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## Understanding the Culture of Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois: A Case Study

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## Understanding the Culture of Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois: A Case Study

### Abstract

This study focuses on the cultural characteristics of Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois in the United States. By trying to understand the culture of the participants, I sought to shed light on how the Ahiska Turks managed to cope with the hardship they experienced and yet preserved their ethnic identities. In this multicase study, I interviewed six male Ahiska Turks. As a result of my analyses, eight themes emerged: family, religion (i.e., Islam), language (i.e., Turkish), communal life, endogamy, authoritarianism, oppression against the preservation of culture and identity, and education for upward mobility. The Ahiska Turks' agrarian way of life, the preservation of their language, and their preference of integration to the larger society for acculturation make them who they are today.

### Keywords

Ahiska Turks, Meskhetian Turks, Culture, Acculturation, Integration

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## Understanding the Culture of Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois: A Case Study

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Culture plays such a significant role in human life that no society can exist without it. All norms, value systems, and ways of conducts are the products of culture. Culture determines how an individual should act, dress, talk, eat, be educated, interact, believe, etc. Scholars of human development believe that there is a strong relation between cultural practices and the development of how members of a particular society think, remember, reason, solve problems, act, and behave. In this sense, every individual in all communities are "cultural participants" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 10). Figuring out what is meant by culture and how people acquire culture is an essential step to start investigating a culture and its participants. According to LeVine (1982), culture is "an organized body of rules concerning the ways in which individuals in a population should communicate with one another, think about themselves and their environments, and behave toward one another and toward objects in their environments" (p. 4). LeVine's (1982) definition of culture has an anthropological perspective positing that culture determines human behavior and human adjustment to the surrounding environment, and thus, helps people organize a collective life.

Each culture has its own set of rules that the members of that particular population have to follow. These rules are both implicit and explicit. When a rule is recognized and justified by the members of a particular society it becomes institutionalized. In other words, sociocultural environments are institutions that regulate norms. Individuals must follow the institutionalized rules (cultural norms) in order to fit in with the community (LeVine, 1982).

Phinney and Ong (2007) posit that both individual and collective cultures have fundamental importance in the identity formation process of immigrants. Even though there does not seem to be a consensus on the definition of ethnic identity, the term refers to people's sense of belonging to their origins (Phinney & Ong, 2007). Ethnic identity is

the result of both individual and collective cultures, which plays a pivotal role in the lives of immigrants in their new land (Phinney & Ong, 2007).

In the following research, I attempted to understand the Ahiska Turks' culture in the Wheaton, Illinois area of the United States, investigating if the Ahiska Turks had experienced any hardship in their new land, how they were coping with those difficulties, and whether they were concerned with preserving their ethnic identities (and how they would achieve that goal). Understanding the culture and the cultural identities of Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois, would serve not only the Ahiska Turks in Wheaton and those entities that serve them, but also the scholars of culture and immigrants at large.

### **Historical Background of Ahiska Turks**

**Region.** The Ahiska Turks are originally from Southern Georgia, known as Meskhetia (Ahiska), which is a region that is surrounded by mountains. It is near the Turkish border.

**Culture.** Aydingun, Harding, Hoover, Kuznetsov, and Swerlord (2006) provide a detailed description of the culture of Ahiska Turks and state that Ahiska Turks are Sunni Muslims who observe Islamic festivals as well as arranged marriages, circumcisions and funerals according to Islamic traditions. They are a predominantly agricultural people who also frequently breed livestock. Villages are important organizational settings as almost every Ahiska Turk can trace his or her origin to a village in Ahiska, Georgia. Ahiska Turks value family and kinship strongly. The predominant language of everyday communication among Ahiska Turks is an Eastern Anatolian dialect of Turkish (Aydingun et al., 2006).

**Discrepancy in terms.** In the literature, there is no consensus on whether to address the group as Ahiska Turks, Meskhetian Turks, or Meskhetians (Aydingun et al., 2006). Even among the leaders of the population, there are differing preferences (Aydingun et al., 2006).

The term Meskhetian is preferred by those who claim that the population was ethnic Georgians who converted to Islam under Ottoman rule (Aydingun et al., 2006). The preference of this term comes from the underlying Georgian identity, which many Ahiska Turks refuse to use, as for them, it denies their Turkish origins (Aydingun et al., 2006).

While certain leaders of the population prefer Meskhetian Turks, others prefer Ahiska Turks, as they believe that the Turkish identity is emphasized. The term refers to the biggest city where Ahiska Turks used to live in Georgia: Akhaltsikhe (Aydingun et al., 2006). I, too, have chosen to address them as the *Ahiska Turks* throughout this study, as the study participants prefer to be addressed as such. The community center where I first contacted the participants of the study is called The Ahiska Turks (Meskhetian) Community Center. During my initial contact with the participants, I asked the meaning of Ahiska and one of the participants stated, "We are Ahiska Turks, also some people call us Meskhetians or Meskhetian Turks." The participants did not refer to themselves as "Meskhetian" or "Meskhetian Turks" other than to clarify and give more information regarding the different terms. Similarly, Aydingun (2002a) reports that the participants of fieldwork conducted in various countries where Ahiska Turks live preferred the term

“Ahiska Turks” as opposed to Meskhetian Turks. Aydingun (2002a, 2002b) refers to the population as “Ahiska Turks” and puts “Meskhetians” in brackets.

**Deportation history.** Since they were one of the peoples whom Stalin labeled as “untrustworthy populations,” the Ahiska Turks were forced out from Meskhetia (Ahiska) by the Soviet army in mid-November, 1944 (Aydingun et al., 2006, p. 6). According to Aydingun (2002), the Ahiska Turks along with eight other Soviet nationalities were deported from their lands in order to secure the frontier with Turkey in 1944. The Soviet authorities forced approximately 100,000 Ahiska Turks to resettle in various Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. However, this inhumane deportation resulted in the loss of twenty percent of the population (Aydingun et al., 2006; Swerdlow, 2006). The survivors became agricultural workers who were required to register several times a week with the local authorities. The authorities did not allow them to travel outside their designated settlements without permits and documentation (Aydingun et al., 2006). Even though the restrictions against the Ahiska Turks began to ease starting in 1956, the Soviet Georgian authorities did not let the Ahiska Turks return to their homeland. Therefore, most of the Ahiska Turks continued to live in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan (Aydingun et al., 2006).

In June 1989, due to the rise in nationalist tensions, a pogrom broke out in the Uzbek section of Fergana Valley in Uzbekistan. Approximately 100 Ahiska Turks lost their lives in the conflict (Swerdlow, 2006). As a result, Soviet troops evacuated 17,000 Ahiska Turks and forced them to resettle in Russia. That initial deportation was followed by another deportation of 70,000 Ahiska Turks, who were forced to leave the region and relocate to Russia (Aydingun et al., 2006; Swerdlow, 2006). About 13,000 Ahiska Turks settled in the Krasnodar region of Russia. However, the Krasnodar authorities did not recognize the Ahiska Turks (Swerdlow, 2006). They were discriminated against and harassed throughout their exile in Krasnodar (Aydingun et al., 2006). The treatment of the Krasnodar authorities was part of a systematic “soft ethnic cleansing” of the Ahiska Turks (Swerdlow, 2006, pp. 1838-1839).

**Current population demographics.** According to Aydingun et al. (2006), there are approximately 350,000 to 400,000 Ahiska Turks spread throughout different countries. There are about 100,000 Ahiska Turks in Azerbaijan, 600 to 1000 in Georgia, 150,000 in Kazakhstan, about 50,000 in Kyrgyzstan, about 90,000 in the Russian Federation, about 40,000 in Turkey, 10,000 in Ukraine, 15,000 in Uzbekistan, and about 12,000 in the U.S.

The literature on the Ahiska Turks, their culture, and their experiences in the U.S. is considerably limited. One of the comprehensive studies conducted on the Ahiska Turks in the U.S. focuses on the history, culture, and the experiences of Ahiska Turks in the U.S. (Aydingun et al., 2006) as presented above, while the other study also presented provides background information on the history of the Ahiska Turks and their resettlement process in the U.S., particularly commenting on the U.S. refugee resettlement program (Swerdlow, 2006). The culture of the Ahiska Turks and their experiences in the U.S. has not been studied, as I was unable to locate any research on this topic. Thus, this study attempts to address a gap in the literature. As well, this study aims to assist the members of the Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois in terms of increasing their voice, which would help the host society (i.e., the U.S.) understand the Ahiska Turks and their culture.

## Role of the Researcher

Culture and preserving culture has become a special interest of mine since I have been an international graduate student in the U.S. Coming from Turkey, I had never considered what it was like to live in an environment where the predominant culture was different than mine. After coming to the U.S. and having children, it has become a major concern for my wife and I how to help our children acquire Turkish culture and identity. I had heard about the long exile of the Ahiska Turks and when I learned that they had settled in Wheaton, IL, I was excited to hear their stories and learn from them. I especially wanted to hear what elements of their culture helped them remain who they are throughout their history, which would assist me to help my children gain and preserve their Turkish culture and identity.

Scholars of culture have long discussed the insider and outsider perspectives (see Geertz, 2000; Harris, 2001; Pike, 1954). The emic (insider) perspective attempts to examine culture in its own terms, whereas the etic (outsider) perspective tries to explore culture according to external standards (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). Critical approaches of research have questioned the dichotomous perspectives and suggested that the distinction between the emic and etic perspectives is not that clear-cut (Merriam et al., 2001). Despite the common notion that cultural insiders would easily access the culture under investigation and interpret it better, the insider's closeness to the culture could make the analyses biased (Bishop, 2005). In that I speak the language of the participants of this study, understand some of the non-verbal cues, and have access to the participants of the study, I am considered an insider. However, as Merriam et al. (2001) stated, I have experienced "moments of being both insider and outsider" (p. 416). Being from Turkey and speaking the language has provided me easy access to the Ahiska Turks. On the other hand, I felt like an insider and an outsider simultaneously at times. For example, one of the participants kept addressing me as *abi*, which means "older brother". However, the participant was much older than I am. The term *abi* is also used to express respect. The participant was using the term to indicate that he respects my position as a doctoral student and a researcher. The very same cultural respect also indicates the power dynamic that played a role in my relationship with the participants. Being a doctoral student at a university put me in a higher position in the eye of the participants, as one of the participants repeatedly stated that what he would say would not be of much help, as he was just a regular person. I also acknowledge the fact that I could have been biased and missed the opportunities for critical questions that an outsider would have asked. For example, the insider knowledge that I have prevented me from asking questions about the role of females or asking to interview female members of the community. In this regard, my gender has made me an outsider to the female members of the community. In addition, I am not familiar with the geographical context (i.e., Ahiska, Uzbekistan, and Krasnador) where the participants lived. The familial structure and practices (e.g., the parents living with the youngest son after all other children are married), the importance of communal life, and the oppression they experienced in the host countries (i.e., Uzbekistan and Russia) were all new to me.

It is thus critical to keep in mind that my role as the researcher in this study has influenced my interpretations and analyses of the data collected from the participants. Throughout the study, the emic and etic perspectives and the interchanging nature of

them represent lenses that I looked through, understood, interpreted, and made sense of the experiences of the participants of the study. It is my hope that the readers of this paper will strive to contemplate my role in every step of the research process, which may help them make better sense of the study.

## **Method**

### **Type of Inquiry**

Maxwell (2005) states that the research questions are and should be the determinant of the type of methodology to be used in a research project. In terms of research purposes, in qualitative methodology, deeper understandings and interpretations of a phenomenon is the end-purpose and the research findings are not meant to be generalized; on the contrary, it is contextualized (Maxwell, 2005). Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as “a situated activity that locates the observer in the world” (p. 3). Qualitative research helps us see the world through interpretation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The research questions underlying this study required a qualitative methodology, through which I, as the researcher, would be able to understand the culture of Ahiska Turks with the help of the thick descriptions that the participants provided.

The purpose of this study includes understanding the Ahiska Turks’ culture and identity and how they have managed to preserve these two. Consequently, I determined that a multicase study approach would help fulfill this purpose. According to Stake (2006), a multicase research design allows the researcher to closely examine multiple cases that are connected. The linked together cases help researchers better understand how “quintain” (i.e., the whole) functions (Stake, 2006, p. vi). In qualitative research, cases provide opportunities to examine various phenomena and then provide explanations of those phenomena (Stake, 2005). Stake (2000) identifies three types of case studies, one of which he calls collective case study. According to Stake (2000), a researcher can use a collective case study to “investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition” (p. 437). Collective case study is a collection of individual cases used as instruments to “provide insight into an issue or to redraw a generalization” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). The chosen cases can provide a deep understanding and “perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases” (Stake, 2000, p. 437). Merriam (1998) states the case study approach allows the researcher to “gain an in-depth understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (p. 19). Since the purpose of this study is to investigate the culture of the Ahiska Turks in Wheaton, Illinois, a multicase study method has allowed me to understand the underlying cultural factors that have contributed to the Ahiska Turks’ cultural survival while living their lives in exile. The collective cases have helped me identify the key themes, which in turn have helped me gain an understanding of the population and their general condition.

### **Sample Description**

Before I started to recruit the participants, I obtained permission from the Institutional Review Board of the university to conduct my research. In order to recruit the participants, I first contacted the director of The Ahiska Turks (Meskhetian)

Community Center in Wheaton, Illinois. After explaining my research interest, the director of the center agreed to help me meet potential participants. There were weekly meetings in the community center and the director invited me to one of the meetings. In the meeting, the director briefly introduced me to the Ahiskan Turks present at the center. They were pleased to hear of my research and one participant shared that they felt that someone should hear their voices. As my conversation progressed, I learned that the Ahiska Turks were quite used to having people interview them. Before they came to the U.S., reporters from Spain, Britain, and Turkey had visited and interviewed them. They seemed eager to make their voices heard. I explained my research interest and how I was interested in their stories, culture, and experiences.

I used purposive and convenience sampling techniques. According to Stake (2005), “even in the larger collective case studies, the sample size usually is much too small to warrant random selection. For qualitative fieldwork, we draw a purposive sample, building in variety and acknowledging opportunities for intensive study” (p. v451). After asking the Ahsika Turks that were present at the meeting for their contact information, ten acquiesced. Four of the ten decided not to participate in the study, resulting in a total of six participants.

All six participants were male and married with children. The youngest was about thirty-five years old and the oldest was about eighty years old. In order to fulfill the privacy and confidentiality requests of the participants, I have assigned pseudonyms to the participants.

Davud is a male in his late fifties and married with children. He is unemployed due to health issues. He received vocational education in Uzbekistan. He is living with his youngest son.

Ekrem is a male and married with children. He is a construction worker. He had attained a high school education in Uzbekistan.

Musa is a male and married with children. He has his own business and had received a high school education in Krasnador.

Osman is a male and married with children. He is living with his youngest son and his family. He is unemployed and had an elementary education. He was the oldest of the participants at around eighty years old.

Ramazan is a male and married with two children. He is working at a factory. He attained a high school education in Uzbekistan.

Suleyman is a male and married with children. He is working at a retail store. He completed a high school education in Uzbekistan.

### **Data Collection**

Three of the participants agreed to let me interview them in their homes and I interviewed the remaining three participants at the community center. I recorded all of the interviews with a digital voice recorder. Each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour. I followed a semi-structured interview in order to understand the different aspects of the culture of the participants. The interview questions included the following:

- 1) Describe their life before coming to the U.S.
  - a. What they used to do for a living before coming to the U.S.



- b. Where they lived
  - c. If they experienced any hardships
- 2) Describe their life now in the U.S.
- a. How they liked the life in the U.S.
  - b. If they experienced any hardships after coming to the U.S.
  - c. If so, how they overcame the difficulties

At certain points during the interviews, I asked the participants to elaborate on what they said in order to get richer data. As I started to transcribe the interviews, I realized that some points were not clear. As a result, I decided to interview those participants for the second time in order to get further clarification. I interviewed three participants for a second time. Those second round interviews lasted twenty minutes each. All the interviews were conducted in Turkish. After interviewing all six participants, I transcribed the interviews in Turkish, and then I translated the transcripts into English.

### **Data Analysis**

After translating the interviews, I analyzed the transcripts for content. Patton (2002) states that content analysis is the process of analyses of texts (e.g., interview transcripts) for themes and patterns that occur over and over again. In the content analysis of the transcript, I followed the coding in grounded theory proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990). One way of content analyzing a text is to inductively analyze the text for categories, themes, or patterns through “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 223). Open coding refers to the “part of analysis that pertains specifically to the naming and categorizing of phenomena through close examination of data” (p. 62). For example, while examining the transcripts of the interviews, I noticed that several participants stressed the importance of survival in exile.

Connecting categories takes place after open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). This step is called axial coding, which is defined as “a set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). As I was looking at the patterns that emerged during the open coding phase, I tried to look at causal relationship among categories. For example, I looked at other categories that would explain the strategies that the participants follow in order to “survive in exile”. “Filial piety” was another category that many participants stressed throughout the interviews. Filial piety ensures the obedience of the children to their parents and taking care of them in their old age. Since the old-age care is reliant on the family members, the survival of the elderly depends on filial piety.

Following the axial coding, selective coding is the next step, which is defined as “the process of selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). After noting down the categories in the open coding step, I searched for the connections between and among other categories that emerged in the previous phases of coding. Family, for example, seemed to be an important element of the cultural identities of Ahiska Turks. Both survival in exile and filial piety seemed to be part of “family,” which is one of the core categories that emerged throughout the analyses.

## Results

Eight themes emerged through the content analysis: religion (i.e., Islam), language (i.e., Turkish), communal life, family, endogamy, authoritarianism, oppression for the preservation of culture and identity, and education for upward mobility. Three themes (religion, language, and communal life) seemed to be the core elements of the Ahiska Turks' culture on which the other four themes (family, endogamy, authoritarianism, and education for upward mobility) stand. Each of these themes is presented in this section.

**Family.** Family is one of the central themes that emerged throughout my interviews. The patriarchal structure of the family emphasizes the importance of age and gender of the family members. The older members of the family (especially the father) are highly respected. The parents stay with the youngest son of the family. The participants also criticized the American family structure in this regard. According to Davud,

*We do whatever we have been taught by our grandfathers and grandmothers. We continue our traditions that are taught to us. For example, we are not leaving our mothers and fathers. What I mean is, for example, if there are four brothers in a family, it has been a tradition that the parents stay with the youngest brother. They help the older children get married and then stay with the youngest. They help him get married too, and then continue staying with him. These are our customs and traditions. There is no such thing like abandoning your parents in our culture. We take care of our parents until the end of their lives. We serve and respect our elders. We have learned and seen from our elders this way.*

The participants emphasized the significance of familial ties and relations. It can be understood from the above quote that it is not only the parents that are respected and followed, but also that the grandparents play an important role in transmitting the cultural values to younger generations. Showing respect to the older family members is one of the most important priorities for the participants of the study. Children learn from their extended family members the Ahiska Turks' way of life and continue to learn from them as they grow up. The elderly members of the family (usually the parents) do not have to worry about Social Security or how to take care of themselves, as this care guaranteed by the culture of the Ahiska Turks. The participants also emphasized an age-based hierarchy. Davud said, "The big brother is important. If there is no father, the big brother comes first. Respecting the big sister is also very important." As it can be understood from this quote, the participant tells of the importance of the age-based hierarchy in the family. Suleyman supported what Davud said:

*We have to be very careful here, in America. These are like the Russians in the time of the Soviets. For example, they do not take care of their parents. Everyone has a separate household. The mother and the child have different households. Everyone is for himself. Just like the Russians.*

*But we are not like them. But we have to preserve our traditions. We mustn't assimilate into their culture, because our culture, our traditions are better. If you abandon your mother or father, you are out of religion... We have to be very careful about our children. They mustn't assimilate into the culture here. We will not, Allah willing, assimilate into their culture just like we did not embrace it there. Allah willing, how we lived among the Russians all those years without assimilating into them, we did not embrace their culture. Our children grew up, for example, and did not become like them.*

Another participant, Musa, criticized the familial lifestyle in the U.S. He compared the Americans to the Russians. According to Musa, the familial life precedes individual interests. Individualism is seen as part of the host culture and Ahiska Turks do not appreciate it. The fundamental differences between the Ahiska Turks' culture and the host cultures (the cultures in Russia and the U.S.) make it easier to adhere to their own culture. The wider the differences are, the more they distance themselves from the host culture. From the above quote, it can also be inferred that the origin of the filial piety is tied to their religion--Islam. Musa also thinks that Allah discourages them from assimilating into the host culture, which is seen as somehow inferior. He regards the abandonment of elderly parents as a big sin. The influence of religion can also be seen here, as Islam commands its followers to take care of their fathers and mothers when they are in need of care. It is also obvious that they see a pattern in the host cultures. According to Musa, in both the Russian and American cultures, parents are neglected. In both cultures, the interests of the individual precede the interests of the family. He sees this as a threat to the survival of his own culture and identity. The children are seen as the future and, therefore, the protection of the future generations is seen as the key for the continuation of the culture and ethnic identity. Musa also criticized the materialistic gain. He regards it as unethical to abandon the parents and to later on make a claim for inheritance. It can be inferred that for Ahiska Turks nothing can take the place of family.

**Authoritarianism.** The participants of the study stated their concerns about the place of corporal punishment in disciplining their children. They raised the issue that the laws and the system here in the U.S. ban corporal punishment against children. They believe that parents should be able to discipline their children with corporal punishment when necessary. Ramazan said the following:

*There is something I do not like about this culture. They are telling our kids to tell the police if their parents beat them. I do not like this. Parents both love their kids and can therefore have the right to beat them. This does not mean that they could beat them to death. I am telling you, this law is not right. Which parent would harm his child? We are talking about mother and father. They would never ever harm their children. There is no such thing in Turkish culture.*

The very similar concern was voiced by Suleyman, who said, "Here you cannot touch your child to discipline him or her. I don't get it. How would you teach your child the right way when he doesn't obey you?" Both participants were very critical of the anti-

corporal punishment of children view in the U.S. They seem to think that corporal punishment is one of the fundamental aspects of the child-rearing process. The participants want their children to be obedient to their parents. They think that parents inherently do the right thing for their children and it is seen as a fundamental part of the culture that children should be obedient to their parents.

The authoritarian theme also emerged when they talked about international politics and criticized the U.S. involvement in Iraq. According to the participants, the former leader of Iraq (Saddam Hussein) had established order through force and coercion. Now, the lack of authority is the main reason for the disorder in Iraq. It can also be inferred that government intervention that is not in line with the culture is not appreciated, which can also be interpreted as the superiority of the cultural norms. Ekrem commented on the same issue:

*There needs to be laws that tell people what to do. The government should be strong to get things done. Coercion is needed. You cannot convince people only with good hearts and smiling faces. Look what happened in Iraq. The people were abiding by the rules and laws under Saddam. Now, look what the Americans did. There is a lack of power, lack of authority. People are killing each other as a result of the lack of authority. If a government wants to last long, it has to have laws and regulations which must be enforced. Those who are not abiding by the rules must be punished and executed if necessary. If there was a public execution, no one else can commit a crime after seeing it. We have a saying "if you do not discipline your daughter, she will elope with either a drummer or an oboe player."*

Ekrem emphasized the importance of a government that is strong and gets things done through laws. He thinks that coercion should be used if it is going to benefit the community at large. Authoritarianism is considered to be a good thing for the community. It is not surprising to find that for the benefit of the society, individual liberties are less significant, as was seen in the family theme. The collective familial needs precede individual needs. In this regard, Ekrem's views can be interpreted to mean that the welfare of the community is stressed over all else. The participant views the public execution of a person guilty of a serious crime as a significant deterrent for the perpetuation of the crime. Here again, the society is given priority and is considered superior to the individuals who constitute it.

Ekrem stressed the obedience of the daughter, as any wrongdoing by a female member of a family is considered as a staining on the family honor. The rearing of a daughter according to the traditions is very important for the family honor. Drums and oboes are two traditional musical instruments in the Turkish culture. However, entertainment is not seen as a very respectable way of living one's life, and therefore, drummers or oboe players are used as metaphors to emphasize the fulfillment of the filial piety of a daughter. Elopement is not regarded as an acceptable act. The approval of a marriage by the family and the community carries a vital importance in Ahiska Turks' culture. Elopement happens when the family or community does not grant approval of the marriage. Since playing drums or the oboe as a way of life is not highly regarded, the

daughter who is not properly raised according to the traditional values could choose to marry a drummer or oboe player, which would hardly be approved by the family or the community.

**Language.** Language is a very salient aspect of the Ahiska Turk culture. All the participants spoke Turkish despite the fact that they all have lived in different countries in which the dominant language is not Turkish. The participants are all multilingual. They speak Turkish, Russian, and Uzbek. They have also started to pick up English as well. They prefer to use Turkish with each other and with their children. Musa commented the following regarding speaking Turkish:

*In Uzbekistan, we would speak Uzbek. Among ourselves, however, we would speak Turkish. We would speak in Uzbek with them. It was not banned. They did not force us to speak Uzbek. However, there were times, in some places, on the buses, later on, they started to harass us. Whenever the Turks come together, they were speaking in Turkish. Then, the Uzbeks started to feel uncomfortable and say "You, people, speak Uzbek!"*

This participant clearly stated that the Ahiska Turks communicated in Turkish among themselves. Before they went to Russia, there had been some harassment due to their language preferences among each other. The importance of language is also evident in Osman's comment:

*We speak Turkish at home. When we go outside, we speak the language of the place. If it was Russia, we would speak in Russian. However, we speak in our language with our children so that they can learn their own language.*

Even though the participants are all fluent in multiple languages, they prefer to use Turkish at home, so that the children can learn the language. When I was interviewing Ekrem at his home, his daughter, who is in grade school, was at home. I tried to speak with her; however, she was shy and did not respond. The father (participant) spoke Turkish to her but the daughter responded in Russian. The participant told me that he allowed his daughter to speak Russian, so that she would not forget it. Davud said

*We never forget our language because we are always together. If we lived separately, away from the community, we would forget the language. For example, some of those who came from Fergana did not speak Turkish. They used to speak Uzbek because they lived alone, apart from other Ahiska Turks. Now, here in America, if our people wouldn't live together, we would forget our language. For example, at least, there should be community centers like this that would enable us to come together at least once a week. We would come together even if to say "Salam Alaiqum salam." If we live together, we would not forget our language, our culture, our religion. Otherwise, we would get lost. We wouldn't know who we are.*

Davud strongly emphasized the importance of Turkish for the Ahiska Turks. It can be understood that the home is not the only place where Turkish is used. The presence of a community in which Turkish is spoken is an essential contributing factor to the preservation of the language. The expression *Salam Alaiqum Salam*” is a reference to the Muslims’ way of greeting. It is shortened to *Salamun Alaiqum*, which means “peace be with you.” This greeting is reciprocated with *Alaiqum Salam*,” which also means “peace be with you.” The participant emphasizes the importance of community and of the Turkish language. According to the participant, even it is for a short period of time (i.e., just enough time to greet each other) it is necessary to keep in touch with the community and the language.

**Religion.** Islam is also a strong part of the Ahiska Turks’ culture. The participants told me that they have practiced Islam for generations. They also thought that their religion and ethnicity (Turkish) were the major source of the oppression they experienced both in Russia and Uzbekistan. The influence of Islam can be traced in the language (Turkish) that they speak. Ekrem stated the following:

*People ask me here if I have a religion, if I observe Islam. Alhamdulillah, I am a Muslim, I tell them. They tell me “it is good to observe a religion. There are religious and non-religious people in America. Those who observe a religion take care of their families. Those who do not are cheaters. We like those with religions.” Some say so, some try to convert us into their religion. I love my religion. I believe in my religion, Islam. I am not saying that their religion is bad. It is good for you, ours is good for us. Everyone has a religion to believe in. Yours is different than ours. Every religion is good to its followers. None of us has converted into other religions. At least, I have never heard of anyone.*

The participant to whom the above quote belongs expressed his experience with Americans. The word *Alhamdulillah* is an Arabic term which means “Thanks Allah.” It is an Islamic tradition to start confirming that you are a Muslim whenever asked. It is an indication that Muslims feel proud and grateful to Allah because they are granted with the honor of practicing Islam. The above quote is an example of an Islamic teaching. In the holy book of Islam, the final verse in chapter 109 titled *The Disbelievers* reads, “You shall have your religion and I shall have my religion,” which is an Islamic attitude when dealing with non-Muslims. It can be inferred that the participant followed the Islamic teaching regarding how to deal with non-Muslims. It is also clear that the participants are aware that some people are trying to convert them to their religions. Ramazan openly articulated the importance of Islam in his life:

*The churches are trying to help us. Of course, they have their agendas. We are very well aware of that. I don’t think they are sincere. They want to convert us to Christianity. They want to make our children Christians. The church members asked us to come to the church. They told us that they would teach us English. There would also be a bible study. I told them, “Look, why don’t you still teach us English and when it comes to Bible session, we can bring our mullah teach our kids Qur’an.” Of course they*

*did not accept it. As soon as I came here, I looked for a mosque. I found it. I took my children to there. I told them that we are Muslims. All Muslims are brothers. No matter where we go, we must know our Qur'an; we must know five-times-a-day prayer. I showed my children that. If I had not taken them to the mosque, they would take them to the church. They are telling them to go to the church to play and have fun. Then, they start preaching their religion. This cannot be done with a few people.*

Ramazan was very animated about the topic of religion (Islam). He particularly expressed his discontent that the people who are trying to help them are not sincere. The word *mullah* means “religious leader”. He wanted to substitute the Bible sessions with the Qur'an, which is the holy book of Muslims. The participants also believed that religion was another aspect of their culture that was the source of the oppression that they experienced in Russia. The participant regards Islam as a significant element of his identity. The influence of Islam in an Ahiska Turk's life is also clear in the quote below. According to the participant, all marriages in the community should also be based on Islamic teachings. Not following the Islamic teachings would result in a loss of identity. According to Ekrem, Islam helped them remember who they were:

*People are getting lost here because they are not going to mosques or community centers. It is so easy to lose your identity here. Now, they used to tell us that we were Turks and discriminate against us. It was good for us. They used to always remind us who we were. They were keeping us away from them and therefore, you knew that you were a Turk and a Muslim. May Allah be pleased with them, because they did not let us forget our culture our identity. Now we are here. Everyone minds his own business. In this free land, there have been cases that some of our people marrying a non-Turk and non-Muslim person. In five to ten years they would lose their identity and assimilate into the American culture. Maybe about ten per cent would teach their children about their religion and would take them to mosques, but the majority does not care.*

**Endogamy.** The Ahiska Turks in the Wheaton area choose to marry other Ahiska Turks at relatively young ages. There have been occasional cases where a male member of the community married to a non-Ahiska Turk and non-Muslim woman, but the opposite case did not occur that often. Osman said:

*We marry one of us. I mean it is easier this way. It is true that there are other Muslims. But it is not like marrying one from your kind. You know, we have our own traditions. It would be tough on the outsider to follow our traditions and customs. That's why we prefer to marry another Ahiska Turk, who knows our ways.*

Osman's quote demonstrates how important it is for the Ahiska Turks to continue their traditions. Mutual understanding of the culture by both the husband and wife is the key to a happy marriage. It can also be understood that family is the key for the

perpetuation of the culture and that is why the participant emphasized the significance of marrying someone from within the Ahiska Turk community. Davud said, “There are a lot of us who converted others into Islam. For example, my grandfather married a Russian nurse. She became a Muslim. She used to pray and observe Islam. But the opposite has never happened.” The influence of Islam on marrying practices can also be traced here. It is usually the common practice among Muslims that a male Muslim is allowed to marry a non-Muslim. However, a female Muslim is not allowed to marry a non-Muslim male. This does not mean that a male Muslim can marry any non-Muslim female. The non-Muslim female has to be the follower of the Books (i.e., she has to be either Jewish or Christian).

**Communal life.** Wherever the Ahiska Turks have gone, they have always found each other. In Uzbekistan and Russia, and finally here in Wheaton, they have formed a community and have supported each other in all aspects of their lives. Community provides support, which is crucial to their survival as a minority. Communal life has also helped them remain closed to the influence of the host culture. It has been one of the most salient aspects of the participants of this study. Musa emphasized the importance of community, saying,

*We used to live together in Uzbekistan. We were a community. There were so many of us where we used to live. You know, our people are such that whenever someone settles somewhere, others follow him and settle with him. Then they grow in number and form a community. For example, in the village where I used to live, there were eighty Turkish households. It was all like this. In the nearby villages there were forty, fifty, or sixty households together.... We are together here, very close. If everyone buys a house and leaves the others, they cannot all buy houses in the same area, we would get separated. We would scatter around the city. This worries us a lot. We were not taught like this. I do not know what we would do. What should we do in order to stay as a community?*

The above comment clearly shows the importance of community and communal life. They habitually settled somewhere together. It is obvious that the community played a very significant role in the preservation of the Ahiska Turks’ culture. The native language (i.e., Turkish) has been carefully preserved due to the close and strong communal life that exists in the community. The participant also said that visiting each other helps their children learn the language. However, he also added that that is not enough and he expressed his concern regarding that. As stated earlier, the family is not merely the environment where cultural values are passed through the generations. The community, along with the family, has the role of socializing the children with the cultural norms and values. The community provides support, solidarity, and collaboration, all of which are vital to the survival of Ahiska Turks in a new land. Regarding this theme, Musa made the following comment:

*My father’s uncle had gone to Russia. Then we went there too. Then their sons came so our unity would not dissolve. What would you do alone somewhere without your people? That’s why we always live together. We*



*are not used to living alone. For example, a family would not go to a city and live alone without other Ahiska Turks. We always go to places where there are others.... When I came here, all my brothers had already come here. There were only three families left back in Russia. I was worried. But now, I am again among my family. I cannot say that I have had tough time here.*

It was clear that the participants viewed communal life as a requirement for the existence of the people. Ramazan also tied the importance of community to Islam. Communal life also fits in well with the basic tenets of Islam, in which Muslims practice communal activities as well as individual ones:

*We need to be together so that we would grow. Islam would grow. In different places, their languages are different, their religion is different. In order to live comfortably we need to be together as a community. In a wedding or celebration, in the time of funerals, May Allah make it away from us, we need to be together. If we lived alone somewhere, we would not know what is going on.*

Ramazan provided the following comment, which underlined the multiple roles that the community plays in the lives of the Ahiska Turks:

*We never forget our language because we are always together. If we lived separately, away from the community, we would forget the language. For example, some of those who came from Fergana did not speak Turkish. They used to speak Uzbek because they lived alone, apart from other Ahiska Turks. Now, here in America, if our people didn't live together, we would forget our language. For example, at least, there should be community centers like this that would enable us to come together at least once a week. We would come together even if to say "Salam Alaykum salam." If we live together, we would not forget our language, our culture, our religion. Otherwise, we would get lost. We wouldn't know who we are. When we live together, if someone does something bad he would feel ashamed of others. My father would say, "Oh son, look, why are you doing that? Look what that person is doing. You should behave like him too."*

The community acts as a school where the members learn the cultural norms and Turkish language. The members of the community set examples for the younger generations. The participant also commented on The Ahiska Turks (Meskhetian) Community Center in Wheaton. He was pleased to see that the community center functions as the public space for the Ahiska Turks to perpetuate the communal life that they have practiced for generations. Ekrem also emphasized the importance of communal life, stating,

*In 1988, things were very bad in Uzbekistan. We needed to protect ourselves all the time. All our relatives had left. They left for Russia. They went to other places. We were left behind. We were alone. It is tough to be alone, abi. There is mischief, there is death, there are all kinds of things. The more we live together the better it is. I think so. I used to be a bus driver in Uzbekistan. I had two brothers who used to live side by side in the same village. I was woken up at 2 in the morning. I said to myself "Oh Allah, please help me!" They were about to do something bad, but fortunately, they went away because I told who I was. They were scared of my brother.*

The community provides not only support but also security. The above quote clearly indicates the role of the community as a protective agent. When there were not very many Ahiska Turks left behind, the nationalist Uzbeks started to harass them. The lack of community support led to security issues. The community thus provides support in the time of hardships.

**Education for upward mobility.** The participants emphasized the importance of education. They think that education is necessary for a better life. They mentioned that it enables one to move up the social ladder. The participants of this study are representatives of the working-class. In order to move up to the middle class, education is necessary. Davud said

*Education and schooling is very important. I went to a vocational school. It is not good to talk about the deceased elders, but I think our elders did not have a broad vision. They didn't quite see the importance of schooling. Look, all I can offer is my physical power. I want my kids to get education, to go to school, so that they can have a comfortable life. I don't want them to be like me.... Americans are not working. I mean, not like us. They have jobs that pay really a lot. They are doctors, lawyers, engineers, and teachers. These professions are not like working in the farms or factories. I want my children to see this and to be convinced that school is very important.*

Even though it is very important to show respect (especially to the deceased elder members of one's family), the participant hesitantly criticized the attitude of his elders regarding education and schooling. He thought that it would have been better if he had been given the option of receiving better education, other than just vocational schooling. Davud thought that education is a means to better life. I was surprised when he said that Americans were not working. When I asked him to elaborate on what he meant, he explained that due to their educational backgrounds, many Americans are earning well, compared to what he is earning.

*If I were younger, I would go to school today. I am going to school to learn English. I want my children to get education. I always tell them to study. They are now complaining about me bugging them all the time about education. And I tell them, "Look my sons, I go to the factory three*

*days a week and I work 12 hours a day. There are others who work at their desks and make much more money than I do. Which one is better?"*  
*"The one at his desk," they answer.*

The above quote indicates how the participant motivates his children to get education. He emphasizes the roles that education and schooling play in moving up the social ladder. Even though the example used by the participant is a not an accurate representation of the white-collar profession, it can be understood that better-paying jobs and more comfortable life can be achieved through schooling and education. Davud also said his children "should get education so that they can become a man. They could give back to the community. They would help them rise." The expression "becoming a man" is a very common saying in Turkish and it means "becoming and growing into a mature and good human being." It is also important to note that he associated "education" with "becoming a man," which is not an uncommon occurrence in Turkish culture. In this context, the participant did not regard education for just material gain, but also for spiritual well-being. We can notice that education is not only for individual gain, but also to give back to the community, which is very much in line with the community-oriented culture of the participants.

**Oppression for the preservation of culture and identity.** The interviews also revealed that the oppression that the participants have experienced in Uzbekistan and Russia helped them preserve their ethnic identity. Ramazan strongly emphasized the preservation of their ethnic identity:

*There have been some people who eloped with Russians or Mexicans. I am telling you, this freedom is too much here. It is not good for us. People are getting lost here because they are not going to mosques or community centers. It is so easy to lose your identity here. Now, they used to tell us that we were Turks and discriminate against us. It was good for us. They used to always remind us who we were. They were keeping us away from them and therefore, you knew that you were a Turk and a Muslim. May Allah be pleased with them, because they did not let us forget our culture, our identity.*

This participant was very critical of the conditions here. He thought that the freedom and individuality experienced in the U.S. would harm the perpetuation of the Ahiska Turks' culture in the U.S. He thought that being a minority and constantly being reminded of who they were has helped them preserve their culture. Now the real threat to the existence, continuity, and the preservation of the Ahiska Turk culture is the absence of discrimination, harassment, and oppression against them. In other words, since security and safety is not an issue now, and there is no oppression or harassment, the people can live without depending on the community. The members of the community would not need the support of the community for security, which would make them more independent and vulnerable to possible threats.

## Discussion

Some of the above salient characteristics of the Ahiska Turks' culture in Wheaton, Illinois, can be conceptualized as part of an agrarian way of life. The Ahiska Turks in the Wheaton area are a very traditional group that has agrarian values. These values helped them preserve their ethnic identity and resist the assimilation of the host culture. LeVine and White (1986) provide a conceptual framework that helps us to understand the above-stated themes. According to LeVine and White (1986), the majority of the world's population has depended on an agrarian way of life, which includes living in small communities, producing food domestically, and practicing agriculture and animal husbandry. They also state that the agrarian cultural traditions, which are still the guiding principles of life, strongly influences the lives of the majority of the world's population even today.

Filial loyalty is one of the major values that agrarian cultures prescribe to their members (LeVine & White, 1986). Since children work with and under the supervision of their elders (especially parents) throughout their lives, they have a sense of loyalty toward their parents. Reciprocity is another virtue of agrarian cultures, which basically says that children are expected to take care of their parents as they age (Levine & White, 1986). They are expected to give back (i.e., support) to their parents. Kinship support is a very important aspect of agrarian cultures (Levine & White, 1986). Many of the participants in the current study underscored the importance of filial loyalty. Living together with family members and respecting and taking care of relatives are very salient aspects of Ahiska Turks' culture.

Unlike in Western cultures, solidarity and unity are the underlying notions in agrarian cultures. Members of an agrarian community are expected to help, rather than compete against, one another. There is a hierarchy in the structure of communities in which age and gender play significant roles. The Ahiska Turks emphasize the age hierarchy even in their daily language. For example, the word *abi* means older brother. Ahiska Turks use this word not only to address to their real brothers, but also to show respect for the older members of the community.

Agrarian cultures assure their members of security, respect, and continuity as a result of their participation in the agrarian culture (Levine & White, 1986). As long as the individual contributes to the welfare of his/her family and community, he/she is sure that there will be reciprocity, which means that he/she will receive any help when he/she needs it from the family, kin, or the community (LeVine & White, 1986). Through all the interviews, the participants mentioned how they lived together and how living together provided them with security and protection.

In agrarian cultures, age determines the statuses of both men and women (Levine & White, 1986). As the individuals get older, they gain respect and are considered to have a higher role in the society, and are thus respected by all members of the community. The third benefit that agrarian societies offer to their members is continuity (Levine & White, 1986). Through their sense of belonging to an agrarian society and ties that span, individuals are provided with a sense of continuity and history. The Ahiska Turks acquire their way of life and perpetuate it from their elders' example. The parents stay and continue living with the youngest of the family even after he/she gets married. The participants of the study stressed how important it is to show respect to the older

members of the Ahiska community. They consider it a shame not to take care of the parents.

The preservation of the Turkish language has also helped the Ahiska Turks in the Wheaton area preserve their culture. Language is a vital tool for human beings (especially in early childhood) in acquiring a world view (Ochs, 1986). Children acquire the norms, beliefs, and values of their societies “through exposure to and participation in language-mediated interactions” (Ochs, 1986, p. 2). Ochs and Schieffelin (1984) emphasize that sociocultural knowledge is acquired through language acquisition. Watson-Gegeo (2004) indicates that cognitive development, which involves language acquisition, is strongly influenced by culture. Language and thought are fundamentally constructed by cultural processes (Watson-Gegeo, 2004). Language socialization is not simply being exposed to a social event; rather, it is the social event itself. Throughout the interviews, the theme of language emerged, which was discussed before in greater detail. The language of the Ahiska Turks has helped them transfer the cultural norms and values. Sayings such as “becoming a man,” “eloping with a drummer or an oboe player,” and “*Salam Alaiqum Salam*” are all examples of value-laden expressions that are unique to the language that the participants use to communicate with one another. Generations pass these values and norms along with the language, which they have preserved surprisingly well.

Through the interaction of the individuals of a community, people construct a cognition community (Watson-Gegeo, 2004). The much valued communal life has made a significant contribution to the culture and identity of the Ahiska Turks. The communal life has encouraged the members of the Ahiska community to share cultural and sociopolitical experiences with one another, which has also shaped and constructed their perceptions, assumptions, and ability to make sense of their environment.

When cultural groups or individuals come into intercultural contact, they experience acculturation, which Berry (2007) refers to as “the process of cultural and psychological change” (p. 69). Berry (1997, 2007) states that groups or individuals use four major strategies to acculturate: integration, separation/segregation, assimilation, and marginalization. Integration refers to the willingness of the non-dominant group to participate in the larger social life. Integration is possible when the members of a cultural group maintain cultural integrity (Berry, 1997, 2007). Assimilation refers to the strategy when the members of a cultural group do not seek to maintain their cultural identity, while the separation strategy occurs when the individuals value their own culture very much and avoid interaction with the host culture. Marginalization occurs when the individuals do not wish to maintain their cultural identities and are not interested in mingling with others (Berry, 1997, 2007). It seems that the participants of this study value their culture very much and at the same time want to interact with others. Therefore, the participants of this study used integration to acculturate.

### **Implications**

There are several implications of this study. The first is regarding its contribution to the literature on Ahiska Turks and the scholars of culture. Since there is little known about the Ahiska Turks and their culture in the U.S., this study can contribute to the general literature on the population. With this study, the intention is also to provide the scholars of culture and immigrants with insight into how a particular culture is shaping its

members and helping them preserve their identities. It is also my hope that this research will trigger other culture studies, especially on new immigrants.

The second implication of the study is that the participants, the host communities, and the agencies helping the Ahiska Turks settle in the U.S. could benefit from this study. Understanding the culture of the Ahiska Turks would help the surrounding communities in their relations with the Ahiska Turks. The surrounding communities can act in a culturally sensitive way while interacting with the group. The participants of the study could potentially indirectly benefit from the study. As the participants stated the need for having their voices heard during my interaction with them, this study will have their need fulfilled, which, hopefully, would help them become part of the society without feeling that they are outsiders. The findings can also help the government agencies, private institutions, and individuals that deal with immigration-related issues. This research could particularly inform the agencies helping the Ahiska Turks settle in the U.S., increasing their insight about the community and thus better serve them. As well, the findings can help the school administrators and teachers who educate the Ahiska children and youth could consider the cultural values and thus better cater to the educational needs. For example, multicultural education requires inclusion of all diverse cultures of the students in a school system. When the school teachers and administrators understand the Ahiska Turks' culture, they can include the cultural needs of the Ahiska children in the curricula, classroom instruction, and any school related educational activities, so that the Ahiska children can receive a better education.

Lastly, I have personally benefitted from this study as I am originally from Turkey and am concerned about having my U.S.-born children acquiring Turkish culture and identities as well as preserving them. I believe that there are many invaluable lessons that I have learned from the participants of this study. Specifically, this includes the preservation and cultural survival which relied on their familial and communal life styles, native language, and faith, which would not necessitate them to acculturate through separation/segregation, assimilation, or marginalization. Ahiska Turks have showed me how to integrate into the dominant culture without giving up cultural identity.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

I have discussed the salient aspects of Ahiska Turk culture and that Ahiska Turks are a very traditional group that has agrarian values, which helped them to preserve their ethnic identities and resist assimilating into the host culture. I have also concluded that the oppression that they have experienced in Uzbekistan and Russia has helped them preserve their ethnic identity. However, my themes and conclusions are not without limitations.

First of all, I met all the participants of the study in the Ahiska Turks community center in Wheaton. The primary service that the center provides is to help the Ahiska Turks preserve their culture, especially the religious and linguistic aspects of their culture. Therefore, the participants who come to the center are those for whom language and religion are important. For example, the above mentioned themes (language and religion) emerged because the participants are religious people who are regular visitors of the community center. Those who do not come to the community center regularly are probably not that religious or for whom language is not that important.

All the participants of the study were male, married, and have children. This may have impacted the importance placed on the role of family and filial piety that emerged in the interviews. If I had interviewed younger people who are not married or female members of the community, I could have had different results. Two of the participants were elderly, who were living with their youngest sons, which might also explain the emergence of this theme.

As for the endogamy theme, the participants were all males, and male and female views might differ when it comes to partner preferences. The participants had all married before they came to the U.S. (either in Uzbekistan or Russia). Their previous lives were harsh and they needed to support one another by marrying other Ahiska Turks, who were of course familiar with the culture. Those who are not yet married might have a different view.

The age and the gender of the participants might have also affected the “authoritarian” theme. Since they were all male and middle-aged or older and have children, they preferred to discipline their children using authoritarian measures. The authoritarian aspect might have emerged as a result of their lives in the former Soviet Union. They are not used to freedom and democracy. The younger generations (both male and female) could also have different thoughts regarding authoritarianism.

The participants of the study did not have a college education. However, there could be more educated members of the community and they could value education for different reasons, other than just upward mobility. As for the two concluding themes (i.e., education for upward mobility and oppression for the preservation of culture and identity), the participants of the study happened to have been engaged in agriculture. The director of the center also stated that there were more educated people who used to live in the urban regions of Russia (and other urban areas). Therefore, the exclusion of the people from urbanized and industrialized regions might have affected the conclusion of the study. Even though they experienced discrimination and harassment prior to coming to the U.S., some people were not from the regions where there was discrimination and harassment. They could have merely come here to enjoy a new life. The communal life also might have contributed to the preservation of their culture, not oppression. I was told that they were almost always together. Being with their kind might have helped them preserve their culture. Another reason could be the countries that were not Muslim and Turkish could have had a contributing effect to this. The host cultures that are very different from theirs could have been harder to adopt and that is why they seem to preserve their culture and ethnic identities.

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