Health, Violation.

İNSAN HAKLARI İHLAL EDİLEN DOĞU TÜRKİSTAN'DA TOPLUM SAĞLIĞINDAN SÖZ ETMEK MÜMKÜN MÜ?

Öz

Yüzyıllar boyunca Çin istilalarına uğrayan ve 1949'da Çin Halk Cumhuriyeti'nin kontrolü altına giren Doğu Türkistan, o tarihten itibaren bir dizi emsali görülmemiş insan hakları ihlaline maruz kalmaktadır. Doğu Türkistanlılar Çin hükümeti tarafından göçe zorlanmakta, göç edenlerin ise izleri sürülerek zorunlu gözaltı

* Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Tokat Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi, Erbaa Sağlık Bilimleri Fakültesi, Hemşirelik Bölümü, e-posta: gulnazata243648@gmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5130-2610>

** Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Trabzon Üniversitesi, Uygulamalı Bilimler Yüksekokulu, Acil Yardım ve Afet Yönetimi Bölümü, e-posta: aysegulsarioglu@trabzon.edu.tr

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9882-3301>

*** Öğr. Gör. Dr., Ondokuz Mayıs Üniversitesi, Sağlık Hizmetleri Meslek Yüksekokulu, Sağlık Bakım Hizmetleri Bölümü, e-posta: mukerremkabatas@hotmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7598-162X>

**** Dil Bilimci, e-posta: h.syn.kemer@hotmail.com

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6646-0419>

kamplarına geri dönmeleri için baskı ve şantaj yapılmaktadır. Doğu Türkistan'da özellikle Müslüman Türklerin 2014'ten beri "yeniden eğitim" olarak adlandırılan kamplarda toplu ve keyfi gözaltına alındıkları ve tutuklandıkları belgelenmiştir. Bu kamplarda Uygurların bedensel olarak dayanılması güç işlerde zorla ve herhangi bir ücret karşılığı olmadan çalıştırıldığı, temel ihtiyaçlarından mahrum bırakıldığı, havalandırmasız hücrelerde ve sağlıksız koşullarda tutuldukları, insanlık dışı ağır işkencelere ve tecavüzlere maruz kaldıkları bilinmektedir. Çin hükümetinin Doğu Türkistanlılara yönelik insan hakkı ihlallerinden biri de sözde "kardeş aile" politikasıdır. Bunların yanı sıra Doğu Türkistanlı kadınlara karşı uygulanan insan onuruna aykırı zorunlu küretaj ve doğum kontrolü politikaları ile kadınların temel hakları ihlal edilmekte, inanç, düşünce ve cinsel özgürlüklerine müdahale edilmektedir. Bütün bunlar yetmezmiş gibi Çin'in Doğu Türkistan'da gerçekleştirdiği nükleer denemeler, geniş çaplı çevresel ve sağlık sorunlarına yol açmaktadır. Bu derleme çalışmasında Çin'in uzun yıllardır uyguladığı insan hakları ihlallerinin Doğu Türkistan toplum sağlığına etkileri, ilgili literatür eşliğinde ele alınmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Doğu Türkistan, Hemşirelik, İhlal, İnsan Hakları, Toplum Sağlığı.

Introduction

Even though the violation of human rights is a matter of international concern, China has systematically violated human rights and freedoms in East Turkestan for nearly eighty years through unprecedented practices (Gökçe, 2020; Kasım, 2023; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Kul, 2024). Due to inhumane practices, millions of East Turkestanis have lost their lives in Chinese massacres since 1949. Those who survive are subjected to unimaginable torture (Çakan, 2021; Lenberg, 2022). To date, approximately three million East Turkestanis have been forcibly detained in internment camps. In these camps, which are unprecedented in their cruelty and torture, East Turkestanis endure such extreme oppression that death is seen as a relief. Under relentless abuse and torture, they suffer severe physical and psychosocial health deterioration (Çakan, 2021; Gökçe, 2020; Lenberg, 2022; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023: 32-38; Murtaza et al., 2024; Smith Finley, 2021; Tobin, 2022).

Since 1949, China has systematically massacred Turks in East Turkestan while also relocating Han Chinese migrants from China's interior regions into the homes of East Turkestanis sent to internment camps. This massive human rights violation, unprecedented and unexampled in the literature, has been allegedly termed the "paired relatives project." Through this policy, the fundamental rights and privacy of Uyghur families, particularly women, are gravely violated (Çakan, 2021; Eruygur, 2024; Gökçe, 2020; Smith Finley, 2021; Tobin, 2022). Furthermore, East Turkestanis women are subjected to forced sterilization policies, violations of reproductive rights, loss of autonomy over their bodies, internment, separation from their children, sexual violence, and denial of freedom of belief and thought. These inhumane practices highlight the human rights violations committed by China against East Turkestanis women (Cillo, 2022; Erkuygur, 2024; Eruygur, 2024; Kul, 2024; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023). Children, too, have been separated from their parents or orphaned through acts of torture, leading to the loss of their language, religion, culture, and Turkish identity. These traumatic experiences are part of a series of human rights violations that children in East Turkestan endure (Gökçe, 2020).

Since 1964, China has conducted 46 atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, both underground and aboveground, in the territory of East Turkestan. Due to the detrimental effects of these nuclear tests, the local population has suffered from fatal diseases, thousands of children have been born with disabilities, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their lives, and thousands more have been left permanently disabled (Aslan & Işık, 2020; URL-1; Çakan, 2021; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020). At this point, the long-standing human rights violations in East Turkestan have profoundly affected the health of the society in all aspects. For this reason, the impact of China's nearly eighty years of systematic human rights violations in East

Turkestan on public health has been examined under several headings: the historical background of human rights violations, forced migration and coerced repatriation, mass detention, digital surveillance, arrest and torture, the so-called "paired relatives policy" and violations of privacy, mass rape, forced sterilization, and compulsory birth control, as well as nuclear tests and their effects on public health.

1. The Historical Background of Human Rights Violations

Human rights are universal values everyone is born with, protecting human dignity and honor. These rights, as one of the fundamental building blocks of society, are based on individuals' freedom, equality, security, and integrity. Every individual in society is equal before the law. No one shall be subjected to torture, cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment. No one shall be arbitrarily arrested, detained, or exiled (URL-2). No one's private life, family, home, or correspondence shall be arbitrarily interfered with, nor shall their honor and reputation be attacked. Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion. Human rights are also international, and their violation is a matter of international concern and action. According to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, all people are born equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience (URL-2, 1999; Eruygur, 2024).

According to unofficial estimates, East Turkestan has a population of approximately 40 million, mostly Uyghur Turks and Muslims. Many Kazakhs, Kyrgyz, Uzbeks, and Tatars also live in this region alongside their Turkic kin (Çakan, 2023; Eruygur, 2024; Kasım, 2023; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Kul, 2024). Historically known as "Turkistan" and "the land of the Turks," this vast region is now Central Asia. It stretches from the Caspian Sea to the Great Wall of China (Kasım, 2023; Kul, 2024). Many cities in East Turkestan, such as Ürmqi, Kashgar, and Turpan, are located along the Silk Road, which has significant economic importance. In addition to agricultural and trade opportunities, East Turkestan is rich in mineral resources. For centuries, the region has endured Chinese invasions, and after the communist revolution of 1949, it came under the control of the People's Republic of China (Kolçak & Ercan, 2020). East Turkestan is within the borders of China today (Akkoyun, 2022).

Since the end of World War II, the People's Republic of China has systematically violated human rights and freedoms in East Turkestan with unprecedented practices. Since the invasion of East Turkestan by China in 1949, Uyghur Turks in the region have been subjected to systematic torture and human dignity has been trampled upon (Gkçe, 2020; Kasım, 2023; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Kul, 2024). Approximately 40 million Muslim Uyghur Turks, who are imprisoned in what is called "re-education camps," are enduring unprecedented torture and cruel treatment, and day by day, they are being slowly erased in their ancestral homeland (Gkçe, 2020). Through its policies, China is suppressing the cultural, religious, and ethnic identities of the people of East Turkestan, attempting to assimilate them by destroying their history, cultural heritage, and national and spiritual values (URL-2, 1999; Eruygur, 2024; Kasım, 2023; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Lenberg, 2022). This assimilation policy is being implemented in an increasingly oppressive and aggressive manner today (Doęanlar, 2021). These policies align with the logic of colonialism and occupation and, in this context, have turned into policies of ethnic cleansing and cultural assimilation (Erkuygur, 2024; Kasım, 2023; Kul, 2024).

Today, it is evident that in almost every household in East Turkestan, at least one or two people died in the massacres of the past century. Since 1949, millions of Uyghurs have lost their lives in the massacres committed by the Chinese regime forces, and today, they continue to be victims of the same state's systematic assimilation policies. The surviving members of the population have been subjected to unimaginable torture (Çakan, 2021;

Lenberg, 2022). It has been revealed that the number of people from East Turkestan forcibly taken from their homes and sent to internment/re-education camps by China since 2016 has reached three million (Çakan, 2021; Lenberg, 2022). Under the guise of strict security and counter-terrorism measures in the region, citizens are constantly monitored, subjected to disciplinary actions, and silenced and coerced by various methods (Doğanlar, 2021; Eruygur, 2024; Kasım, 2023; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Smith Finley, 2021). Through state-approved, legalized, and institutionalized pressures on the Uyghur identity, culture, and heritage, China is attempting to eradicate the Turkish and Muslim identities of the people of East Turkestan (Shibli, 2021). All of these actions indicate that China is essentially conducting a policy of genocide in East Turkestan (Cillo, 2022; Çakan, 2023; Doğanlar, 2021; Finnegan, 2020; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Stern, 2021). According to the internationally accepted definition of genocide under international law, any of the following actions committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group constitute genocide: killing members of the group, causing serious bodily or mental harm to the members of the group, deliberately imposing living conditions that will lead to the physical destruction of the group, imposing measures to prevent births within the group, or forcibly transferring the children of the group to another group (Cillo, 2022; Finnegan, 2020; Smith Finley, 2021; Stern, 2021). It is clear that China is carrying out all five of the actions prohibited by Article II of the UN Genocide Convention in East Turkestan, and through increasingly severe implementation of these genocidal policies, it aims to erase the Turkish identity in East Turkestan with policies of oppression and isolation (Cillo, 2022; Çakan, 2023; Doğanlar, 2021; Finnegan, 2020; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Stern, 2021; Tobin, 2022).

2. Forced Migration and Forced Repatriation

The migration process, which involves countless challenges, is a complex period that profoundly affects the psychosocial health of the migrant. Migration is closely related to grief as it involves the process of losing many loved ones. The increasing number of factors that complicate the migration process further exacerbate the already difficult period of grief, potentially turning it into a complicated mourning process. In this context, it can be said that the mourning process is complicated for Uyghur Turks, who are forced to migrate from their homeland for various reasons and face many stressors that could complicate the migration process (Akkoyun, 2022; Stern, 2021). Today, many children from East Turkestan who have been forced to migrate to our country are known to exist. It is noted that a significant number of these children have one or both parents remaining in their homeland, and their opportunities to communicate with them are extremely limited (Akkoyun, 2022). A study examining students' emotional experiences who migrated from East Turkestan to our country found that most needed psychological support (İlter & Sarı Demir, 2022). In addition to forcing the East Turkestan population to migrate, the Chinese government is also exerting pressure on foreign countries using its international power to report Uyghur migrants (Stern, 2021). Tracing the movements of Turkish Muslim refugees abroad, China pressures and blackmails them to return to compulsory detention camps. In this regard, information about individuals from other countries is being requested. Under cooperation agreements with other countries, Turkish Muslims abroad are being deported to China by many countries without legal justification, contrary to international law. In addition to forced repatriation cases, many Turkish Muslims are being forcibly relocated to distant areas within China as part of labor transfer programs and made to work under coercion (Keleş, 2024; Stern, 2021). As restrictions on the movement of Turkish Muslims increase, many families have been separated. Tightened passport controls and border crossings have made it impossible for children to join their parents abroad. As the government punishes contact with those abroad, many Turkish Muslims, including small children, are unable to communicate with their relatives for months or even years. This situation leads to the

disintegration of the family unit, which is the most minor and fundamental building block of society, and causes familial and societal trauma (Akkoyun, 2022; Keleş, 2024; Stern, 2021).

The Chinese government uses digital channels or direct phone connections to harass Uyghurs living abroad. In many cases, the families of East Turkestan migrants who remain in their homeland are used as leverage or subjected to sanctions. These harmful practices not only pose a direct threat to the fundamental freedoms of Uyghurs but also violate the national sovereignty of host states, such as Turkey. This situation demonstrates that China is committing crimes against humanity in the Uyghur region and that borders do not limit human rights violations. A United Nations report documented and acknowledged this (Cillo, 2022; Erkuygur, 2024; Keleş, 2024; Uluyol, 2024). The psychosocial stress factors affecting displaced East Turkestanis, such as widespread mental health issues, unemployment, economic difficulties, legal status problems, and concerns about the future of their children, further exacerbate their situation and expose them to more significant health risks (Erkuygur, 2024). Article 13 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) states that everyone has the right to leave any country, including their own, and return to their country. This right has been taken away from Uyghur Turks who have either voluntarily migrated or have been forced to migrate in today's world (Akkoyun, 2022; Cillo, 2022; Erkuygur, 2024; Keleş, 2024; Uluyol, 2024).

3. Mass Detention, Digital Surveillance, Arrest, and Torture

Since 2014, it has been documented that Muslim Turks in East Turkestan have been arbitrarily detained and arrested in large numbers. While the exact number of those detained since then is unknown, it is estimated that nearly three million East Turkestanis have been held in Chinese camps, referred to as "political education" or "re-education" camps (Gkçe, 2020; Harris & Isa Elkun, 2023; Keleş, 2024; Lenberg, 2022; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Smith Finley, 2021). Most of those held in these so-called political education camps are never formally charged with any crime, and their legal rights are not respected. Uyghurs have been detained and arrested for reasons such as traveling domestically or abroad without government approval, going on the Hajj pilgrimage without the authorities' knowledge, applying for a passport, communicating with someone abroad, accidentally clicking on an international website on the phone, fasting, praying, participating in religious activities and ceremonies, receiving religious education, having a family with an intense religious atmosphere, wearing a headscarf, having a spouse who wears a headscarf, growing a beard, or engaging in any behavior or discourse associated with religious symbols, as well as violating birth control policies (Gkçe, 2020; Harris & Isa Elkun, 2023; Keleş, 2024; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Tobin, 2022).

The Chinese government uses artificial intelligence systems, such as surveillance cameras and call records, to scan East Turkestanis for potential "extremist" thoughts, appearances, or behaviors (Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Tobin, 2022) —mass surveillance, supported by high-tech tools, forces biometric data collection from East Turkestanis. DNA and voice samples, fingerprints, iris scans, and blood samples are recorded from all East Turkestanis between the ages of 12 and 65. In addition, former detainees and their relatives are frequently monitored by local authorities, who regularly assess and record their moods and behaviors according to criteria such as whether their thoughts are "stable," if they have "recognized their mistakes," and if they show "sincere remorse." Some individuals receive daily visits from local authorities, must sign in every morning, and participate in roll calls every evening. One of the critical components of the repressive regime established by the People's Republic of China in East Turkestan is digital surveillance technology. The primary focus of China's surveillance activities in East Turkestan is public spaces. The digital eye of the government is designed to extend from large public squares to the most remote streets.

Personal communication traffic in the region is monitored through the mandatory use of certain smartphone apps or via spyware (Keleş, 2024; Narmanlıoğlu & İyigüngör, 2022).

China's mass surveillance activities violate Article 12 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 17 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Keleş, 2024). Uyghurs detained in camps and detention centers are subjected to forced assimilation under the guise of education. The emotional damage caused by the surveillance system on Uyghur Turks is also a matter that requires serious attention. Through digital surveillance, East Turkestan has been turned into an open-air prison, leaving Uyghurs with no free space to live their identity (Keleş, 2024; Narmanlıoğlu & İyigüngör, 2022). In these camps, where death is seen as a release, detainees lose both their physical and mental health under all forms of torture and abuse (Gökçe, 2020; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023; Murtaza et al., 2024; Smith Finley, 2021; Tobin, 2022). Deaths in the camps due to forced Chinese assimilation, malnutrition, unhealthy conditions, denial of medical care, and violence/beatings, as well as rape and forced labor of male and female prisoners, are just a few of the inhumane practices in these camps (Smith Finley, 2021). Family members who have been detained cannot receive any information about their whereabouts or condition. Likewise, former detainees have stated that during their time in the camps, they had no contact with their families and do not know where their families are. Additionally, in violation of Muslim burial traditions, the Chinese government has established crematoria and burial management centers to carry out cremations (Keleş, 2024). In East Turkestan, Uyghurs held in prisons are forced to work in physically unbearable tasks, deprived of basic food needs, and subjected to cruel rules such as being forbidden to speak, smile, or cry. Those who break these rules are kept in cells without ventilation, stripped naked, beaten with electric batons, tortured by being hung in an airplane position, suspended from the ceiling, electrocuted in various parts of their bodies, and subjected to electric shocks to their genitals and the insertion of horsehair. Additionally, some former detainees and camp instructors have testified that they witnessed or heard about prisoners being raped. Prisoners are also forced to learn Chinese and forbidden to speak any other language. They are compelled to sing songs praising the Communist Party of China. Many of the Uyghur Turks subjected to these tortures die in horrific conditions, lose their mental faculties, or attempt suicide. They suffer permanent bodily damage and never receive medical care (Erkuygur, 2024; Gökçe, 2020; Harris & Isa Elkun, 2023; Keleş, 2024; Smith Finley, 2021).

Uygur women are being forced to work under harsh and unfair conditions, either in camps or factories operated by the Chinese government, often with little or no pay. In these camps, women are subjected to human rights violations such as torture, sexual harassment and violence, forced cultural assimilation, and restrictions on religious and cultural practices. They are also separated from their families and societal/cultural connections. This situation creates deep psychological trauma for the victimized women and hinders long-term recovery both individually and at the societal level (Erkuygur, 2024; Keleş, 2024; Smith Finley, 2021). The conditions faced by Uyghur women are also described as modern slavery. This has raised serious concerns in the international community and has been frequently highlighted by human rights defenders, governments, and the media (Erkuygur, 2024; Erkuygur, 2024). Along with these documented human rights violations, much of the built heritage, including mosques, shrines, and cemeteries, is being destroyed; Uygur-language books are being burned, and the use of Uygur and other native Turkic languages is being restricted. Thousands of Uygur, Kazakh, and Kyrgyz intellectuals and cultural leaders have been imprisoned up until today (Harris & Isa Elkun, 2023; Smith Finley, 2021; Keleş, 2024). In addition, China has also enforced the practice of placing the children of arbitrarily detained Uygurs into orphanages or boarding schools (Keleş, 2024).

4. The so-called "Bilateral Family Policy" and Privacy Violations

The "Bilateral Family" or "Pair Up and Become a Family" policy implemented in East Turkestan is part of a series of assimilation and control policies by the Chinese government towards the Uyghurs. Since 1949, while systematically persecuting the Turkic people in East Turkestan, China has also been resettling Han Chinese migrants from its interior provinces in the region through state-led programs (Çakan, 2021; Eruygur, 2024; Gkçe, 2020; Tobin, 2022). For every Uyghur man sent to internment camps, a Han Chinese man is sent to live in their home. This mass human rights violation, which has no precedent or clear description in the literature, is called the "Bilateral Family Project." As Uyghurs and other Turkic Muslims are sent to internment camps, prisons, and forced labor factories, their families and communities are torn apart. Meanwhile, the Chinese state offers land, jobs, and economic support to attract more Han Chinese settlers to the region (Çakan, 2021; Eruygur, 2024; Gkçe, 2020; Smith Finley, 2021). This policy interferes with the private sphere of families, violating their structure and freedoms. The Bilateral Family policy aims to weaken the Uyghurs' ethnic and cultural identity and assimilate them into Han Chinese culture. Under this policy, the privacy of Uyghur families, particularly Uyghur women, is severely violated, and their religious and cultural freedoms are restricted. The regular access of Han Chinese men to Uyghur women's living spaces leads to security concerns and potential risks of sexual violence. This negatively affects the physical and psychosocial health of women. The "Bilateral Family" policy also intervenes in the education and upbringing of children (Çakan, 2021; Eruygur, 2024; Gkçe, 2020; Tobin, 2022).

Uyghur children in East Turkestan are subjected to so-called educational programs aimed at severing their connections with their parents or leaving them parentless due to torture. These programs are designed to strip them of their language, religion, culture, and Turkish identity (Gkçe, 2020). The demographic effects of this campaign, initiated by the Chinese government in 1953, are alarming. In 1953, 75% of the population in the region was Muslim, while 6% was Han Chinese. By 1982, the Muslim population had decreased to 53%, and the Han Chinese population had increased to 40%. The census conducted in 2010 clearly shows that the demographic shift has worked against the Turkic people. Today, the proportion of Han Chinese in the region is highly significant, reflecting the scale of ethnic cleansing. In some cities, the Han Chinese population has risen to as high as 90% (Çakan, 2021). Additionally, intermarriages between Uyghurs and Han Chinese are believed to have significantly increased since 2017, with most marriages occurring between Han Chinese men and Uyghur women (Erkuygur, 2024; Eruygur, 2024). Chinese government-affiliated labor units and social security workers support Han Chinese men and frequently force Uyghur women to marry these men (Erkuygur, 2024; Eruygur, 2024; Tobin, 2022).

5. Mass Rape, Forced Sterilization, and Mandatory Birth Control

Today, in East Turkestan, China is conducting a systematic assimilation and genocide policy through internment camps, birth bans, forced sterilizations, mandatory abortions, worship bans, and prohibitions on education in native languages, as well as the preservation of written and oral cultural heritage. In this context, East Turkestan is a region where the prohibition of discrimination and, by extension, fundamental human rights are continuously violated (Akgn, 2021; Lenberg, 2022). It is clear that Uyghur women are the most severely affected by China's repressive policies, and this situation violates their fundamental rights and human dignity (URL-2, 1999; Eruygur, 2024). China's policies on mandatory abortion and birth control have altered the demographic structure of the region in its favor. These severe human rights violations align with the UN Human Rights Council's definition of "genocide" (Cillo, 2022; Kul, 2024; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023). The forced sterilization policies in East Turkestan seriously violate Uyghur women's reproductive

rights. These practices take control over women's bodies and deprive them of making fundamental decisions about their reproductive health (Erkuygur, 2024).

Women from East Turkestan bear the heaviest burden of China's genocidal policies; their identities and existence are disregarded, and efforts are made to strip them of their unique cultural and individual characteristics. In this process, the Chinese government violates women's fundamental rights by intervening in their religious, ideological, and sexual freedoms. Forcing them to eat pork, pressuring them to speak Chinese, and banning prayer and worship are just a few examples of these violations. Since 2009, Chinese authorities have initiated a series of actions aimed at eliminating religious practices such as clothing and headscarves, labeling them as 'ignorant and regressive thought' or 'backwardness' (Eruygur, 2024; Rodríguez-Merino & Zhang, 2023; Turdush & Fiskesjö, 2021). Being imprisoned in internment camps, separated from their children, having their bodily freedoms restricted, subjected to sexual violence, and having their freedom of belief and thought disregarded—such inhumane treatment, including mass rape, torture, forced sterilization, and deprivation of food—demonstrate China's human rights violations against the women of East Turkestan. These mechanisms of violence lead to devastating and unacceptable consequences, especially for women and girls (Eruygur, 2024).

Uyghur women are being forced to take medications that affect their menstrual cycles and impair their reproductive abilities. Measures such as sterilization, abortion, and the insertion of intrauterine devices are being forcibly applied. Furthermore, the rule requiring a three-year gap between the first and second child is enforced on Uyghur women. Both male and female detainees in the internment camps are subjected to torture and rape, and babies born as a result of rape during detention are taken by the state and raised according to dominant Chinese ideologies (Eruygur, 2024; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023). In 1991, 18,700 Muslim Turkic women in the Karakash district of Hotan Prefecture were forcibly subjected to abortions and sterilization (Gökçe, 2020). A large-scale campaign for forced sterilization against Uyghur women began around 2018. In East Turkestan, women who voluntarily underwent IUD insertion or sterilization were given financial rewards in 2019 and 2020. In addition to these practices, the Chinese government-appointed administration in East Turkestan encourages ethnic marriages between Uyghur women and Han Chinese men under the promise of releasing detained parents. These marriages are forced, and if a Han man proposes to an Uyghur woman, she cannot refuse; otherwise, she faces consequences, including being placed in mandatory education camps (Eruygur, 2024).

The Chinese government's forced sterilization policies in East Turkestan severely violate the reproductive rights of Uyghur women. These practices take away women's control over their bodies and deprive them of making fundamental decisions about their reproductive health. This situation is part of a broader policy aimed at changing the demographic structure of the society. The forced marriages of Uyghur women to Han Chinese men in East Turkestan are a severe violation of both the women's and the Uyghur people's autonomy. Sexual violence against Uyghur women in internment camps is an inhumane and degrading practice. These actions violate women's fundamental human rights and inflict deep psychological and physical trauma on them. Sexual violence also weakens social and family ties within the community, creating a widespread climate of fear (Erkuygur, 2024; Eruygur, 2024; Gökçe, 2020; Maisoon & Habeeb, 2023).

6. Nuclear Tests and Their Effects on Community Health

One of China's genocidal policies in East Turkestan, the ancient homeland of the Turks, is nuclear weapon testing. Since 1964, China has conducted 46 atomic and hydrogen bomb tests, both underground and above ground, turning the region into a virtual nuclear weapons laboratory. East Turkestan is known as China's largest nuclear testing center.

Swedish experts determined that the underground nuclear test conducted in 1984 caused an earthquake with a magnitude of 6.8 on the Richter scale (Aslan & Işık, 2020; URL-1; Çakan, 2021; Duman, 2020; Gven, 2021).

Nuclear weapons, under international law, are considered the most destructive weapons of mass destruction in terms of their humanitarian and environmental effects. These effects of nuclear weapons lead to widespread and lasting devastation both during wars and in the post-war periods. In this context, China's nuclear tests in East Turkestan have directly impacted the region's ecosystem and the lives of its people, causing widespread environmental and health issues. Nuclear testing, which began on October 16, 1964, has led to the people of the region contracting fatal diseases, and 20,000 disabled children have been born in East Turkestan. It is known that the number of deaths caused by nuclear tests in East Turkestan has reached 210,000. Thousands of people have either been disabled or contracted significant diseases, such as cancer, due to the radiation and environmental pollution caused by the nuclear tests (Aslan & Işık, 2020; URL-1; Çakan, 2021; Duman, 2020; Gven, 2021; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Kul, 2024).

Furthermore, the nuclear tests in East Turkestan have had significant consequences not only on a regional level but also globally. As a result, the effects of China's nuclear tests on international security have sparked widespread discussion and gained considerable attention in global public opinion. China's nuclear tests in East Turkestan are destabilizing both regional and global security balances. In the event of a potential disaster, the nuclear facilities in the region, which could lead to the extinction of human and animal life, continue to be constructed in East Turkestan despite being prohibited. While these activities occasionally make headlines in the global press, no sanctions have been imposed on China about this matter. Before the eyes of the international community, the existence of the Turkic people in East Turkestan, whose underground and above-ground resources are exploited by China, is being intentionally exposed to nuclear danger (Aslan & Işık, 2020; Gven, 2021; Kolçak & Ercan, 2020; Kul, 2024).

Conclusion

Throughout history, thousands of people have lost their lives in East Turkestan due to the genocidal policies implemented by China, while many others have migrated in large groups, forced to leave their homeland behind. Those who remained have faced unprecedented human rights violations. In East Turkestan, China has carried out a series of human rights abuses, including forced migration and repatriation, mass detentions, digital surveillance, arrests, and torture; the so-called 'brother family' policy and violations of privacy, mass rape; forced sterilization and mandatory birth control practices, as well as nuclear weapons testing.

It is almost impossible to speak of a healthy society under the conditions of these fundamental human rights violations and genocidal approaches in East Turkestan. The situation that the people of East Turkestan have been subjected to systematically for nearly eighty years, which directly overlaps with the internationally recognized definition of genocide, has deeply affected the health of the society. Due to these policies that have lasted for many years, thousands of people have lost their lives, many others have been forced to migrate in large groups, and those who migrated have been unable to return to their homeland and have lost contact with their families in East Turkestan. The forced sterilization policy has been used to attempt to erase the religious, national, and ethnic identities, as well as the historical and cultural heritage of the people of East Turkestan. The human rights violations in the detention camps have profoundly impacted the physical and psychosocial health of millions of East Turkestan. In response to these actions, various global campaigns are being carried out to stop human rights violations. These campaigns

are organized by governments, human rights organizations, civil society groups, and activists who aim to stop the oppression the Uyghur people are facing. While international public reactions continue to raise awareness about the suffering of East Turkestan's people and to increase pressure on the Chinese government, China's human rights violations in East Turkestan continue to escalate in severity. In this context, it is recommended to conduct studies in which sample cases are discussed and interviews are conducted with sample groups.

References

- Akgün, Aybike Elif (2021). "Eastern Turkistan Policy of The People's Republic of China under the Scope of Prohibition of Discrimination". *Route Educational & Social Science Journal*, 8(5): 390-406.
- Akkoyun, Ayşe Zeynep (2022). "The Mourning Process of Migrant Uyghur Turks". *Pamukkale Medical Journal*, 15(4): 868-876.
- Aslan, Celal and Işık, Gülbahar (2020). "China's Nuclear Tests in East Turkestan and Its Reflections in the World". *Nevşehir Hacı Bektaş Veli Üniversitesi SBE Dergisi*, 14(3): 1161-1177.
- Cillo, Joseph (2022). "Modern Genocide: China's Uyghurs". *Florida Political Chronicle*, 29(1):23-29.
- Çakan, Varis (2021). "Massacres toward Turks in Turkestan from Past to Present". *Asya Araştırmaları Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, 5(1): 13-22.
- Çakan, Varis (2023). "East Turkistan Issue in History and Today". *Asya Araştırmaları Uluslararası Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi*, (7): 1-6.
- Doğanlar, Muhammet Enes (2021). "China's East Türkistan Strategy in the Shadow Of Great Power Competition, Geopolitics and Assimilation". *Doğu Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 4(8): 54-80.
- Duman, Melih (2020). "Factors Affecting Foreign Policy of Turkey towards East Turkestan (until 1939)". *Avrasya Uluslararası Araştırmalar Dergisi*, 8(23): 395-408.
- Erkuygur, Semire (2024). "Challenges and Opportunities for Uyghur Mental Health and Psychosocial Support Programming". *Intervention, Journal of Mental Health and Psychosocial Support in Conflict Affected Areas*, 22(1): 17-21.
- Eruygur, Adilcan (2024). "On Human Rights Violations Against Uyghur Women in East Turkistan". *Journal of Turkic World Women Studies*, 3(4): 20-37.
- Finnegan, Ciara (2020). "The Uyghur Minority in China: A Case Study of Cultural Genocide, Minority Rights and the Insufficiency of the International Legal Framework In Preventing State-Imposed Extinction". *Laws*, 9(1): 1.
- Gökçe, İsmail (2020). "A Land Where the Sun Dawns but the Humanity Dies: East Turkestan". *Journal of Turkish Researches Institute*, (69): 629-652.
- Güven, Ahmet (2021). "Framing the News of Xinjiang/East Turkistan in International Media". *Gümüşhane Üniversitesi İletişim Fakültesi Elektronik Dergisi*, 9(1): 295-324.
- Harris, Rachel and Isa Elkun, Aziz (2023). *The Complicity of Heritage: Cultural Heritage and Genocide in the Uyghur Region*. Uyghur Human Rights Project. 1602 L Street NW | Washington, DC 20036.

İlter, Betl and Sarı Demir, Sevdâ. (2022). "An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of the Emotional Experiences of East Turkestani International Students with Somatic Complaints". *AYNA Klinik Psikoloji Dergisi*, 9(3): 629-655.

Kasım, Remziye (2023). "An Evaluation of the Struggle for Survival of the Uyghur Turks Against Chinese Oppression". *Uluslararası Uyğur Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (21): 98-106.

Keleş, Melike (2024). "Do China's Human Rights Violations Against Uyghur and Other Turkic Muslims Constitute Genocide under International Law?". *AHBV Hukuk Fakltesi Dergisi*, 28(1): 509-560.

Kolçak, Hakan, and Ercan, Osman (2020). "Oppressed Uyghurs and Other Turkic Communities: Systematic Human Rights Violations in East Turkestan". *Trk Dnyası Araştırmaları*, 126(248): 77-114.

Kul, mer (2024). "Uyghur Autonomous Region (East Turkestan) from the Establishment of the People's Republic of China to the Tiananmen Incidents (1949-1989)". *Korkut Ata Trkiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (14): 904-924.

Lenberg, Lina Semyonovna (2022). *Genocide in East Turkestan: Exploring the Perspectives of Uyghurs in the Diaspora and their Resistance to Chinese State Violence*. Unpublished Doctoral Thesis. University of San Francisco. The Faculty of the School of Education International and Multicultural Department. In Partial Fulfillment Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education.

Maisoon, Basila and Habeeb, Hashmina (2023). "Diffusing the Boundary through Body Control: An Analysis of Uyghur Ethnic Genocide". *Singularities*, 10(2): 32-38.

Murtaza, Zainab et al. (2024). "China's Repression on Uyghur Muslims and Violation of International Human Rights". *Remittances Review*, 9(2): 2883-2894.

Narmanlıoęlu, Haldun and İyigngr, Tuęçe (2022). "Digital Surveillance on Uyghur Turks". *Bilig*, (102): 119-146.

Rodrguez-Merino, Pablo A and Zhang, Chi (2023). "Impaired, "easy prey" Saved by the She-Empowering State: Official Narratives of "Xinjiang Women" in China's "People's War on Terror". *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 25(5): 918-940.

Shibli, Nawroos (2021). "Political Geographies of Islamophobia: Chinese Ethno-Religious Racism and Structural Violence in East Turkestan". *Islamophobia Studies Journal*, 6(2): 150-166.

Smith Finley, Joanne (2021). "Why Scholars and Activists Increasingly Fear a Uyghur Genocide in Xinjiang". *Journal of Genocide Research*, 23(3): 348-370.

Stern, Julia. (2021). "Genocide in China: Uyghur Re-Education Camps and International Response". *Immigration and Human Rights Law Review*, 3(1): 2.

Tobin, David (2022). "Genocidal Processes: Social Death in Xinjiang". *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 45(16): 93-121.

Turdush, Rukiye, and Fiskesj, Magnus (2021). "Dossier: Uyghur Women in China's Genocide". *Genocide Studies and Prevention: An International Journal*, 15(1): 22-43.

Uluyol, Yalkun (2024). China's Transnational Repression against Uyghurs. *Doęu Asya Araştırmaları Dergisi*, 7(13): 26-48.

İnternet References:

URL-1: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-45147972> (Access: 24.09.2024).

URL-2: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights> (Access: 20.09.2024).