

# Debates on inter-ethnic marriages: assimilation or integration? The Turkish perspective

Mehmet Nuri Gültekin

University of Gaziantep. Department of Sociology  
mngultekin@gmail.com



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## Abstract

This paper opens a new debate on ethnic intermarriage between Kurdish and Turkish people in Turkey. It addresses how the institution of marriage has become a political subject in the wake of the foundation of the republic and classifies these marriages according to their social and cultural environment. In order to understand the phenomenon, it opens a sociological investigation into the assimilation, integration and hybridisation processes involved in intermarriage between Kurdish and Turkish people. This paper looks at spoken language as an instrument of cultural continuity and a vector for the transfer of cultural institutions to future generations within a traditional-patriarchal society. It establishes a connection between the subjects of assimilation, integration and hybridisation with those of intermarriage and language.

**Key words:** intermarriage; hybridisation; language; patriarchy; women; cultural change.

**Resumen.** *Debates sobre matrimonios interétnicos: ¿asimilación o integración? La perspectiva turca*

Este artículo abre un nuevo debate sobre los matrimonios interétnicos entre kurdos y turcos en Turquía. Trata sobre la transformación de la institución del matrimonio en un tema político tras la fundación de la república, y clasifica estos matrimonios según su entorno sociocultural. Para poder entender este fenómeno se inicia una investigación sociológica sobre los procesos de asimilación, integración e hibridación implicados en el matrimonio entre kurdos y turcos. Se analiza el idioma hablado como instrumento de continuidad cultural y como vector de transferencia a las generaciones futuras de las instituciones culturales en una sociedad patriarcal tradicional. Además, se establece una conexión entre asimilación, integración e hibridación, y los matrimonios interétnicos y el idioma.

**Palabras clave:** matrimonio interétnico; hibridación; idioma; patriarcado; mujeres; cambio cultural.

### Summary

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## 1. Introduction

The literature in Sociology has for decades been concerned with the dimensions of intermarriage, assimilation and integration (Barrington, 1981; Bugelski, 1961; Edgar, 2007; Marcson, 1951; Phillips, 2005; Song, 2009). As is known, these subjects can also relate to immigration, colonisation or the guest-worker issue in industrialised Western societies (Alba, 1986; Lambert and Taylor, 1988; Lee and Yamanaka, 1990; Tienda, 1980; Xie, 1997). Indeed, the problem of integration and assimilation has a long history, one stretching back as far as the social geography of the meeting and acculturation (or clashing) of peoples with different ethnic origins and backgrounds. Various sociological approaches attribute different causes and occurrences to this integration and assimilation in societies worldwide. For instance, the assimilation and integration of immigrants in Latin America differs from that of non-European guest workers in Germany, the Netherlands (Schinkel, 2011) or Sweden (Cretser, 1999). We also know of different types of assimilation and integration of people in Argentina (Baily, 1980), the US (Rosenfeld, 2002; Lewis Jr. and Ford-Robertson, 2010), and in European countries. In the same way, hybridisation of cultures in Britain through marriage between Commonwealth people does not resemble the assimilation of cultures seen elsewhere.

Marriage ties and kinship established through this structure are highly influential in traditional societies. But intermarriage has complex dimensions, and works differently in every sphere of social life (Price and Zubrzycki, 1962). Political and ideological causes can turn intermarriage into integration of different ethnic or cultural groups, and acculturation of people living in different regions or social stratifications. These intermarriage events may contain one-sided or reciprocal assimilation of the couple, and integration of different ethnic culture or values.

In this last regard, assimilation, integration and hybridisation are the key perceptions in intermarriage, forming the focus of much of the debate on the subject at different levels. The complexity, potential incompatibility or social permeability within these unions mean that interpretations can span a variety of homogenous or heterogeneous marriage processes in different societies worldwide. In addition, three perceptions can be found at a variety of social levels. For instance, one marriage may at first illustrate assimilation, followed later by integration. Similarly, assimilation can lead to integration, which in turn may lead to cultural hybridisation.

Marriage is the oldest established form of human behaviour providing kinship ties and an avenue for peacemaking between tribes. Beyond this, it does not only imply kinship; marriage can also be an exchange of goods and culture. Thus every marriage, be it homogamy or heterogamy, contains its own acculturation, assimilation and integration process in accordance with its social environment. In addition, social and historical conditions lead to different events and interpretations on a regional basis. Human relationships within intermarriage exist in their own social reality, which must be understood in its historical and political context. In pre-modern times within the tribal social order marriage and its results had different dimensions to those of modern times. In the wake of the nation-state building of modern times, intermarriage has been a device for the application of the ideological framework of political structures. Nonetheless, despite these temporal, regional and political factors, debates on intermarriage share the same conceptual foci: integration, assimilation and cultural hybridisation.

This paper addresses Kurdish-Turkish intermarriages from the perspective of the assimilation and integration they realise in different regions and at the level of everyday social life in Turkey. It opens a new debate on Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage on the basis of both Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002), and KONDA (1993) survey findings. In addition to the existing debate on this subject, we want to introduce new approaches to integration, assimilation and hybridisation through different types of intermarriage occurring between Kurds and Turks within the social context of modern Turkey.

## 2. Intermarriage, population and language

The family has a key role in cultural transfer to future generations in traditional social structure (Banks, 1972; Galvin, 2001). The function of culture and tradition transfer and the importance of marriage relationships underline their importance for society, particularly within a patriarchal context (Altuntek, 1993; Balaman, 1982; Delaney, 2001).

The exchange of women between social groups or families can be of great significance (Yücel, 2008). Strong allegiances and enmities alike have been perpetuated by women or marriages between kinship groups, villages and other small communities. The first requirement for a new kinship is marriage, which then creates a blood tie. Marriage ties are like a bridge, with effects growing down through the generations and over the years among Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Mesopotamian and other nomadic people (Solinas, 1995; Tillion, 2006). A Kurdish saying emphasises the importance of consanguinity: *"Blood never turns into water!"*

The marriage of two people brings about more complex and wide-reaching impacts within the system of kinship relationships. In the traditional social system in particular, in the absence of literary cultural institutions, the language spoken in everyday life is the main instrument for the transfer of cultural heritage (Hassanpour *et al*, 1996). Teaching language to the new

generation and preserving it in day-to-day life forms the primary way of keeping traditions and cultural identities intact and resisting assimilation in the modern world. This makes learning and teaching of language essential within this context; in fact keeping a language alive and transferring it to the next generation is more than just *learning*. In this regard, intermarriage between Kurds and Turks presents numerous concepts in terms of assimilation and integration through language: social conditions; traditional views on women; the political and ideological modernisation processes of the state; and Kurdish society itself.

It should also be underlined that the assimilation processes of Kurds do not only relate to marriage between Kurds and Turks. Despite Kurds' predominant homogamy, they cannot speak Kurdish either, particularly in urban communities. We therefore have to be careful when explaining assimilation, integration and hybridisation due to intermarriage. In addition, assimilation and integration are only two causes of the cultural hybridisation faced by Kurds in Turkey. Furthermore, Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage has further ideological dimensions and effects than are currently known. Many difficulties and obstacles face those pursuing the study of ethnic, politic and statistical complexities in Turkey.

The first of these difficulties, which also applies to Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage, is understanding how the institution of marriage relates to political factors, and to what extent it is the result of wider cultural-political outputs. This paper aims to examine the general characteristics of Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage and its cultural outcomes. In particular, it will assess the context of language and culture within the framework of intermarriage.

The second relates to statistical data. According to recent statistical projections (KONDA, 1993, *cited in* Akçura, 2008), since, there are 3 million people (Kurds and Turks) with kinships ties to other ethnic groups by marriage in Turkey's population of 74 million. This rate and figure may be higher or lower there is no known official registration, information and research data (at least, none that is publically available) related to "Kurds" and other ethnic groups in the country. This is because the state assumes all citizens to be legally "Turkish" – despite their possessing different ethnic origins, languages or dialects – including Kurds. Only very small groups and ethnic communities identified as "Non-Muslim" in accordance with the Lausanne Treaty of 1924 are recognised (Ahmad, 1999; Zürcher, 2009).

The third difficulty does not relate to statistical data but is also to be found in political, academic and population estimates and analyses in Turkey. Any attempt at an ethnic definition of the population, be it based on an academic, political or demographic assertion, is inevitably be regarded as a grave mistake from square one.

The final problem is defining the term "Kurd". Here it must be remembered that there are deep differences between a person who identifies himself/herself as a Kurd, someone of Kurdish origin and someone with Kurdish ancestors; we have to acknowledge that definition. The classification of a population

on the basis of mother tongue, everyday language or official language may lead to arbitrary conclusions.

### 3. Turkish wives, Kurdish husbands: the other side of marriage and traditionalism

There are two important studies in the intermarriage field in Turkey, and we will debate these results. The first was made by a private survey company (KONDA) in 1992, the second was carried out by Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002); this second survey analysed the Turkish Health and Demography Statistics of 1993 and 1998. Both pieces of research tried to estimate the rate of marriage between Kurds and Turks, as well as the effects of class, job and geography on this process (Table 1 and Table 2). The results of two studies show that the general form of intermarriage amongst Turks and Kurds is between Kurdish husbands and Turkish wives.

The findings of both studies indicate the existence of a rising trend in Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage. Another clear finding is the low rate of Kurdish wives within intermarriage. This second fact is key in understanding the issue.

**Table 1.** Percentages of ethnically mixed marriages of Turks and Kurds, and ratios of ethnic homogamy

	Marriage Cohort			Total
	Before 1976	1976-1988	1989-1998	
Turkish males	0.7	1.2	1.7	1.2
Turkish females	1.4	1.5	1.8	1.5
All Turks	1.0	1.3	1.7	1.4
Kurdish males	9.4	8.9	10.2	9.4
Kurdish females	5.2	7.2	9.5	7.5
All Kurds	7.3	8.1	9.8	8.5
Total	1.8	2.3	3.0	2.4
Odds ratio	1354*	864*	520*	793*
N	6.116	9.984	7.038	23.138

\*p<0.001.

Source: Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002: 429)

**Table 2.** Kurdish-Turkish kinship and marriage relationships

	Percentage (%)
Kurds (with matrilineal and patrilineal linkages)	7.67
Kurds (with patrilineal and kinship linkages)	7.71
Kurds (with matrilineal and kinship linkages)	7.76
Kurds (with patrilineal linkages)	9.94
Kurds (with matrilineal linkages)	9.50
People (who has Kurdish kinships)	10.64
People (with Kurdish kinships/matrilineal/patrilineal linkages)	3.30

Source: KONDA (1993) cited in Akçura (2008: 318)

One of the reasons for the low rate of Kurdish wife/Turkish husband marriages is the still-strong semi-feudal values system and cultural forms that keep women in seclusion or imprison them in the village, in the home or under their relatives' tutelage (Yalçın-Heckmann, 2006; Çağlayan, 2007). With this semi-feudal or patriarchal mentality, women are viewed solely as an embodiment of "honour" and as mothers not individuals. Because of these patriarchal values, men want to "protect" or "repress" their women; in other words they assume that protecting and repressing women is the main duty of the tribe's men (Koğacioğlu, 2009). When society encounters the modernisation processes perpetuating the state's ideological mores, the nature of the culture in this traditional social structure dictates that men are the first to encounter the outside world's conditions (Stevens, 1996).

The first relationship of this structure with the outside world is education. This means attending modern institutions like schools and encountering national state values there. Perhaps not all, but at least some from the closed community experience significant changes in this way. Men, who have greater access to education facilities, inevitably begin to be alienated from their traditional structure. These men gain new or modern social status and economic power as result of destroying their traditional or tribal values. It is these educated men in an urban social environment who marry Turkish or non-Kurdish women. Conversely, marriages between Turkish men and Kurdish women, the latter of whom are imprisoned by traditional social structure, are prevented from increasing. These women cannot access the educational and modern opportunities men are able to. Thus we encounter more marriages between Kurdish husbands and Turkish wives.

We must also separate Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage in Turkey from intermarriage between those from different Western and developed modern societies taking place elsewhere. For instance, the marriage of an Italian woman and a Frenchman lacks the same effective power of change on their national cultural continuity (Bagchi, 1981; Jovic, 2001; Kalmijn, 1998; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009; Smits, 2009; Song, 2009).

Imprisoning women in the home, the community or the village in order to limit their employment potential or education negatively impacts the development of "modern" behaviour among Kurdish women. There is a clear increase in the male rate of Kurdish-Turkish marriages due to the male values system prevalent in the patriarchy. This trend continues from the 1960s to the 2000s, albeit with small periodic irregularities.

The powerlessness of Kurdish women in the marriage market in comparison with their rivals derives from their being kept outside the modern education system and the extreme control exercised over their bodies and attitudes by their relatives (Yücel, 2008; Korteweg and Yurdakul, 2009; Parla, 2001). This tight protection and seclusion has a variety of outcomes.

The suppression of women in every way and their oppression by the perception of "honour" always requires a "kinship system observer" (Delaney, 2001). In this way, women become the main agent carrying masculine semi-

feudal perceptions and are hence imprisoned in the cultural geography of pre-modern tribal relationships. Meanwhile, men have contact with external modern educational opportunities and circles of assimilation. As a man's educational level increases, he has less and less chance of meeting an equally educated Kurdish woman. This leads to an increasing chance of his marrying a non-Kurdish woman. Likewise, a man of a lower educational level has less chance of marrying a woman from a more educated background than him (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002). Nonetheless, there have been many changes within this population over the last 20 years (Mutlu, 1996; van Bruinessen, 2003), thanks to modernisation, migration to urban centres and increasing access to education (Hassanpour *et al.*, 1996) due to violence in the predominantly Kurdish south-east. This has led to new forms and criteria in partner choices among both men and women.

There is a further interesting fact here: women who suffered segregation under masculine cultural codes speak the Kurdish language, using it in everyday life and transferring it to coming generations until school age, largely due to their own uneducated situation. This creates a significant paradoxical dilemma for Kurds and their cultural world. Despite their lack of education, women lie at the centre of Kurdish language and culture. Without obtaining a higher educational level, without a greater chance to access urban life, women try to protect the culture together with the language. There is not only the effect of official pressure to consider. In the author's opinion, the main problem is the impact of modernisation and urbanisation on Kurdish women and Kurdish men. That is, there is an internal assimilation process under way within Kurdish homogeneity. This is because the one way to be successful in education and economic life, and to climb the bureaucratic ladder, is to forget their main language or to conceal it in every sphere in which the state is present.

All these compulsions cause an internal or self-assimilation process among Kurds. Most Kurdish couples speak Kurdish between themselves, but the communication process in Kurdish is cut off when they communicate with their children at home; they speak Turkish with their children in order to support their school life and future interests. Therefore, despite Kurds' long history of nation-building, such efforts have less visible results against this contradictory backdrop. Cultural identity and nation-building attempt to remake the language in the form of slogans and nostalgic phenomena. A clear example of this is giving Kurdish names to children and listening to Kurdish music. In reality, this situation creates odd behaviour, such as using the Kurdish language only to contact old people or ceasing to use it altogether. This mechanism remains true even if both sides of the couple are Kurds. Addressing Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage sheds further light upon this phenomenon, however.

Research shows that the class and geographical influences on Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage are considerable (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002; Akçura, 2008), and intermarriage is far less common between ethnic groups in regions where Kurds have a larger population. Each ethnic group creates its

own homogamy. Without doubt, one cause of this is demand in the marriage market. Thus in big cities every Kurd and Turk has a logical obligation in terms of choice of partner. Although semi-feudal values give men a chance to overcome these traditional barriers, women remain bound by them.

This patriarchal social order changes girls' fate, meaning that modern, educated Kurdish men cannot easily find Kurdish women like them. Kurdish men given the chance for change deprive the women belonging to their ethnic or tribal group of the same opportunities. As a result of this cycle they cannot find Kurdish women with the same educational or modern qualities in big cities (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002).

This continuously generates unequal relationships between men and women, as well as leaving the perpetuation of the Kurdish language and culture to women with rural, old-fashioned, "peasant" lifestyles; they also live in tribal or semi-feudal conditions. These traditional values and their agents cannot access mainstream culture and instead reproduce rurality. Consequently, workers, the cheap labour force, peasants, illiterate or semi-literate people, and those with traditional and tribal values try to construct a related Kurdish identity<sup>1</sup>.

Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage provides some interesting results when compared to Kurdish homogamy. As noted earlier, it is largely the case that Kurdish men marry Turkish women, rather than vice versa. But education, class and job prospects also play a role. Kurdish women are disadvantaged in the marriage market due to a lack of education or other modern traits. All the negative effects of a patriarchal society limit Kurdish women. Kurdish men perpetuate this asymmetric relationship and status with their education, urbanity and freedom of movement; all consequences of being born at an advantage and in credit culturally. In this unequal structure men have better luck and an abundance of opportunities in the marriage market in terms of choice when compared to women. They expect their wives to be modern, educated and to hold different values from the traditional ones the men have imposed upon their own sisters and female relatives. This is largely a reflection of the ironic historical and cultural situation of the Kurdish people – or at least of its male majority. Of course this also represents a deep cultural contradiction for the Kurdish man, who deems the semi-feudal, patriarchal lifestyle and boundaries to be proper and correct, and who sometimes applies violence against his women in the name of "honour".

Kurdish masculinity and the patriarchal social cultural value system deem education, modern behaviour and work opportunities for their female relatives "dishonourable". However, once they obtain modern qualifications they begin to search for Turkish (or other) women with an education and the same other modern qualifications they termed dishonourable. This is a clear display of the

1. We generally encounter the paradoxical structure of this view when an ethnic Kurdish identity is considered. People who do not or cannot speak Kurdish are restricted to simply listening to Kurdish music and referring to their ethnic origins or historical background in their children's names.

results of late modernisation and the cultural transformation of the traditional patriarchal social system.

Research shows that Kurds and other ethnic groups had scant marriage relationships with other groups when they lived in localised societies (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002; Akçura, 2008). This can be understood on the basis of a consanguineous social life and order constructed around kinship (Boulay, 1984; Magnarella and Türkdoğan, 1973). But we have witnessed an increasing trend in intermarriage amongst different ethnic groups with urbanisation and its erosive effect on traditionalism. In line with the increasing freedoms of the urban space come rising levels of intermarriage. This is a clear and indisputable outcome<sup>2</sup>.

Intermarriage between Kurds and Turks appears to date back at least a thousand years, to the historical invasion by Turks of Asia Minor during the 11th century. On this basis it can also be claimed that intermarriage continued until 90 or 100 years ago with little impact from political considerations. In the author's opinion, these intermarriage patterns changed with the young nation-state of the republic, when intermarriage took on different meanings and roles than was previously the case. Prior to that, not only between Turks and Kurds, but marriages between Arabs, Armenians or Caucasians (Çerkez) bore no similarity to those of the modern period: all marriages between local groups had "equal" meaning in pre-modern times.

The main change came in the 20<sup>th</sup> century following the nation-state construction, and Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage should be viewed through this modern nation prism. The young republic took its real form after 1923, despite claims of its origins lying in the French Revolution (Ahmad, 1999; Karpas, 2003). The Turkish version of the nation-state differed from that of industrialised Western societies (Zürcher, 2009), with "Turkification" of the entire population forming the main official state ideology. As a result of this ideological approach, the state insisted there was no Kurdish population and no Kurdish language (and indeed no other ethnic languages) as an alternative to Turkish in Turkey (Akçura, 2008). In addition, they tried to prove that Kurds were originally Turkish but simply lived in the mountains. This official state view was perpetuated until the 1990s (van Bruinessen, 2003). Despite significant improvements, this ideological approach is still common, especially amongst ultra-nationalists.

Thus the state has stimulated two important ideas to realise its ideology. First, the prohibition of the Kurdish language (along with other ethnic languages) in all public usage. Second, defining the prerequisite for participation in all political, economic, bureaucratic and military organs as being the assimilation, refusal of ethnic origin, denial or forgetting of Kurdish culture

2. Turks and Kurds' intermarriage is affected by ethnic tensions in the country; when these peak rates of intermarriage decrease. Furthermore, prejudices against Kurds abound in the rhetoric of daily political life's "usual" dimensions. Nonetheless, Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage has always been seen in Turkey.

and identity. They closed every path in public life to Kurdish. The Kurdish language or being a Kurd has become associated with peasantry, patriarchy, tribal life, belonging to a pre-modern tradition and illiteracy. Indeed this has come about not only through the state's official application but also by Kurds' own efforts<sup>3</sup>.

This paper now goes on to categorise intermarriage between Kurds and Turks under a few titles using the results of Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits (2002), and the KONDA survey (*cited in Akçura, 2008*). It also looks more closely at these marriages as assimilation-integration-hybridisation or acculturation of people and ethnic groups.

### *3.1. Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage in rural social life*

Intermarriage among ethnic groups can be viewed locally under the criteria of social class, religion or sect. The level of intermarriage between Kurds and Turks changes according to where they live. In addition, these intermarriages had different functions before and after the advent of the nation-state. In pre-modern life Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage had the same motives as homogamy; fame, honour, nobility, kinship, neighbourhood cohesion, etc. These marriages tied Kurds and Turks on both sides, who would learn each others' languages voluntarily and the children born of these inter-ethnic marriages spoke two languages.

But the function of these marriages took on different dimensions following state domination and denial of the Kurdish identity. The multilingual dimension of these marriages was destroyed over the course of the last century by the state's ideological concept and by state institutions such as the national education system, economic pressures and the bureaucracy.

Turkish language and *being Turkish* were the official identity under the state's definition and the state ideology permeated every sphere of social life. Children born into this heavy political and ideological climate had to learn (accept?) that the Kurdish language must be forgotten and they had to prepare themselves for these conditions at a variety of educational and institutional levels.

### *3.2. Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage in small cities and towns*

Various ethnic groups live in small cities and towns in south-eastern and eastern Anatolia, and despite political tensions in the country intermarriage amongst these groups occurs. As is the case in the societal structures in this region, the key factors in intermarriage there are class, religious, sectarian, con-

3. It should be noted that speaking Kurdish does in itself refer largely to the peasantry amongst Kurds themselves (This part doesn't quite work for me – maybe 'refer to the peasantry within the Kurds themselves?') until recent decades. For example, those migrating to a city would almost immediately start speaking Turkish with their children and relatives. The author views this as *voluntarily assimilation*.

sanguineous or other kinship ties. Thus, where Kurds and Turks live alongside one another homogamy is common despite the prevalent ethnic tensions in the country. Of course, marriages like these have been affected by the modernisation process and the resulting cultural assimilation. Ultimately the nation-state modernisation and the official state identity aimed to destroy all local differences and to integrate them within the majority. Reciprocal acculturation was seen during pre-modern periods, but the acculturation of intermarriage (hybridisation) turned into assimilation in modern day Turkey. In this way ethnic groups and communities were suppressed by the dominant official state culture.

Until the last few decades, possessing *Alevi* or *Sunni* sectarian values was more significant than ethnic ties of marriage in south-eastern and eastern regions of Turkey. Despite the importance of these strong ties, ethnic origin has become the prominent identity in recent years. However, these marriages do not display reciprocal acculturation, only one-sided assimilation. Language in particular, and culture as its agent, has been the institution most affected in this process; hybridisation in these marriages only appears as speaking Turkish with a Kurdish accent!

From a cultural perspective there is no means of integration in this social structure because integration requires tolerance of the existence of the “other” (Jovic, 2001; Kalmijn, 1998; Song, 2009); the social structure becomes a process of exchange, and acculturation is reciprocal. But assimilation, especially that seen in Turkey, rejects, denies or terms a “deviation” all existence of the “other” cultural identity.

This assimilation continues today in Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage, despite Kurds’ nation-building efforts.

### *3.3. Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage in big cities*

The migration process has always been active in Turkey (Ak it and Akçay, 1998; Özbay, 1998; Peker, 1998). Many kinds of people are brought together in big cities due to these migration movements (Karpas, 2003). Major cities (such as Istanbul, Ankara, Antalya and Izmir) and modern lifestyles do not permit ethnic groups to close themselves off from the outside world; these metropolises have the power to eradicate traditional boundaries (Alba, 2005). The Kurdish population living in Turkey has been confronted with a huge change in metropolitan life. Some of this population overcame the barriers of class and cultural structure through modern education and new job opportunities. The remainder, even if unable to resist urban life in the long term, retains relation patterns peculiar to Kurdish society.

The majority of Turkish-Kurdish intermarriages appear in such an environment. In addition, life in the metropolis not only affects marriage between Turks and Kurds, it also affects Kurdish homogamy: greater assimilation and fewer integration processes are clearly displayed. These marriages may be classified under two headings as follows.

### 3.3.1. *Marriage between well-educated people in big cities*

Marriage amongst well-educated Kurdish men and Turkish women is the most common form of Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage in Turkey (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002). This is because men can more easily disregard close kinship relationships and dispense with traditional values. Thus in the majority of intermarriages the husband is Kurdish and the wife Turkish.

University-educated Kurds with professional jobs are particularly likely to choose partners from outside their ethnic group. This was very much the case between 1970 and 2000, according to statistical estimates, when Kurds migrated en masse from the south-eastern region to the southern and western coastal regions of Turkey (Akşit and Akçay, 1998; Karpat, 2003). During this period, modern educational facilities and urbanisation also affected eastern and south-eastern Anatolia. The consequences of this mass movement were interesting: when a well-educated Kurd wanted to marry it proved difficult to find a Kurdish woman of the same education level, as noted earlier. This was the result of Kurdish society's treatment of women and resulted in more Kurdish men marrying Turkish women. The same situation is valid for a Turkish man; if he wanted to marry a Kurdish woman with the same qualifications he could not find one easily.

Here it should be emphasised that assimilation does not occur solely in Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage, it also occurs in homogamous marriages between Kurds. We assume that ethnic tensions in recent decades could negatively affect these marriages, as could the consequences of urbanisation and migration. As is known, modern education or working conditions are prevalent in big cities, and hence it is here that most intermarriage occurs. The first and most important factor for Kurds is unhesitating support for the state's ideology. The bureaucratic obstacles Kurds face can only be lifted if their behaviour and attitudes are adjusted accordingly. In short, voluntary assimilation occurs. One way in which this takes place in homogamy is by parents' not speaking Kurdish with their children. This forgetting or suppressing of the language and culture is a conscious process. This is the consequence of the assimilation policy that spanned the 1920s to the late 1990s and to some extent continues today.

### 3.3.2. *Marriage between working class individuals or former-peasants in big cities.*

Migration and urbanisation did not only affect well-educated people, it also affected the less educated: villagers, the young and the middle-classes. Huge labour force migrations occurred towards Turkey's big cities as part of rapid urbanisation. Despite the south-eastern and eastern cities' characteristic transformations, the less-educated Kurdish population who migrated to other regions is very conservative when compared with well-educated Kurds.

In this period marriages between Kurds and their neighbours in shanty-town developments (*gecekondu* in Turkish) increased. What is interesting here is that, in contrast to the usual trend, these marriages display more Kurdish wives and Turkish husbands (Gündüz-Hoşgör and Smits, 2002). The definitive fact here is that class relationships or proximity proved more important than ethnicity.

Nonetheless, despite these being equal class relationships, language assimilation continues to be one-sided. This is because assimilation itself originates not only from intra-family processes; there are many outside influences such as school, media, work and the labour market. All of these affect transformation, social change and the acculturation of the family structure.

### *3.4. Extra-ordinary intermarriage of Turks and Kurds*

#### *3.4.1. Soldier marriages*

Intermarriage between young Kurds and Turks can occur when young men are on military service (this remains obligatory in Turkey for all able-bodied men over 18). No official statistical data exists, but cases can be observed on occasion (Gültekin, 2010)<sup>4</sup>. Most of these marriages take place on the elopement of women with young men. The husbands or wives may be Kurdish or Turkish; there is no difference between the couples. The most important factor is that all the women in such intermarriage with soldiers come from villages or small towns. These inter-ethnic elopements became a way for young girls to overcome traditional family rules and closed social circles. If the young man has a job or guaranteed income he has a better chance of success. Again, however, the processes of assimilation and acculturation in these marriages remain the same as in other types.

#### *3.4.2. Turkish-Kurdish intermarriage as a second wife*

This last type is very rare. The marrying off of a daughter can be a source of income for the father, leading to her being evaluated as an economic commodity (Schlegel and Eloul, 1988; Parveen, 2007). For a number of reasons, men from other parts of Turkey may want to marry a second time, or have perhaps lost their wives. They marry poor girls from the eastern or south-eastern regions<sup>5</sup>, paying a dowry for the privilege. This marriage type is very rare, but its consequences in terms of assimilation remain the same.

## **4. Conclusion**

Different assimilation processes are at play in the intermarriage of Kurds in Turkey. This differs from the integration and cultural hybridisation occurring in Western societies due to immigration, guest workers, colonial history and the post-colonial integration process. This characteristic of assimilation is related to Anatolia and Turkey's socio-cultural structural history, ethnic complexity and political realities.

Assimilation, integration and hybridisation process are extremely complicated for Kurds, and intermarriage between Kurds and Turks is just one part

4. During this rural survey researchers met with five couples from two villages.

5. <http://www.yuksekovahaber.com/haber/hayatin-gulmedigi-kadinlar-33104.htm> - retrieved 13 July 2011 <http://www.tkd.org.tr/index.php> - retrieved 13 July 2011

of the picture. Despite a lack of concrete statistical data, Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage can be viewed as an assimilation of one culture (Kurdish) into another (Turkish), reinforced by political, economic and educational institutions. One of the forms this assimilation assumes relates to the learning and teaching of language. However, intermarriage is not the only cause of language assimilation among Kurds; other factors include urbanisation, migration and alterations in class patterns.

Intermarriage between Kurds and Turks can be realised at any social level. Regional and countrywide conditions affect the tone of these marriages, but language assimilation is not bound by geographical consideration. The nation-state policies and ideological construct of a social reality in Turkey means that intermarriage has become so politicised that even its results can be viewed as ideological or political.

In summary, Kurdish-Turkish intermarriage rarely means hybridisation or integration of two different cultures. The norm is for couples to comprise a Kurdish husband and Turkish wife and for a process of cultural assimilation to occur in which the Turkish language usurps the place of Kurdish in the home. This is rooted in the relatively low social status of women in the traditional-patriarchal social system, despite the variety of levels at which such marriages may occur.

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