



Redefining Home: Adaptive Transnationalism in the Migration of Tatar Women from Russia to Kazakhstan

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Abstract: This study explores the experiences of Tatar women who migrated to Almaty, Kazakhstan following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Employing theoretical frameworks of transnationalism and intersectionality, we analyze these women's migration experiences, religious practices, and identity formation processes. Based on in-depth interviews with ten Tatar women migrants, the research reveals how they navigate multiple identities, maintain and transform transnational connections, and construct new forms of belonging in their host society. Our findings demonstrate that these women are not merely navigating between two worlds, but actively creating new, transnational ways of being. Their stories highlight how migrants creatively adapt to new environments, negotiate multiple identities, and form communities that transcend traditional national and ethnic boundaries. Drawing on these insights, we propose a new conceptual framework of "Adaptive Transnationalism," which captures the dynamic process through which migrants actively reshape their identities, practices, and social connections in response to new cultural contexts, while maintaining and transforming ties to their places of origin. This framework offers a fresh perspective on how migrants actively shape their experiences and identities across borders, providing a valuable tool for navigating the complexities of modern migration and fostering more inclusive and adaptive societies.

Keywords: Tatar Women, Migration, Transnationalism, Intersectionality, Kazakhstan

1. Introduction

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 sent shockwaves through the global community, triggering a cascade of geopolitical, economic, and social consequences. Among the less-studied effects of this conflict is the migration of ethnic minorities from Russia to neighboring countries, particularly those in Central Asia. This paper focuses on the experiences of Tatar women who relocated to Almaty, Kazakhstan, in the wake of the invasion, examining the intersection of migration, gender, and religious identity in a rapidly changing sociopolitical landscape.

The impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on women has been profound and multifaceted. Women have faced increased vulnerability to sexual violence in conflict zones, shouldered the burden of family displacement, and navigated the challenges of rebuilding lives in unfamiliar environments (UN Women, 2022). For ethnic minority women from Russia, too, the war has added layers of complexity to their already precarious positions, often compelling them to make difficult decisions about migration and identity.

The Tatars are a Turkic ethnic group predominantly residing in Russia, with significant populations in Tatarstan, Bashkortostan, and other regions of the Russian Federation and Central Asia. Historically, the Tatars have played a crucial role in the cultural and political landscape of Russia and Central Asia. Additionally, they have maintained a distinct cultural and linguistic identity within the Russian Federation, with the Tatar language being the second most widely spoken language in Russia after Russian (Sakurama, 2022). Islam has been a significant aspect of Tatar identity, although the practice and interpretation of Islam among Tatars have evolved over time, influenced by both traditional Tatar customs and the broader Islamic world (Ro'i & Wainer, 2009).



The post-Soviet era has seen a resurgence of Tatar cultural and religious identity, with the Republic of Tatarstan gaining significant autonomy within the Russian Federation. However, this autonomy has been challenged in recent years, leading to tensions between Kazan (the capital of Tatarstan) and Moscow (Sharafutdinova & Turovsky, 2017).

The choice to focus on Tatar women migrants in Almaty for this study is significant for several reasons. Firstly, the Tatars, as a Turkic ethnic group predominantly residing in Russia's Republic of Tatarstan and other regions, have a complex history of cultural preservation and negotiation within the Russian Federation (Wertheim, 2012). Their experiences offer insights into the dynamics of ethnic minority migration in post-Soviet spaces. Secondly, Almaty, as Kazakhstan's largest city and former capital, serves as a crucial destination for these migrants, offering economic opportunities and a diverse cultural milieu. The city's position as a bridge between Russian, Central Asian, and broader Turkic cultures makes it an ideal setting to examine processes of identity negotiation and community formation.

Moreover, the focus on women's experiences allows for an exploration of the gendered dimensions of migration, particularly at the intersection of ethnic and religious identities. Tatar women, navigating between their Turkic heritage, Islamic faith, and the influences of Tatar, Russian and Kazakh societies, offer a unique perspective on the complexities of transnational identity formation.

This study aims to investigate the multifaceted experiences of Tatar women in Almaty, focusing on three interconnected aspects: their migration background, the transformation of their identities, and their interactions with local Islamic organizations and the broader Muslim community. By examining these elements, we seek to contribute to the growing body of literature on migration, transnational identities, and the gendered aspects of religious practice in diasporic communities.

The academic importance of this research lies in its potential to bridge several fields of study. Firstly, it contributes to the literature on migration and diaspora studies by examining a case that doesn't fit neatly into the category of refugee studies but represents a form of politically motivated relocation. This adds nuance to our understanding of migration triggers and processes in the context of regional conflicts. Secondly, it enhances our understanding of Islam in Central Asia, a region experiencing significant religious revival and transformation. The experiences of Tatar women provide insights into how Islamic practices and identities are negotiated in transnational contexts. Finally, it engages with feminist scholarship on Muslim women's agency and identity formation, offering a case study that challenges simplistic narratives about women's experiences in Islamic societies.

Recent scholarship has emphasized the need for intersectional approaches in migration studies, particularly in understanding the experiences of Muslim women (Mirza, 2013). Building on this foundation, our research employs a qualitative approach to capture the nuanced realities of Tatar women's lives in Almaty. We argue that their experiences illuminate broader patterns of identity negotiation, religious adaptation, and community formation in the context of migration, contributing to the development of what we term "Adaptive Transnationalism."

Our study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do Tatar women's transnational connections shape their adaptation and identity formation in Almaty?
2. How do the intersections of gender, ethnicity, religion, and migrant status influence their experiences and opportunities?
3. How do they reinterpret and practice their Islamic faith in the context of migration and minority status?
4. How do they navigate and potentially challenge existing power structures and cultural norms in both Tatar and Kazakh communities?

To address these questions, we conducted in-depth interviews with 10 Tatar women who moved to Almaty after February 2022. Our analysis draws on theories of transnationalism, intersectionality, and Islamic feminism to interpret the complex realities of our participants' lives.

This paper begins with a comprehensive review of relevant literature, followed by a discussion of our theoretical framework and methodology. We then present our findings, organized thematically to address our research questions. The paper concludes with an in-depth discussion of the implications of our research for understanding the intersections of migration, gender, and Islamic identity in contemporary Central Asia, culminating in the proposal of "Adaptive Transnationalism" as a conceptual framework for understanding the dynamic processes of identity formation and community building in transnational contexts.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

This section provides a comprehensive review of the relevant literature and outlines the theoretical framework that guides our study. We draw on diverse fields including transnational migration studies, gender and migration, and post-Soviet identity formation to construct a nuanced approach to understanding the experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty.

2.1. Transnational migration and identity formation

The concept of transnationalism has become central to understanding contemporary migration processes. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) define transnationalism as "the processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement." This approach moves beyond traditional assimilation models to recognize the fluid and dynamic nature of migrant identities and practices.

Levitt and Jaworsky (2007) argue that transnational migrants inhabit a social field that spans their home and host societies, influencing both contexts through their activities and relationships. Our study extends this concept by exploring how these transnational social fields operate in the specific context of intra-regional migration within the post-Soviet space, where historical connections and shared cultural elements complicate the notion of distinct "home" and "host" societies.

Vertovec's (2009) concept of "transnationalism as a social morphology" emphasizes how transnational networks create new social formations that transcend national boundaries. Our study builds on this framework by examining how these new social formations are created in the specific context of post-Soviet Central Asia, a region with its own unique historical and cultural dynamics.

2.2. Gender, intersectionality, and migration

The intersection of gender and migration has become an important focus in recent scholarship. Pessar and Mahler's (2003) "gendered geographies of power" framework is particularly relevant for our study, helping us understand how gender shapes migration experiences across transnational spaces. We apply this framework to examine how Tatar women's gender roles and expectations are challenged and renegotiated in the context of their migration to Almaty.

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989), provides a crucial framework for understanding how multiple social categories interact to shape individual experiences. McCall (2005) outlines different approaches to intersectionality, including the intercategory approach, which examines relationships of inequality among social groups. Our research extends this approach by examining how intersecting identities are negotiated not only in relation to the majority population but also within the context of transnational connections and competing cultural norms.

In the context of Muslim women's migration, Mirza (2013) emphasizes the importance of an intersectional approach that considers the interplay of gender, ethnicity, and religion. While their work focuses on Muslim women in Britain, their insights inform our approach to understanding the complex identities of Tatar women in Almaty. Our study contributes to this body of literature by examining how these intersecting identities are negotiated in a context where Islam is more publicly visible than in many Western settings, but where Tatar women still constitute a religious and ethnic minority.

2.3. Islam, gender, and transnational identity

The study of Islam in transnational contexts has grown significantly in recent years. Göle's (2013) work on the public visibility of Islam and gender in Europe provides insights into how Muslim women negotiate their religious identities in secular or non-Muslim majority contexts. Our study extends Göle's work by examining how these dynamics play out in a post-Soviet Central Asian context, where the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and national identity has its own unique historical trajectory.

Jouili (2015) examines how Muslim women in France and Germany navigate secular norms while maintaining their religious practices. Their work is particularly relevant to our study as it highlights the agency of Muslim women in shaping their religious identities and practices in contexts where they are minorities. Our research builds on this by exploring how Tatar women in Almaty negotiate their religious identities not only in relation to the majority Kazakh Muslim population but also in the context of their own Tatar Islamic traditions and their experiences of Islam in Russia.

The concept of Islamic feminism, as developed by scholars like Badran (2009) and Mir-Hosseini (2006), provides a crucial framework for understanding how Muslim women reconcile their faith with gender equality. Our study contributes to this field by examining how Islamic feminist ideas may be articulated and practiced in the specific context of post-Soviet Central Asia, where discourses of gender equality have a distinct historical and ideological background.

2.4. Post-Soviet identity formation and migration

Understanding the historical and contemporary experiences of Tatars in Russia and post-Soviet spaces is crucial for contextualizing our study. Wertheim's (2012) work on language and nationalism among Tatars provides insights into the role of linguistic practices in maintaining Tatar identity. Graney (2019) examines how Tatars have navigated their identity and political status within the Russian Federation, offering valuable context for understanding the push factors that may have influenced Tatar women's decisions to migrate to Kazakhstan.

In the specific context of Kazakhstan, Laruelle (2014) examines the country's nation-building strategies, noting how Kazakhstan has attempted to balance Kazakh ethnic identity with civic nationalism. Omelicheva (2011; 2016) describes the revival of Islam in post-Soviet Kazakhstan, noting the influence of both traditional Hanafi Islam and newer, transnational Islamic movements.

The religious landscape in Kazakhstan is complex, with approximately 70% of the population identifying as Muslim, primarily following the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam (Omelicheva, 2016). However, the degree of religious observance varies widely, with many Kazakhs practicing a form of "folk Islam" that incorporates pre-Islamic beliefs and practices (Louw, 2007). Since independence in 1991, Kazakhstan has experienced a revival of Islamic practices and institutions, while the government has maintained a policy of secularism and religious tolerance (Koch, 2013).

For Tatar migrants from Russia, this context presents both opportunities and challenges. The presence of established Islamic institutions and a majority Muslim population can provide a sense of religious familiarity, while differences in Islamic practices and interpretations between Tatar traditions and local Kazakh customs may require negotiation and adaptation.

2.5. Theoretical framework

Drawing on these diverse strands of literature, our study adopts an integrated theoretical framework that combines concepts of transnationalism, intersectionality, and post-Soviet identity formation. This approach allows us to examine how Tatar women migrants navigate multiple identities, maintain transnational connections, and construct new forms of belonging in their host society.

We employ transnational migration theory to understand how Tatar women maintain connections across borders and how these connections shape their experiences in Almaty. We use an intersectional approach to analyze how gender, ethnicity, religion, and migrant status interact to shape these women's opportunities and constraints. Finally, we situate our analysis within the context of post-Soviet identity formation, considering how the shared history and ongoing transformations of the post-Soviet space influence Tatar women's migration experiences and identity negotiations. This theoretical framework guides our investigation of four key research questions:

1. How do Tatar women's transnational connections shape their adaptation and identity formation in Almaty?
2. How do the intersections of gender, ethnicity, religion, and migrant status influence their experiences and opportunities?
3. How do they reinterpret and practice their Islamic faith in the context of migration and minority status?
4. How do they navigate and potentially challenge existing power structures and cultural norms in both Tatar and Kazakh communities?

By engaging with these questions through this integrated theoretical lens, our study aims to contribute new insights to the fields of migration studies, gender studies, and post-Soviet studies, while also offering a nuanced understanding of the lived experiences of Tatar women migrants in post-Soviet Central Asia.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing online semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, Kazakhstan. This method was chosen to allow for in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives and experiences, while accommodating the constraints of remote research. As Denzin and Lincoln (2011) argue, qualitative methods are particularly suited to understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their experiences, making them ideal for our study of identity negotiation and community formation among Tatar women migrants.

3.2. Participant recruitment and interview process

Participants were recruited using a combination of purposive and snowball sampling methods. Initial contact was established through a local volunteer organization supporting Tatar migrants in Almaty. This approach, known as "gatekeeper sampling" (Clark, 2011), provided access to the first few participants. Subsequently, snowball sampling was employed, where existing participants referred other potential interviewees from their social networks (Noy, 2008). This method was particularly effective in reaching members of this relatively close-knit migrant community.

As Biernacki and Waldorf (1981) note, snowball sampling is especially useful when studying hidden or hard-to-reach populations, as was the case with our Tatar women migrants in Almaty. However, we were mindful of the potential limitations of this method, such as the risk of bias towards more socially connected individuals, as highlighted by Heckathorn (2011).

3.3. Data collection methods

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 10 Tatar women migrants from June to July 2024. The interview guide was developed based on our research questions and theoretical framework, covering topics such as migration experiences, identity negotiation, religious practices, and community involvement. This approach aligns with Kvale and Brinkmann's (2009) emphasis on the semi-structured interview as a powerful tool for capturing the lived experiences of participants.

Each interview lasted approximately 60-90 minutes and was conducted in the language preferred by the participant (Russian, Tatar, or a mix of both). All interviews were recorded with the participants' consent and later transcribed for analysis. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), we engaged in repeated listening of the audio recordings to ensure accuracy in transcription and to gain a holistic understanding of each participant's narrative.

3.4. Ethical considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study, following the ethical guidelines outlined by the American Anthropological Association (2012). To ensure strict protection of personal information, pseudonyms and informant numbers are used throughout this paper. All field notes and audio recordings are securely stored under lock and key, in line with data protection best practices (Israel & Hay, 2006).

We were particularly sensitive to the potential vulnerabilities of our participants as migrants and members of a minority group. We followed the ethical guidelines outlined by the Japanese Society of Cultural Anthropology (2008) regarding research with vulnerable populations. This included being attentive to power dynamics during interviews and ensuring participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

3.5. Data analysis

Data analysis was conducted through a comprehensive review of the interview transcripts and field notes. We employed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involved a six-phase process: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report.

The researcher engaged in a close reading of the data, identifying recurring themes and patterns in the participants' narratives. This process involved contextual analysis, considering the broader sociocultural and political environment in which the participants' experiences were situated. As recommended by Charmaz (2006), we used memo-writing throughout the analysis process to develop our ideas and make connections between emerging themes.

The analysis focused on understanding the nuances of the women's migration experiences, their religious practices, and integration processes in Almaty. Key quotes and anecdotes were extracted to illustrate these themes, following Geertz's (1973) concept of "thick description" to provide rich, contextual detail in our findings.

3.6. Researcher positionality

It is important to acknowledge the positionality of the primary researcher, as it may influence the data collection and analysis process (England, 1994). The researcher has a Tatar grandmother but was raised in a Catholic household in the Far East, in an environment where Tatar, Russian and Japanese were spoken. This background provides both insider and outsider perspectives, potentially facilitating rapport with participants but also risking certain biases or blind spots in the research process.

To mitigate potential biases, we employed reflexivity throughout the research process, maintaining a reflexive journal as recommended by Finlay (2002). This practice allowed for continuous examination of how the researcher's positionality might be influencing data collection and interpretation. Additionally, we engaged in peer debriefing sessions with participants not directly involved in the research, a strategy that Creswell and Miller (2000) suggest can enhance the credibility of qualitative findings.

We also acknowledge that there may be aspects of the Tatar migrant experience that the researcher might overlook due to their particular background and perspective. To address this, we employed member checking (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), sharing preliminary findings with participants to ensure our interpretations resonated with their experiences.

3.7. Limitations

While our methodological approach allows for an in-depth exploration of Tatar women migrants' experiences, it has certain limitations. The small sample size and focus on Almaty limit the generalizability of our findings, a common challenge in qualitative research (Yin, 2018). Additionally, our sampling method may have led to an overrepresentation of more socially active women, potentially missing the experiences of more isolated individuals.

The online nature of our interviews, necessitated by practical constraints, may have impacted the depth of rapport built with participants and limited our ability to observe non-verbal cues (Deakin & Wakefield, 2014). However, as Lo Iacono et al. (2016) argue, online interviews can also create a sense of ease and openness among participants, potentially leading to rich data.

We acknowledge these limitations and caution against broad generalizations based on our findings. Instead, we aim to provide rich, contextualized insights into the experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, contributing to a deeper understanding of transnational migration processes in the post-Soviet space.

4. Tatar Women's Migration Experiences in Almaty

This section presents the main findings of our study, focusing on the migration experiences of Tatar women in Almaty, Kazakhstan. Drawing on in-depth interviews with ten participants, we provide a thick description of their journeys, challenges, and adaptations. The narratives presented here offer a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay between ethnic identity, religious practice, and gender roles in the context of migration.

4.1. Profiles of participants

Before delving into the thematic analysis, we present brief profiles of our ten participants to provide context for their narratives. All names are pseudonyms to protect the participants' identities.

Table 1*Profiles of Participants*

Number	Pseudonym	Age, year of birth	Marital status, reason(s) for migration
Informant 1	Aliya	Age 32, born in 1992	married, moved to avoid her husband's conscription
Informant 2	Gulnara	Age 45, born in 1979	divorced, relocated due to economic difficulties
Informant 3	Zarina	Age 28, born in 1996	single, left Russia for political reasons
Informant 4	Farida	Age 39, born in 1985	widowed, moved to avoid her sons' conscription
Informant 5	Leila	Age 51, born in 1973	married, followed her husband for work opportunities
Informant 6	Amina	Age 35, born in 1988	married, moved to avoid her husband's conscription
Informant 7	Sabina	Age 42, born in 1982	divorced, sought better economic prospects
Informant 8	Lyaysan	Age 29, born in 1995	single, pursued educational opportunities
Informant 9	Dilyara	Age 47, born in 1977	married, relocated to join family-in-law
Informant 10	Elmira	Age 33, born in 1991	married, left reluctantly due to her husband's decision

4.2. The decision to migrate: push and pull factors

The decision to migrate was rarely straightforward for our participants. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was a significant catalyst, the reasons for leaving were often multifaceted, combining political, economic, and personal factors.

Aliya (informant 1)'s story exemplifies the complex decision-making process many families faced. She explained:

"When the partial mobilization was announced, my husband and I were terrified. We have two young children, and the thought of him being sent to fight... it was unbearable. We never wanted to leave Russia, but suddenly we had no choice. Kazakhstan seemed like the safest option – close enough to home, but far enough from the war" (interviewed on 28 June 2024).

Aliya's case highlights how the threat of conscription forced many families to make rapid decisions about migration. For others, like **Gulnara** (informant 2), economic factors played a more significant role:

"After the sanctions hit, my small business started struggling. I could see the writing on the wall – things were only going to get worse. As a single mother, I couldn't afford to wait and see. Moving to Almaty was a gamble, but I felt I had to take the chance for my daughter's future" (interviewed on 17 July 2024).

Gulnara's experience underscores the economic uncertainty that pushed many to seek opportunities elsewhere. However, not all of our participants left willingly. **Elmira** (informant 10)'s story reveals the tensions that can arise when migration decisions are not unanimous within families:

"It was my husband's idea to move. He was worried about the economic situation and thought there would be better opportunities in Kazakhstan. I didn't want to leave. My whole life was in Kazan – my job, my friends, my parents. But in our culture, as you know, wives are expected to follow their husbands. So here I am, trying to make the best of it" (interviewed on 11 July 2024).

Elmira's reluctant migration highlights the gendered dynamics often at play in migration decisions, where women may have less agency in the decision-making process.

4.3. Navigating new identities in Almaty

Upon arrival in Almaty, our participants faced the challenge of reconstructing their identities in a new context. This process involved negotiating their Tatar heritage, their relationship with Islam, and their roles as women in a new society.

Zarina (informant 4), who left Russia primarily for political reasons, found herself reconnecting with her Tatar identity in unexpected ways:

"In Russia, I always felt caught between my Tatar culture and Russian culture. But here in Almaty, I've found a new appreciation for my Tatar roots. There's a freedom to express that part of myself here that I never felt in Moscow. I've started attending Tatar cultural events and even picked up Tatar language classes" (interviewed on 4 July 2024).

Zarina's experience reflects a pattern we observed among several participants – a renewed interest in and connection to their Tatar heritage after migration. This phenomenon aligns with previous research on diaspora communities and the reinvigoration of ethnic identities in new contexts (Vertovec, 2009).

For some participants, like **Amina** (informant 6), the migration experience led to a deepening of religious identity:

"Back home, I was always a bit hesitant to wear the hijab. There was so much prejudice, especially after the invasion started. But here in Almaty, I feel more comfortable embracing my faith openly. The first time I wore my hijab to the bazaar, I was nervous. But people barely blinked an eye. It's given me the courage to explore my spirituality more deeply" (interviewed on 19 July 2024).

Amina's narrative illustrates how the more tolerant religious atmosphere in Almaty allowed some women to express their Islamic identity more freely. However, this was not a universal experience.

Farida (informant 4), for instance, found herself questioning aspects of her faith:

"I've always considered myself a devout Muslim, but the war and the migration... it's shaken my faith. I look at my fellow Muslims here in Almaty, and sometimes I wonder – how can we reconcile our beliefs with the violence happening in Ukraine? I'm still praying, still fasting, but I'm also asking a lot more questions" (interviewed 18 July 2024).

Farida's spiritual struggle highlights the complex ways in which political events and migration can impact religious identity and practice.

4.4. Challenges and adaptations in daily life

The practical challenges of settling into life in Almaty were a significant theme in our interviews. Participants discussed difficulties with housing, employment, and social integration, as well as the strategies they developed to overcome these obstacles.

Leila (informant 5), who followed her husband to Almaty for work opportunities, described the initial shock of arrival:

"The first few months were a blur. We were living in a tiny apartment, much smaller than our home in Kazan. My husband was working long hours at his new job, and I was alone with the children in a city I didn't know. I couldn't read the signs in Kazakh, I didn't know where to buy groceries... it was, well, what to say, overwhelming" (interviewed on 10 July 2024).

Leila's experience was common among our participants. Many described a period of disorientation and isolation upon arrival. However, most also developed strategies for adapting to their new environment. Leila continued:

"But then I met some other Tatar women at the local mosque. They showed me around, helped me learn some basic Kazakh phrases. Now I'm even teaching Russian to some local children to earn extra money. It's not the life I imagined, but we're making it work".

The role of informal networks, particularly among other Tatar migrants and at religious institutions, emerged as a crucial factor in adaptation for many of our participants.

Employment was another significant challenge for many of the women we interviewed. **Sabina** (informant 7), who moved to Almaty seeking better economic prospects, found that her expectations did not match reality:

"I had this idea that there would be plenty of jobs in Almaty. But when I got here, I realized my Russian college degree didn't carry the same weight without the ability to speak Kazakh. I spent months searching for work in my field before I finally had to accept a job as a sales clerk. It was humbling, but I had to swallow my pride for the sake of survival" (interviewed on 1 July 2024).

Sabina's story highlights the often-overlooked challenges of professional integration for migrants, even those moving between countries with historical ties.

4.5. Transforming gender roles and family dynamics

The migration experience often led to shifts in gender roles and family dynamics among our participants. Some women found new freedoms and opportunities in Almaty, while others struggled with increased responsibilities and pressures.

Lyaysan (informant 8), who came to Almaty to pursue educational opportunities, found that the move allowed her to challenge traditional expectations:

"In my family back in Ufa, there was always this pressure to get married young. But here in Almaty, I'm focused on my studies. I'm the first in my family to pursue a master's degree. My parents don't fully understand, but they're starting to see that there are other paths for Tatar women besides early marriage and motherhood" (interviewed on 8 July 2024).

Lyaysan's narrative illustrates how migration can create spaces for women to pursue personal goals and challenge cultural norms. However, not all women experienced such positive transformations. **Dilyara** (informant 9), who relocated to join her family-in-law (Her husband's father moved to Almaty early with his family to avoid conscription), found herself caught between conflicting expectations:

"Sometimes I feel like I'm living in two worlds. At home, I'm expected to be a traditional Tatar wife and mother. But outside, I'm navigating a more modern, Kazakhstani society. My husband expects me to work to help support the family, but also to maintain all my duties at home. It's exhausting trying to balance it all" (interviewed on 18 July 2024).

Dilyara's experience highlights the complex negotiations many migrant women face as they attempt to balance traditional roles with new economic and social realities.

4.6. Maintaining transnational ties

Despite the challenges of their new lives in Almaty, most of our participants maintained strong connections to their communities of origin in Russia. These transnational ties played a significant role in shaping their experiences and identities.

Gulnara (informant 2) described how technology allowed her to maintain a sense of connection:

"Every evening, I video call my parents in Kazan. They tell me about life back home, and I show them around our new apartment. It's not the same as being there, but it helps. My daughter practices her Tatar with them – I worry she'll forget the language otherwise" (interviewed on 17 July 2024).

For Gulnara, these daily calls served not only to maintain family relationships but also as a way to preserve cultural and linguistic ties for the next generation. However, maintaining these connections could also be a source of stress and guilt. **Aliya** (informant 1) expressed conflicted feelings about her decision to leave:

"Sometimes when I talk to my friends back home, I feel like a traitor. They're dealing with hardships, and here I am, safe in Almaty. But then I look at my children, and I know we made the right choice for them. It's a constant back-and-forth in my mind" (interviewed on 28 June).

Aliya's sentiment reflects the emotional complexity of migration, where the decision to leave for safety and opportunity is often tinged with guilt and a sense of abandoning one's community.

4.7. Looking to the future

As our participants reflected on their experiences and looked to the future, we observed a mix of hope, uncertainty, and resilience. Many expressed a desire to put down roots in Almaty, while others saw their time in Kazakhstan as temporary.

Amina (informant 6), who had embraced many aspects of life in Almaty, expressed cautious optimism:

"We're starting to feel at home here. My children are learning Kazakh in school, making friends. I'm even thinking of applying for Kazakhstani citizenship. But part of me still dreams of returning to Russia someday, when things are different. For now, though, we're building a life here" (interviewed on 19 July 2024).

Amina's perspective was echoed by several participants who were actively working to integrate into Kazakh society while maintaining hope for eventual return. In contrast, **Elmira** (informant 10), who had moved reluctantly, was more focused on an eventual return to Russia:

"I'm trying to make the best of our time here, but in my heart, I know this isn't our final home. I'm using this time to learn new skills, save money. When the situation in Russia improves, we'll go back. This is just a temporary chapter in our lives" (interviewed on 11 July 2024).

Elmira's view represents those participants who saw their migration as a necessary but temporary measure, highlighting the diverse range of perspectives and experiences among Tatar women migrants in Almaty.

In conclusion, the experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty reveal a complex interplay of push and pull factors, challenges and adaptations, and transformations of identity and family dynamics. Their stories highlight the resilience and agency of these women as they navigate new cultural, religious, and social landscapes, while also underscoring the ongoing challenges and uncertainties they face. As they continue to build lives in Almaty, these women are not only reshaping their own identities but also contributing to the evolving multicultural fabric of Kazakh society.

4.8. Theoretical implications: the multifaceted nature of migration experiences

The narratives presented in this section reveal the complex and multifaceted nature of Tatar women's migration experiences in Almaty. Their stories highlight the interplay of political, economic, and personal factors in shaping migration decisions and outcomes. We observe a process of active adaptation and creative reimagining of transnational connections, where migrants demonstrate agency in shaping their practices rather than simply maintaining static ties across borders.

The experiences of our participants underscore the gendered nature of migration processes, aligning with Pessar and Mahler's (2003) "gendered geographies of power" framework. Women like Elmira, who migrated reluctantly due to her husband's decision, exemplify how gender norms can shape migration trajectories. Conversely, women like Lyaysan, who found new educational opportunities in Almaty, demonstrate how migration can also create spaces for challenging traditional gender roles.

The economic challenges faced by many participants, such as Sabina's struggle to find work in her field, highlight the often-overlooked difficulties of professional integration for migrants. These experiences resonate with Bauder's (2003) work on the devaluation of immigrants' cultural capital in new contexts.

Moreover, the diverse strategies employed by these women to adapt to life in Almaty - from language learning to entrepreneurship - demonstrate their agency and resilience in the face of significant life changes. This aligns with our observations of how migrants actively shape their environments rather than passively adapting to them.

5. Religious Identity and Practice Among Tatar Women in Almaty

This section delves deeper into the religious experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, focusing on how their Islamic identities and practices have been shaped, challenged, and transformed by the migration process. Drawing on the rich narrative data collected from our ten participants, we offer a detailed analysis of the complex interplay between religious identity, cultural heritage, and the new social context of Kazakhstan.

To provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of these experiences, we will focus primarily on the narrative of one participant, **Amina** (Informant 6), while incorporating insights from other interviewees to illustrate broader patterns and variations.

5.1. Amina's journey: a case study in religious transformation

Amina, a 35-year-old married woman with two children, left her hometown of Kazan, Russia, in the wake of the Ukraine invasion. Her story provides a compelling illustration of the religious challenges and transformations experienced by many Tatar women in Almaty (interviewed on 19 July 2024).

"I always considered myself a Muslim... but in Kazan, it was more of a cultural identity than a practiced faith. We celebrated Eid, fasted during Ramadan, but that was about it. Wearing a hijab or praying five times a day? That wasn't part of my life".

Amina's description of her religious identity in Russia echoes the experiences of several other participants. For many, Islam was an integral part of their Tatar heritage, but its practice was often limited to major holidays and life-cycle events.

The decision to leave Russia was primarily motivated by concerns for her children's future, but it also opened up unexpected avenues for spiritual exploration:

"When we decided to move to Almaty, religion wasn't really on my mind. I was worried about my husband finding work, the kids adjusting to a new school. But something changed when we got here. Maybe it was the shock of leaving everything behind, or the need to find a new community, but I found myself drawn to the mosque in a way I never was back home".

Amina's experience highlights how the disruption of migration can often lead to a reevaluation of one's religious identity. For her, the mosque became not just a place of worship, but a source of community and support in an unfamiliar environment.

5.2. Navigating a new religious landscape

Almaty's religious landscape presented both opportunities and challenges for Amina and other Tatar women. Kazakhstan, while officially a secular state, has a predominantly Muslim population and a more visible Islamic presence than many parts of Russia. Amina described her first visits to the local mosque:

"The first time I went to the mosque here, I was nervous. I didn't know the proper etiquette, and I was worried I'd stand out as a foreigner. But the women there were so welcoming. An older Kazakh woman showed me how to perform wudu [ritual ablution] properly. It was like she could sense my uncertainty".

This experience of warmth and guidance from the local Muslim community was echoed by several other participants. **Gulnara** (Informant 2) noted, *"The mosque became a place where I could connect with both my Tatar culture and the local Kazakh culture. It's a bridge between my past and my present"*.

However, the increased visibility of Islamic practice in Almaty also presented challenges for some women. Amina reflected on her decision to start wearing the hijab:

"I never thought I'd wear a hijab. In Kazan, it wasn't common, and to be honest, I had some negative stereotypes about it. But here, seeing so many women proudly wearing it, I became curious. I started with wearing it just to the mosque, then for Ramadan. Now, I wear it all the time. It's become a part of who I am".

Amina's journey towards adopting the hijab illustrates a common theme among our participants: the renegotiation of visible religious symbols in a new context. For some, like Amina, the move to Almaty provided the freedom to explore more overt expressions of faith. For others, it prompted a reevaluation of their relationship with such practices.

Zarina (Informant 3), for instance, had a different experience: *"I feel less pressure to 'look Muslim' here than I did in Russia. There, wearing a hijab felt like a political statement. Here, I can practice my faith more privately, focusing on the spiritual aspects rather than the outward appearance"* (interviewed on 4 July 2024).

5.3. Deepening religious knowledge and practice

For many of our participants, including Amina, the move to Almaty sparked a desire to deepen their understanding of Islam. This often involved formal and informal religious education, which was more readily available in Almaty than in their hometowns. Amina described her journey of religious learning:

"Back in Kazan, my knowledge of Islam was pretty basic. Here, I've started attending classes at the mosque. I'm learning to read the Quran in Arabic, understanding the meaning behind our rituals. It's like I'm discovering my religion for the first time, even though I've been Muslim all my life".

This process of religious education often led to changes in daily practices. Amina continued:

"Now, I pray five times a day. I never did that in Russia. At first, it was challenging to fit it into my schedule, especially with work and the kids. But it's become a source of peace in my day, a moment to pause and reflect".

The increased religious observance wasn't limited to prayer. Amina and several other participants reported changes in their dietary habits, socializing patterns, and even financial practices as they learned more about Islamic principles.

"I've become more conscious about halal food," Amina explained. *"I'm also learning about Islamic finance - we're even considering switching to an Islamic bank for our savings".*

5.4. Negotiating religious identity in the family

The transformation of religious identity and practice often had significant implications for family dynamics. For Amina, whose husband was less religiously inclined, this presented both challenges and opportunities for growth:

"My husband was surprised by my growing religiosity at first. He joked that he had married a different woman. But over time, he's become supportive. We have deeper conversations about faith and values now. It's brought us closer in many ways".

Amina's experience was not universal among our participants. **Elmira** (Informant 10), for instance, found that her renewed interest in religion created tension in her marriage:

"My husband doesn't understand why I'm suddenly so interested in Islam. He worries that I'm becoming 'too conservative.' It's been a source of arguments between us" (interviewed on 11 July 2024).

For those with children, like Amina, the migration experience often prompted a reevaluation of how to pass on religious and cultural heritage:

"In Kazan, I didn't think much about teaching my kids about Islam. Now, it's become a priority. We read Quran stories together, and I'm teaching them to pray. I want them to have a stronger connection to their faith than I did growing up".

5.5. Intersections of religious and ethnic identity

For many Tatar women, the experience of migration led to a complex renegotiation of the relationship between their religious and ethnic identities. Amina reflected on this process:

"Being Tatar and being Muslim have always been connected for me. But here in Almaty, I'm exploring what each of those identities means separately. I'm more conscious of my Tatar heritage - I'm teaching my kids Tatar songs and stories. At the same time, I'm connecting with Muslims from different backgrounds in ways I never did before".

This sentiment was echoed by **Leila** (Informant 5), who noted:

"In Russia, being Tatar was what made me different. Here, it's being Muslim that connects me to the broader community. But I'm also more aware of the unique aspects of Tatar Islam - our traditions, our approach to gender roles. It's a balancing act".

5.6. Challenges and contradictions

While many participants, including Amina, reported positive experiences of religious growth, the process was not without its challenges and contradictions. Amina reflected on some of the difficulties she encountered:

"Sometimes I feel caught between different worlds. Some of my old friends from Kazan don't understand my new religiosity. They think I've become a different person. And while the Muslim community here is welcoming, there are cultural differences. Sometimes I feel like I have to prove that I'm a 'real' Muslim because I'm not Kazakh".

The issue of authenticity and belonging came up frequently in our interviews. Many women reported feeling pressure to demonstrate their Islamic credentials, both to the local Muslim community and to other Tatar migrants.

Amina also grappled with reconciling her newfound religious conviction with other aspects of her identity:

"I've always been proud of my education and my career. Now, I'm learning about Islamic perspectives on women's roles, and sometimes it's challenging to reconcile everything. I believe in gender equality, but I'm also drawn to more traditional interpretations of family life. It's an ongoing process of figuring out what feels right for me".

5.7. Looking to the future

As Amina and other participants reflected on their religious journeys in Almaty, many expressed a sense of ongoing evolution and uncertainty about the future. Amina shared her thoughts:

"I don't know what the future holds. Will we stay in Almaty forever? Will we return to Russia someday? How will my religious practice continue to change? These are questions I can't answer. But I do know that this experience has transformed my relationship with Islam in ways I never expected".

For many of the women we interviewed, including Amina, the experience of migration had opened up new possibilities for religious exploration and growth. At the same time, it had complicated their sense of identity and belonging.

Amina concluded our interview with a reflection that seemed to capture the sentiments of many participants:

"This journey - both the physical move to Almaty and my spiritual journey - has taught me that identity isn't fixed. Being a Tatar Muslim woman in Almaty is different from what it meant in Kazan. And that's okay. It's all part of the journey".

In conclusion, the religious experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, as exemplified by Amina's story, reveal a complex process of identity renegotiation, spiritual exploration, and cultural adaptation. These experiences highlight the dynamic nature of religious identity in the context of migration, the intersections between religious and ethnic identities, and the ways in which individual spiritual journeys are shaped by broader social, cultural, and political contexts.

The narratives presented in this section contribute to our understanding of how migration can serve as a catalyst for religious change, the role of religious communities in facilitating adaptation to new environments, and the challenges of maintaining coherent identities across transnational spaces. They also underscore the importance of considering religious dimensions in studies of migration and integration, particularly in contexts where religious and ethnic identities are closely intertwined.

5.8. Conceptual insights: the dynamic nature of religious identity in transnational contexts

The religious experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, as exemplified by Amina's story and others, reveal a complex process of identity renegotiation and spiritual exploration. These narratives demonstrate how religious identities and practices are actively reshaped in response to new social and cultural contexts.

The deepening of religious identity experienced by many participants aligns with Vertovec's (2004) observation that migration can often lead to increased religious consciousness. However, our findings go beyond this, showing how women like Amina not only become more religious but also reinterpret their faith in light of their new experiences.

The challenges faced by these women in reconciling different aspects of their identities - as Muslims, as Tatars, as women, and as migrants - underscore the intersectional nature (Crenshaw, 1991) of their

experiences. This complexity is central to our understanding of how migrants navigate multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities in transnational contexts.

Moreover, the ways in which these women engage with local Islamic institutions and reinterpret religious practices demonstrate their agency in shaping their religious experiences. This aligns with Jouili's (2015) work on Muslim women's religious agency in European contexts, while also highlighting the unique dynamics at play in the post-Soviet, Central Asian setting.

6. Integration and Community Building: Tatar Women's Experiences in Almaty

Drawing on the rich narratives and insights presented in the previous sections, this section examines how Tatar women migrants navigate the process of integration into Almaty's social fabric and build new communities. We explore the strategies they employ, the challenges they face, and the ways in which they reimagine their identities in this new context.

6.1. Navigating multiple identities

The experiences of our participants reveal a complex process of identity negotiation as they integrate into Almaty society. Many women find themselves balancing multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities: as Tatars, as Muslims, as Russians (or former Russian residents), and as new members of Kazakhstani society. **Aliya** (Informant 1) articulated this complexity:

"Some days, I feel like I'm juggling different versions of myself. At home, I'm a Tatar mother, speaking our language, cooking our traditional foods. At work, I'm seen as a Russian speaker, bringing skills from my life in Kazan. At the mosque, I'm part of the broader Muslim community. And when I'm dealing with government offices or my children's school, I'm trying to fit into Kazakh society. It's exhausting sometimes. Well... I feel like I'm expanding who I can be, too" (interviewed on 28 June 2024).

This sentiment was echoed by several participants, highlighting the fluid and contextual nature of identity in the migration experience. The ability to navigate these multiple identities often served as a resource, allowing women to connect with diverse groups and access different support networks.

6.2. Language as a tool for integration

Language emerged as a crucial factor in the integration process. Most of our participants arrived in Almaty with fluency in Russian but limited or no knowledge of Kazakh. Their efforts to learn Kazakh played a significant role in their integration experiences. **Gulnara** (Informant 2) described her language journey:

"When I first arrived, I relied entirely on Russian. But I quickly realized that to truly be part of society here, I needed to learn Kazakh. It's been challenging – at my age, learning a new language isn't easy. But it's opened up so many doors. I can chat with my neighbors, understand local news, even help my daughter with her Kazakh homework. It's given me a sense of belonging I didn't expect" (interviewed on 17 July 2024).

Several women reported that their efforts to learn Kazakh were met with appreciation from local Kazakhs, often serving as a bridge for cultural exchange and friendship. However, the process was not without its frustrations. **Zarina** (Informant 3) noted:

"Sometimes I feel like my language skills define my acceptance. When I stumble over Kazakh words, I can see people's perceptions of me change. It's like I'm less 'integrated' in their eyes. It's frustrating because I feel connected to this place in my heart, even if my tongue can't always keep up" (interviewed on 4 July 2024).

6.3. Building new communities

One of the most striking aspects of the women's narratives was the importance of building new communities in Almaty. These communities often transcended traditional ethnic or national boundaries, creating new spaces of belonging. **Amina** (Informant 6) described her experience:

"When I first arrived, I sought out other Tatars. It was comforting to hear Tatar language, to share familiar customs. But over time, my circle has expanded. Now, some of my closest friends are Kazakh women I met at the mosque, a Ukrainian family in our apartment building, and even an Uyghur colleague from work. We've created our own little 'migrant family,' supporting each other through the challenges of building a new life here" (interviewed on 19 July 2024).

This creation of diverse, multi-ethnic communities was a common theme among our participants. Many women found that shared experiences of migration, regardless of origin, created strong bonds. These communities often served as crucial support networks, offering practical help (such as job referrals or childcare) as well as emotional support.

6.4. Engagement with local institutions

Interactions with local institutions – including government offices, schools, healthcare facilities, and religious organizations – played a significant role in the integration process. These interactions often presented challenges but also opportunities for engagement and belonging. **Farida** (Informant 4) shared her experience with her children's school:

"At first, I was intimidated by the school system here. The curriculum is different, and I worried about my children falling behind. But I decided to get involved – I volunteered for school events, joined the parent-teacher association. It was challenging with my limited Kazakh, but it helped me understand the system better and feel more connected to the community. Now, I feel like I have a voice in my children's education" (interviewed on 18 July 2024).

Several women noted that religious institutions, particularly mosques, played a crucial role in their integration. These spaces often served as sites for language learning, cultural exchange, and community building. However, experiences varied, with some women feeling fully embraced by these communities, while others felt pressure to conform to certain expectations of religious practice or cultural behavior.

6.5. Economic integration and professional identity

For many of our participants, economic integration and the maintenance or reconstruction of professional identities were central challenges. Women often found that their qualifications or work experiences from Russia were not fully recognized or valued in the Kazakhstani context. **Sabina** (Informant 7) described her professional journey:

"I was an accountant in Kazan, but when I came here, I couldn't find a similar position. The systems are different, and without fluent Kazakh, many offices wouldn't consider me. I had to start over, taking courses in Kazakh accounting practices. It was humbling, being a student again in my 40s. But it's also been empowering. I'm building a new professional identity that bridges my experience from Russia with my new life here" (interviewed on 1 July 2024).

Several women found entrepreneurial solutions, starting small businesses that catered to the Tatar community or leveraged their unique cross-cultural experiences. **Leila** (Informant 5), for example, started a small bakery specializing in Tatar pastries:

"It started as a way to earn extra money, baking chakchak and other Tatar sweets for the community. But it's become so much more. It's a way to share my culture, to create a little piece of home here in

Almaty. And it's introduced me to so many people – Kazakhs curious about Tatar cuisine, other migrants looking for a taste of home. It's become a bridge between cultures" (interviewed on 10 July 2024).

6.6. Challenges and resilience

While many of our participants shared stories of successful integration, they also faced significant challenges. These included experiences of discrimination, feelings of nostalgia and loss, and the stress of adapting to a new society while maintaining connections to their heritage. **Elmira** (Informant 10), who had moved reluctantly, expressed ongoing struggles:

"There are days when the homesickness is overwhelming. When my children come home speaking more Kazakh than Tatar, I worry about them losing their heritage. When I see news from Russia, I feel guilty for leaving. It's a constant emotional struggle" (interviewed on 11 July 2024).

However, even in the face of these challenges, our participants demonstrated remarkable resilience. Many spoke of developing new coping strategies, finding strength in their faith, and drawing support from their newly formed communities. **Dilyara** (Informant 9) reflected:

"This journey has taught me how strong I am. Every challenge – whether it's helping my children adjust, or reimagining my own identity – has shown me capabilities I didn't know I had. I'm not the same woman who left Kazan two years ago. I'm more confident, more adaptable, more open to new experiences" (interviewed on 18 July 2024).

6.7. Integration dynamics: challenges, resilience, and evolving identities

The experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty reveal a complex and multifaceted process of integration. These women navigate multiple identities, build diverse communities, engage with local institutions, and reconstruct their professional lives in a new context. Their stories highlight both the challenges of migration and the remarkable resilience and adaptability of individuals in the face of significant life changes. Moreover, their experiences shed light on the evolving nature of urban spaces in Central Asia, where historical connections, contemporary migrations, and global influences intersect to create new forms of community and belonging. As these women integrate into Almaty society, they are not only adapting to their new environment but actively shaping it, contributing to the city's cultural diversity and social fabric.

The narratives presented here underscore the importance of viewing integration not as a one-way process of assimilation, but as a dynamic, two-way interaction between migrants and host societies. They also highlight the need for policies and support systems that recognize the diverse needs and experiences of migrant women, particularly those navigating multiple cultural and religious identities.

6.8. Analytical reflections: navigating integration and transnational belonging

The experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty reveal a complex and multifaceted process of integration and community building. Their stories demonstrate how migrants actively construct new forms of belonging that transcend traditional national and ethnic boundaries.

The women's experiences of navigating multiple identities align with Vertovec's (2001) concept of "bifocality" in transnational migration, where individuals maintain simultaneous attachments to different places and cultures. However, our findings suggest that this process is more dynamic and multidirectional than a simple bifocality.

The crucial role of language in the integration process, as highlighted by participants like Gulnara, resonates with Norton's (2013) work on language and identity in migration contexts. The efforts to learn

Kazakh while maintaining Tatar and Russian exemplify the linguistic dimension of transnational adaptation.

The formation of diverse, multi-ethnic communities by these women challenges simplistic notions of diaspora formation based solely on shared ethnicity or national origin. Instead, it aligns with Glick Schiller et al.'s (2006) concept of "simultaneous incorporation," where migrants forge connections across multiple social fields.

The economic strategies employed by women like Leila, who started a Tatar bakery, demonstrate how migrants can leverage their cultural capital in new contexts. This aligns with Light and Gold's (2000) work on ethnic economies in migration contexts.

Overall, these experiences underscore the need for a theoretical framework that can capture the dynamic, creative processes through which migrants construct new forms of belonging and community in transnational contexts.

7. Discussion: Reimagining Identity, Faith, and Belonging in Transnational Spaces

This study of Tatar women migrants in Almaty provides valuable insights into the complex interplay of transnational connections, intersecting identities, and religious practices in the context of migration. By synthesizing our theoretical framework outlined in Section 2. with the empirical findings presented in Sections 3-6, we propose a new conceptual framework, which we term "Adaptive Transnationalism," for understanding the dynamic processes of identity formation and community building in transnational contexts.

7.1. Transnational connections and identity formation

Our research reveals that the transnational connections maintained by Tatar women profoundly shape their adaptation and identity formation in Almaty. As discussed in Section 2.1., the concept of transnationalism (Glick Schiller et al., 1992) emphasizes the multi-stranded social relations that link societies of origin and settlement. Our findings extend this understanding by demonstrating how these women actively reshape these connections in response to their new context. For instance, Gulnara's daily video calls with her parents in Kazan (Section 4.6.) exemplify how digital technologies are leveraged to maintain ties with communities in Russia. However, these connections go beyond mere maintenance of relationships. As seen in Leila's case (Section 6.5.), where she started a Tatar bakery in Almaty, these transnational ties become a basis for creative adaptations that bridge cultural contexts.

This process of active adaptation and creative reimagining of transnational connections is a key component of what we term "Adaptive Transnationalism." It emphasizes the agency of migrants in shaping their transnational practices, aligning with Vertovec's (2009) concept of "transnationalism as a social morphology" while extending it to highlight the transformative nature of these practices.

7.2. Intersectionality and migrant experiences

The intersections of gender, ethnicity, religion, and migrant status significantly influence the experiences and opportunities of Tatar women in Almaty. This aligns with the intersectional approach outlined in Section 2.2., particularly drawing on Mirza's (2013) work on Muslim women's intersecting identities in migration contexts.

Our findings, particularly in Sections 4.5. and 5.4., demonstrate how these intersecting identities are not static but dynamically negotiated. For instance, Amina's journey of religious exploration (Section 5.1.) shows how migration can lead to a reevaluation and transformation of religious identity, intersecting with her roles as a woman, a mother, and a professional.

These findings support McCall's (2005) intercategory approach to intersectionality, which examines how multiple categories of difference interact to shape individual experiences. However, our concept of Adaptive Transnationalism extends this by emphasizing how individuals actively negotiate and reshape these intersecting identities in transnational contexts.

7.3. Religious identity and practice in transnational contexts

The reinterpretation and practice of Islamic faith in the context of migration and minority status emerge as a central theme in our findings. This aligns with the discussion in Section 2.3. on Islam, gender, and transnational identity, particularly drawing on Göle's (2013) work on the public visibility of Islam.

Our findings, particularly in Section 5., demonstrate how Tatar women navigate between different interpretations of Islam, balancing their Tatar Islamic heritage with the practices they encounter in Almaty's more diverse Islamic landscape. This process of religious negotiation and adaptation is a key aspect of Adaptive Transnationalism, highlighting how religious identities are actively reshaped in response to new social and cultural environments.

7.4. Language, integration, and community formation

Language emerged as a crucial factor in the integration process, as discussed in Section 6.2. This finding aligns with Norton's (2013) work on language and identity in migration contexts, as outlined in our theoretical framework. The efforts of participants like Gulnara to learn Kazakh while maintaining Tatar and Russian exemplify the linguistic dimension of Adaptive Transnationalism.

Furthermore, our findings on community formation (Section 6.3.) challenge simplistic notions of diaspora formation based solely on shared ethnicity or national origin. Instead, they align with Glick Schiller et al.'s (2006) concept of "simultaneous incorporation," where migrants forge connections across multiple social fields. However, our concept of Adaptive Transnationalism goes further by emphasizing how migrants actively construct new forms of community that transcend traditional ethnic and national boundaries.

7.5. Towards a theory of adaptive transnationalism

Drawing on the insights from our empirical findings and existing theoretical frameworks, we propose "Adaptive Transnationalism" as a new conceptual framework for understanding the dynamic processes through which migrants navigate multiple identities, maintain and transform transnational connections, and construct new forms of belonging in their host societies.

We define Adaptive Transnationalism as a dynamic process through which migrants actively reshape their identities, practices, and social connections in response to new cultural contexts, while maintaining and transforming ties to their places of origin. This process involves the creative adaptation of cultural practices, the negotiation of intersecting identities, and the formation of new communities that transcend traditional ethnic and national boundaries.

At the core of Adaptive Transnationalism is the recognition of migrants' active agency. Rather than being passive subjects of transnational forces, migrants are seen as active agents shaping their transnational experiences. This extends Glick Schiller et al.'s (1992) concept of transnationalism by emphasizing the transformative nature of migrants' actions. Furthermore, Adaptive Transnationalism emphasizes the creative adaptation of cultural practices and identities. Instead of simply maintaining their original cultural practices, migrants innovatively adapt these to their new contexts. This builds on Vertovec's (2009) "transnationalism as a social morphology" by highlighting the innovative ways migrants reshape their cultural practices.

The framework also underscores the intersectional negotiation of identity. Multiple aspects of identity, including gender, ethnicity, and religion, are continually negotiated and reshaped in the transnational context. This extends McCall's (2005) intercategorical approach to intersectionality by emphasizing the dynamic nature of identity negotiation in transnational contexts. Moreover, Adaptive Transnationalism recognizes the dynamic nature of community formation. Migrants construct new forms of community that go beyond traditional diaspora models, expanding on Glick Schiller et al.'s (2006) concept of "simultaneous incorporation" by emphasizing the active role of migrants in creating new, hybrid communities.

Finally, the framework highlights migrants' simultaneous engagement with multiple social fields. Migrants maintain connections to both their home and host societies, actively shaping each. This builds on Levitt and Glick Schiller's (2004) concept of "simultaneous embeddedness" by highlighting the bidirectional influence of migrants on both home and host societies. Adaptive Transnationalism offers a more nuanced understanding of transnational migration processes, synthesizing and extending key concepts from existing theoretical frameworks in light of our empirical findings. It emphasizes the creative and dynamic ways in which migrants construct their lives across borders, providing a valuable tool for analyzing the complex realities of transnational migration in the 21st century.

This framework addresses the limitations of previous approaches by recognizing the agency and creativity of migrants, accounting for the intersectional nature of migrant identities, highlighting the dynamic and bidirectional nature of cultural adaptation and community formation, and emphasizing the role of language and religious practice in shaping transnational experiences.

8. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study of Tatar women migrants in Almaty significantly advances our understanding of transnational identities, intersectionality, and religious practice in the context of migration. By introducing the concept of "Adaptive Transnationalism," we offer a nuanced framework that captures the dynamic, creative processes through which migrants actively shape their identities and communities across transnational spaces. This framework moves beyond static notions of transnationalism, emphasizing the agency and ingenuity of migrants as they adapt to new contexts while maintaining and transforming ties to their places of origin.

The experiences of Tatar women migrants in Almaty reveal the complex, multifaceted nature of transnational migration in the 21st century. These women are not merely navigating between two worlds; they are actively constructing new, transnational ways of being. Their stories highlight how migrants creatively adapt to new environments, negotiating multiple identities and forming communities that transcend traditional national and ethnic boundaries.

The concept of Adaptive Transnationalism provides a fresh perspective on how migrants actively shape their experiences and identities across borders. This framework can guide future research and inform policy decisions in an increasingly interconnected world, helping to navigate the complexities of modern migration and fostering more inclusive and adaptive societies.

While acknowledging the valuable insights this study provides, it is important to recognize its limitations. The focused nature of our research – examining a specific ethnic group in a particular location with a small sample size – limits the generalizability of our findings. However, these limitations also open up promising avenues for future research.

Future studies could expand the scope of this research in several ways. Comparative analyses of different ethnic groups or examinations of similar processes in various host countries would allow for a more comprehensive test of the Adaptive Transnationalism framework across diverse contexts.

Longitudinal research designs could provide valuable insights into how these processes unfold over time, capturing the dynamic nature of identity formation and community building in transnational contexts. Additionally, as global connectivity continues to increase, investigating the role of digital technologies in facilitating Adaptive Transnationalism becomes increasingly crucial. Understanding how digital platforms and communication technologies influence transnational practices and identities could reveal new dimensions of this phenomenon.

Despite its limitations, this study makes a significant contribution to our understanding of transnational migration processes. By highlighting the agency, creativity, and resilience of Tatar women migrants in Almaty, it challenges us to reconsider our approaches to studying and managing migration in an increasingly interconnected world.

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