What Role do Soviet Nationalities Play in Regulating the Marital Behavior in Dagestan?

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Abstract
The paper presents the findings of a study dedicated to the norms of matrimony in contemporary Dagestan and the role of ethnic classification by Soviet nationalities within it. Through the research, 133 in-depth interviews were conducted across different regions of the republic, focusing on marital norms and actual behaviors. It was demonstrated that matrimonial norms are changing, with a predominant shift from the notion that one should marry within her/his village — to various types of universalism, which allow for the possibility of creating a family with a Muslim individual or anyone regardless of categorical membership. Soviet nationalities are relatively rarely mentioned as a factor in choosing a marital partner. When they are, the necessity of marrying within the same nationality is justified with the same arguments used to explain the logic of prioritizing marriages within one's village. This suggests that nationalities act as a modern form of particularism, which, however, is not (and possibly never fully was) a significant regulator of marital relations. These conclusions are discussed in the context of the hypothesis regarding the irrelevance of nationalities in Dagestan as a classificatory framework and are analyzed through the prism of literature dedicated to marital universalization in a global context.
Keywords
nationalities; ethnicity; Dagestan; marriage; marital attitudes; marital behavior; classifications; constructivism; Avars; Dargins; Kumyks

Introduction

How important are nationalities in regulating marital behavior in Dagestan? On the one hand, the answer seems straightforward enough—their importance is steadily decreasing. This is

supported by the research (Shakhbanova, 2008), expert theses (Kerimov, 2018), and statements of ordinary Dagestanis (Oloblin, 2022). However, has it ever been otherwise? Several ideas point to the notion that the actual marital attitudes and practices of Dagestanis were regulated by classification by nationalities to a relatively small extent. Among those are modern constructivist conceptualizations of ethnicity (Brubaker, 2006; Hale, 2004; Wimmer, 2013; Jenkins, 2008; Fenton, 2010; Chandra et al., 2012; Varshaver, 2022a) as an organization of differences based on social categories and classifications; the "how's and why's" of the adoption of classifications by nationalities in the Soviet Union (Slezkin, 2001; Hirsch, 2005); and the evidence of the social organization of pre-Soviet and Soviet Dagestani society, where rural life was largely regulated by classifications by jamaats and tukhums (Gadzhieva, 1985b; Magomedova et al., 2021; Khashaev, 2007). The main marital attitude that Dagestanis adhered to throughout the 20th century was one of "marrying fellow villagers", and this worldview is gradually eroding. Additionally, since fellow villagers in the vast majority of cases belonged to the same nationality, as the interpretation of reality through the prism of nationalities in the USSR and Dagestan became common and normalized, these changes were interpreted by both scholars and ordinary Dagestanis as a decrease in the share of marriages "within" the nationality and a respective increase in the share of interethnic marriages.

There are studies that focus on the importance of certain ethnic classifiers (e.g. by nationality and religion, but often not by village) in marital attitudes in the Dagestani context (Vereshchagina & Shakhbanova, 2013), as well as those focusing on the marital behavior regarding nationalities itself, primarily using statistical data (Gadzhieva, 1985a). However, the research found no studies that attempted to understand, simultaneously, which social categories actually structured the marital behavior of Dagestanis, the role nationalities played in reality, and how the situation was changing. The current paper presents the results of an analysis of 133 in-depth interviews collected in Dagestan in the summer of 2022. The interviews covered a variety of topics, including marital behavior and attitudes. The questions were phrased so that the informants could elaborate on their logic applied when choosing a marriage partner, without the interviewer imposing any particular classificatory framework. The analysis was carried out using mixed methods. A qualitative analysis of the material was carried out first, then the interviews were quantified, and statistical patterns were identified. The "Results" section of the paper delves into the reality of marital normativity in Dagestan, identifies the role of nationalities in its structuring, and presents an assumption about the changes this role has undergone over time. The "Discussion" section places these results in the broader context of ethnicity studies and shows how the research into changes in marital normativity in Dagestan allows us to answer the question of how and why ethnicity constructs change in

general, why some classifications cease to be relevant, while others become such, and how this is reflected in marital behavior.

Theoretical background

Classifications in the focus of contemporary ethnicity research

In the course of the reconceptualization of the field of ethnicity studies that has been happening since the end of World War II, its basic ontology has also been revised. With substantiated ethnic groups gradually leaving the focus of research, it transfers primarily to the classifications of people based on categories usually characterized by inherited membership, as well as communicative acts of various types that produce these classifications (Wimmer, 2013; Jenkins, 2008; Chandra et al., 2012; Brubaker, 2006). This reconceptualization is described as a constructivist or cognitive turn in ethnicity studies (Brubaker, 2004). The outcome notion of such transition can be summarized as follows: people classify other people continuously, and some of the classifications produced prove to be relatively stable and come to regulate social relations and the behavior of individuals. Various kinds of collective actors play an important role in the production and consolidation of these classifications, including modern states, which often create or adopt certain classifications to raise the effectiveness of governance.

The role of the state in the creation and maintenance of ethnic classifications through state statistics and identification documents has been the subject of many studies (e.g., Appadurai, 1993; Simon, Piche & Gagnon (eds.), 2015). If state-produced ethnic categories are associated with both preferences and negative effects, and the ethnic classification itself proves an effective tool for the social organization of society, it is expected that the official classification will also become a vernacular classification—those classified will "believe" in it and will base their everyday behavior on these beliefs. In addition to this "persuasiveness" of the state, there are other factors that contribute to the fact that a particular classification becomes entrenched as a social fact. These include, for example, the extent to which the classification corresponds to the real differences between people and is an effective "cognitive key" to these differences, as well as the degree to which this classification is woven into the fabric of private life, thus regulating such social relations as friendship and marriage.

Studies of ethnicity and marriage are "guilty" of inattention to the vernacular dimension of ethnicity, and, in part due to having failed to undergo the cognitive turn following the theoretical avant-garde of ethnicity studies, partly due to limitations in data that are usually based on official categories, "fail" to keep up with the dynamics of the actual relevance of classifications and categories. In the latter case, researchers may see inter-categorical marriages where there was no

inter-categoricality for the spouses themselves, or vice versa: they may "overlook" the normativity associated with categories not included in official classifications and therefore invisible to state statistics.

Research on Marital Normativity and Marital Behavior

"Interethnic" marriage has long been a central part of the research literature on ethnicity in its "ethnic relations" version. Statistics on the prevalence of intermarriage in society have been used as a barometer for assessing the degree of social integration, intergroup social distance, and the strength of ethnic boundaries and identities in general (Gordon, 1964; Qian & Lichter, 2011; Dribe & Lundh, 2011). Research on racially and ethnically diverse marriages has emerged and developed primarily in the context of the increase in intermarriage between blacks, Hispanics, Asians, American Indians, and whites in the United States since the 1970s (Rosenfeld, 2008; Schwartz, 2013; Smith, 2013, Hannemann et al., 2014), as well as in countries with the largest immigrant flows, such as Australia and Canada (Kalbach, 2002; Meng & Gregory, 2005; Hou & Myles, 2013). Subsequently, the variety of countries studied has expanded significantly (Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2006; Dribe & Lundh, 2011; Hannemann et al., 2018), which verified the possibility of extending the described trends to other socio-cultural contexts. According to the existing research, the main prerequisite for marital universalization is modernization and its aspects: an increase in the standard of living, the spread of education, and the process of urbanization, which contribute to the blurring of ethnic boundaries and a decrease in the influence of ethnicity on all aspects of life, including marriage (Kalmijn & Van Tubergen, 2006; Schwartz, 2013; Hannemann et al., 2018).

Papers presenting research into Russian context do not provide enough evidence to establish a universal scenario for changes in marital attitudes and practices of the population (Lurie, 2018), but there are studies based on statistical data indicating an increase in the share of inter-category marriages (Asanova, 2008; Khachatryan & Chadova, 2016). These results, like international cases, are usually associated with the processes of secularization and urbanization in Russia, as well as the convergence of the living conditions and quality of life of various "ethnic groups" (Zeitunyan, 2006; Amirkhanova, 2017). A relatively small number of studies devoted to ethnicity and marriage in Dagestan demonstrate a predominantly positive and neutral attitude of young people towards inter-category marriages (Vereshchagina, 2013), and, in addition, emphasize that it is the city dwellers who have a stronger attitude towards the insignificance of nationality criterion for choosing a spouse (Shakhbanova, 2011). Among the barriers hindering the spread of mixed marriages, from the point of view of the residents of the republic, the fear for the "preservation of the ethnic core of peoples" stands out (Vereshchagina, 2003; Zagirova et al., 2017).

Researchers looking into inter-categorical marriage rates note that, along with the

universalistic tendencies described above, ethnic endogamy continues to exist, and explanations for this phenomenon are yet to be found. Works attempting to explain the attitude towards endogamy in terms of factors contributing to it point to the desire of families to preserve various types of resources: economic, social, and symbolic (Kalmijn, 1998; Zang, 2007), as well as the importance of communicative convenience, which is ensured by the similarity of the cultural background of the spouses (Nave, 2000; Buss et al., 2001). The focus on preserving cultural distinctiveness and language, as well as maintaining the cohesion of an imagined group, its values, and traditions is also sometimes mentioned (Byrne, 1997; Clark-Ibanez & Felmlee, 2004). Such factors can diminish the effects of modernization or interact with them in ways that have unexpected consequences: for example, an increase in the level of education can contribute to the strengthening of ethnic identity and an increase in the number of mono-ethnic marriages (Furtado, 2012). In addition, the choice of a partner depends not only on individual and collective preferences but also on the structural possibilities of the marriage market (Kalmijn, 1998; Giindiiz-Hosgor & Smits, 2002), which may not allow for changing marital attitudes. In the Russian context, the prevalence of interethnic marriages varies depending on the type of region: in contrast to Russia as a whole, mixed marriages are less common in ethnic ("national") republics (Soroko, 2014; Evstigneev, 1971). Such trends may be associated with stronger social pressure in such regions and, while attitudes may change, sanctions prevent these attitudes from being implemented (Shakhbanova, 2013). Researchers of interethnic marriages in Dagestan explain the results through the lens of differences in customs and traditions, behavior, and "traits of national character" (Shakhbanova, 2013), which, in the context of "increasing significance of ethnic factors in the life of the peoples" (Vereshchagina, 2014), contribute to an increase in the level of ethnic endogamy.

Overall, studies have documented both trends in which marital attitudes and behavior change toward greater inclusiveness and universality,—when, with all else equal and under the influence of various mechanisms, the coexistence of representatives of different ethnic categories in one territory by default leads to weakening prohibitive marital norms,—and reverse processes in which social closure, associated with the attitude towards preservation of different types of capital, occurs. It is impossible to say that marital normativity in global context is on its steady way to universalization, partly due to there not being any studies that start with such a generalized problem in their empirics, and partly because existing local studies demonstrate contradictory tendencies.

Nevertheless, in the long term, such a phrasing of the problem allows us to rethink the obtained empirical data in the dichotomy of *particularism-universalism*, within which particularistic attitudes are those that imply categorical limitation within the existing structure of possibilities, while universalistic attitudes are those whose logic presupposes a vector for maximizing options.

The consequence of such a definition is that the same attitude (including marriage to representatives of the same nationality) in some contexts can be expanding, while in other contexts—limiting.

Research context

Most of the territory of modern Dagestan became part of the Russian Empire as a result of the Caucasian Wars (Pokrovsky, 2009). Following this, from the second half of the 19th century, their economic integration began (Karpov & Kapustina, 2011). At that time, Dagestan was already characterized by significant cultural and linguistic diversity. However, the main elements of social identification for the local population were the patrilineal groups (*tukhums*) and the associated rural communities (*jamaats*) (Gadzhieva, 1985b; Magomedova, 2021; Khashaev, 2007). The 1920s in the USSR, including Dagestan, saw the creation of official ethnic categories—"nationalities" or "peoples"—which were largely based on the work of ethnographers and linguists, as well as administrative pragmatics (Hirsch, 2005) and revolutionary romanticism (Alpatov, 2000). By 1926, a final list of approximately 40 Dagestani nationalities was approved, but by the 1939 census, their number had been reduced to 11 (Avars, Dargins, Kumyks, Lezgins, Laks, Azerbaijanis, Tabasarans, Russians, Chechens, Nogais, Jews). This shorter list, with minimal changes, survived until the last Soviet census in 1989. In the three post-Soviet censuses, the number and composition of nationalities almost completely reverted to match the 1926 list, though with some changes (e.g., the category of "Kapuchin" disappeared and the category of "Bezhtin" was added to describe the population of roughly the same area and villages). During the Soviet period, nationalities became significant elements of self-identification for Dagestanis, which intensified in the post-Soviet period with the weakening of the federal center and the attempt to build a political structure based on ethnic parity (Landa, 2016; Hall, 2015; Ware & Kisriev, 2001). Today, however, the political and social significance of national categories is believed to be diminishing (Varshaver, 2021; 2022b; 2025) due to the erasure of actual cultural differences, Islamization, and the mass migration of Dagestanis to other regions of Russia.

With territorial and chronological diversity of marital attitudes and practices, the most common type of marital behavior was rural endogamy, that is, limiting the circle of potential and actual marriage partners to the framework of the rural community, "jamaat" (Gadzhieva, 1985b; Aglarov, 2014). In some contexts, the norm prohibiting marriage with residents of other villages was enshrined in local adats (Gadzhieva, 1985b), but in others, this norm could be completely absent, and inter-categorical marriage unions could even be encouraged (Aglarov, 2014). Marital behavior, in addition, formed under the influence of "vertical" classifications (namely classes), according to which "misalliances" were not approved (Gadzhieva, 1985b). Despite the common

opinion that classification by tukhums played the role of a factor limiting the range of possible marriage partners, modern researchers claim that tukhum endogamy was not widespread and that marriages between representatives of different tukhums were used to build coalitions within the jamaat (Aglarov, 2014; Ragimova, 1998).

When studying the marriage culture in Dagestan, researchers also note that individual wedding customs, ceremonies, and institutions (levirate, sororate, “cradle arrangement”, etc.) also had local characteristics and varied depending on the territory (Alimova, 1989; Abdinova, 2010; Elmurzaeva, 2012). With the advent of the Russian Empire in Dagestan, cases of marriages between representatives of different faiths—Muslims and Christians—rose in frequency. However, marriages within Islam remained the prevailing trend in the marital behavior of the population (Gadzhieva, 1985a). The Muslim religious paradigm also allowed polygamy, but due to practical possibilities, this option was the privilege of the richest people (Zagirova, 2022).

During the Soviet era, with the advent of interpreting diversity through the prism of national classification, marital behavior began to be discussed in Dagestan in this terminology; in particular, in terms of mono- and interethnic marriages. According to the 1939 census, the most common form of marital union in Dagestan was marriage between representatives of the same nationality. The share of interethnic marriages at that time was 6%. By 1963, this figure had increased to 10%, and by 1981 it had reached 12% (Gadzhieva, 1985a). The share of such marriages in cities, workers' settlements, and district centers was higher and amounted to about 22% (Gadzhieva, 1985a). In the capital of the republic, Makhachkala, the share of interethnic marriages reached 28% in 1963 (Evstigneev, 1971). By 2010, however, this share had dropped to 10% (Bessudnov & Monden, 2021), but in 2018 Makhachkala registry office employees noted an increase in interethnic marriages (Kerimov, 2018).

Studies have also noted differences in the likelihood of interethnic marriages among representatives of different nationalities in Makhachkala, as well as among men and women (Bessudnov & Monden, 2021). Interethnic marriages were found to be most common among younger age cohorts. Currently, the opinions of Dagestanis regarding interethnic marriages vary; however, many have a neutral or positive attitude towards such marriages (Vereshchagina & Shakhbanova, 2013; Zagirova, et al., 2017; Shakhbanova, 2013; Vereshchagina, 2013; Adziev & Gasanov, 2010; Karaev, 2012; Sigareva & Sivoplyasova, 2015), and in some cases, nationality may not be taken into account at all (Shakhbanova, 2008). Presumably, this is due to the attitudes towards marriage being based on Islamic norms (Murtuzaliev, 2019). In addition, researchers note that at present, when deciding on marriage, such factors as financial status, the presence of mutual romantic feelings, psychological characteristics of the partner, and other criteria are taken into

account (Aigumova & Aigunov, 2008). Variations in marital norms are also a frequent element in the description of Dagestani nationalities and differences between them[1]. In general, however, despite the existence of research, it is impossible to say that there has been drawn a consistent picture of the marital behavior of Dagestanis of the past and present that is close to reality.

Research methodology

The data for the current paper was collected by the authors of the paper and their colleagues in the summer of 2022. An interview guide on the current state of ethnicity in Dagestan was developed, with one of the topics discussed being marital norms, marital behavior, and the role of nationalities in this regard. Here are some sample questions from the respective thematic block:

> *Who did you marry? Was it a person of the same nationality or a different one? Of the same religion or a different one? From the same locality or a different one?*
> *How was the decision made? Did you know the bride/groom? Who looked for/selected him/her and how? What were the main criteria for choosing a spouse?*
> *What did you know: who should you marry in the first place? Who was it generally forbidden to marry? Was there a situation when it was better not to marry someone/it was better not to marry someone, but it was still possible? How was this explained? What did people say about it? How did opinions differ on this matter in your family (maybe grandparents were against marriage, but parents were not)? What role did nationalities play in this?*
> *In your opinion—can people from different villages, nationalities, religions marry each other or not? Why? What did you tell/will you tell your children, other young relatives about this?*

The interviews were biographical, due to which these questions—in a shortened format—were asked regarding different stages and contexts of the informant's life. For example, if they were studying at a university or moving, the aim was to find out the norms of marriage in new social circles. All the interviews were conducted in Russian, the quotes in this paper have been translated into English by the authors with an attempt to preserve the original cadence and tone of the speakers.

[1] Similar descriptions are given in a monograph "Peoples of Dagestan" (*Arutyunov & Osmanov et al.*, 2002) and on the official website of Ministry of Nationalities and Religious Affairs of the Republic of Dagestan (*National Policy …*, 2023).

A total of 133 interviews were collected and transcribed. The interviews were collected both in Makhachkala and its environs (78 interviews) and in seven mountain villages: Kubachi (10), Urkarakh (6), Arakul (8), Nizhniy Katrukh (8), Ikhrek (6), Bezhta (8), and Tlyadal (9). The villages were selected based on several considerations, including the diversity of the nominal ethnicity of the villagers (Avars, Dargins, Laks, Rutuls, Bezhtins, Kubachins, Azerbaijanis), the diversity of Dagestan's regions, the complexity of the local construction of ethnicity, etc.

The interview transcripts were uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software Atlas and thematically coded. In the first stage, general codes were created to denote material relevant to the topic. Then, specific codes were created and attributed to statements that allowed us to determine the marital normativity and behavior of the informant and their parents. The texts marked with codes were analyzed by the entire team of authors of the paper, and the main types of informants' ideas were reconstructed and presented in the first part of the "Results" section of the current paper.

Based on the coded information, different types of marital attitudes were identified and formulated both for the informant themselves and their children. Additionally, where possible, the positions of the informants' parents were reconstructed[2]. The "Results" section first presents a detailed description of each of the attitudes, then their quantitative ratio (for this purpose, 124 individual cases were identified from 133 interviews, which sometimes took place simultaneously with several informants), factors explaining the informant's gravitation towards one of them, as well as intergenerational family dynamics on the continuum of particularism-universalism[3]. The final part of the section describes the discursive logics behind the attitude "to marry representatives of the same nationality", and also demonstrates the results of a comparison of these arguments and reasons explaining the importance of "intra-village" marriages.

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[2] Coding process implied simplification of complex situations to binary variables (availability or absence of an attitude in a given interview), as well as creation of a nominal variable "dominant attitude", which had five states. However, reality was not always prone to such simplification. Below are some complicated cases and the ways each of them was treated and resolved:

One of the informants (male, 34, Makhachkala) at a certain period of his life identified himself with his mother's nationality. At that time, he got married to a young woman of the same nationality, born in the village where his mother lived. However, by the point in time when the interview was conducted, he started to identify himself with his father's nationality and, while describing his previous marriage, referred to it as "interethnic". Moreover, at the time of the interview the informant did not have any marital attitudes towards himself, due to considering his past experience unsuccessful and not having plans to marry at some future point at all. In this case, the attitude was determined to be absent and not considered in calculations.

The other informant (female, 74, Makhachkala) was betrothed to a person, speaking the Kumyk language, under the assumption that he belonged to the eponymous nationality. Over the course of the engagement, however, it turned out that formally he belonged to the Avar national category. Despite this, the wedding still took place. The informant's parents' attitudes in this case were defined as monoethnic.

[3] Attitudes to marry fellow villagers and people of one's nationality were coded as particularistic attitudes, based on the definition given in the "Methodology" section of the current paper. Attitudes to marry Dagestanis, Muslims and anyone regardless of their category were coded as universalistic. Such coding, as it follows from the definition, is determined by the opportunity structure of Dagestan, where in most contexts the first two types of categories are limiting, while the other three—expanding the total number of possible marriage partners.

Results

Types of Marital Attitudes

Five main types of marital normativity were identified during the data analysis. The first four types are preferences to marry (1) residents of one's village, (2) representatives of the same nationality, (3) representatives of Dagestani nationalities, and (4) Muslims regardless of nationality. The fifth type is a universalistic attitude toward marriage regardless of the categorical affiliation of a potential marriage partner. It should be noted that the described variants of marital normativity were not mutually exclusive. Sometimes the most desirable option was the "narrowest" one, while the others became less desirable as they "expanded"; sometimes it could be concluded that the options were equally desirable for the informants; sometimes they spoke "in favor" of one of the options, implicitly or explicitly "rejecting" all the other ones. The "narrowest" type of marital normativity[4] prescribes the choice of a spouse out of the residents of one's village. Below is an example of an informant explaining how their parents outline the circle of potential marriage partners:

> **Informant:** *Yes, well, that's how it is in our family. Let's say they told me– Well, roughly speaking, it's not even up for discussion—like, "You'll only marry one of your own," that is, from our village. That is, look, Avars, we have areas and in the areas there are villages. That is, in an area there may be 5-6-7 villages. That is, I can't even marry a guy from this area, [he] must be from the village. That is, I don't know the exact population, I can't tell you, of the village. Well, you choose, roughly speaking, everyone there is related, who... Well, yes, roughly speaking, everyone there is related to each other, second cousins, and so on. Well, that is, you consider only this circle, roughly speaking. (female, 21, Makhachkala)*

And here is how one of the informants—many years after marriage—described the reasons for choosing a fellow villager:

> **Interviewer:** *And if you wanted to, could you marry someone not from Ikhrek?*
> **Informant:** *No, I didn't want to.*
> **Interviewer:** *And you could if you wanted to?*

[4] Note that in Dagestan there exists a yet another type of marital normativity, according to which spouses are chosen within a tukhum or class. However, over the course of interviews our informants have much more rarely mentioned such attitudes than the ones presented in the paper. Besides, authors, similar to the researcher Ragimova (*Ragimova*, 1998), equate these to the "status" logic, as a result of which tukhum- and class-defined attitudes are considered a part of the rural type of normativity.

Informant: *I wanted to be with our people, there are beautiful girls here, our customs, others have different ones. (male, 71, Ikhrek)*

Another type of marital normativity is associated with the attitude of choosing a marriage partner from among representatives of the same nationality. As such, a university student from Makhachkala talks about her views on the search for a marriage partner and specifies that the choice is limited specifically by nationality:

Informant: *I just have so many friends who want to marry me off. That's why, wherever I go to work, everyone is looking for a husband for me.*
Interviewer: *And of different nationalities?*
Informant: *Avar. To be honest, any other nation is basically nonexistent to me. (female, 23, Makhachkala)*

Informants also note that this attitude may be expressed to varying degrees in different generations:

Informant: *Parents? I think that they would have a normal and understanding attitude, but they still don't necessarily… but it would be preferable for her to be Lezgin. My mother's the first question was: "What's her nationality?" To be honest, I was surprised when it was the first thing she asked me, because I personally didn't expect it from her, because I've thought all my life that they don't treat it that way, but apparently it's still important to them. For example, for my mother, it turns out, for my wife's side—it was also important for them that there was a Lezgin. That is, for this generation it's still important, for us—it's already so-so. (male, 23, Makhachkala)*

The third, even broader, type of marital norm prescribes marrying a representative of one of the "Dagestani" nationalities[5]. As an example, below is an excerpt from an interview with a twenty-year-old woman from Makhachkala, who only considers Dagestani men as marriage candidates:

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[5] Dagestan often is described by its residents as a place of cultural diversity, with the pattern of imagining this diversity is through the "peoples", which "have lived in Dagestan since ancient times". These "peoples" commonly include all the main census categories, excluding the category of "Russians" (Nazarov, 2022).

Interviewer: *Are you considering that it could be a Russian husband?*

Informant: *No, definitely not a Russian one.*

Interviewer: *Definitely not? What if he's a Russian from Dagestan?*

Informant: *Also no, anyway…*

Interviewer: *So, a Tabasaran or just a Dagestani?*

Informant: *Any Dagestani.*

Interviewer: *Are you considering any Muslims? A Turk or an Azerbaijani?*

Informant: *No, only a Dagestani.*

Interviewer: *Only a Dagestani. Outlined the range of possibilities.*

Informant: *For me, in my subjective opinion, there is no better man than a Dagestani man, but that's for me. For me, Dagestani men are simply a stronghold of masculinity. Of course, there are many morons, but I don't pay attention to them. I know a lot of Dagestani men who are courageous, modern, educated guys. And I really like that. And that's why I'm not ready to marry anyone else at all, under any circumstances. I'd rather stay alone. (female, 20, Makhachkala)*

Some informants, however, consider Russians who socialized in Dagestan, to be Dagestani:

Interviewer: *Does she want to get married now too?*

Informant 2: *We don't even ask anymore.*

Informant 1: *The law is the law. And whether she wants it or not, who will ask her when her father and mother insist? If we come across one, we will not refuse a normal person. A normal person—will not refuse.*

Interviewer: *And if he is Russian, will you refuse?*

Informant 2: *It makes no difference.*

Informant 1: *Yes, it makes no difference, the main thing is that they get along.*

Interviewer: *And what if it's some Pole?*

Informant 1: *No, no, that one no. [We need] our own, Dagestani. (female, 52, female, 59, Arakul)*

Interviewer: *And if she's Russian and is from Dagestan, if she was born... After all, there are Russians in Dagestan too?*

Informant: *Well, that, again, depends on the person. If she, for example, has a Dagestani mindset, then it might be okay. (male, 21, Makhachkala)*

However, sometimes in such cases, as a condition for the possibility of marriage, potential Russian marriage partners may be required to convert to Islam, and this segues to the fourth, Islamic type of marriage normativity, which generally outlines the possible candidates as any Muslim, but also provides the opportunity to marry a proselyte. An informant, commenting on a conflict with her brother, who believes that her husband can only be a man of the same nationality, emphasized that for her only the Islamic criterion is important:

> **Informant:** *My family has no restrictions, because my family is religious, and I was never told: "You will only marry a Lezgin!" Only my brother says this, and I don't agree with him, screw him. "You will only marry a Lezgin,"—no one ever told me this, because they understood that religion comes first, religion, and then some other values. <...> But my brother always told me: "I will never marry you off to anyone except a Lezgin." I was like: "You have no right [to say so]." I was already guided by my religion, because according to religion I can marry anyone. And that's it, it turns out that's how it is now. But this is a solvable issue. In the past there was something [like the brother believes], and it was very difficult to solve. So, yeah. Now you can even marry an African. (female, 20, Makhachkala)*

Informants often note that the category "Muslims" is open for anyone to enter and that if potential spouses initially belong to different religions: one to Islam, while the other—not, the latter can convert to Islam, and this applies to both brides and grooms:

> **Interviewer:** *Is religion important when choosing a wife?*
> **Informant:** *Well, yes. Even if we get married, for many the most important thing is religion. The fact that I, for example, am a Muslim, and I marry a Christian, the most important thing for us is that she converts to Islam. (male, 21, Makhachkala)*

> **Informant:** *We have nothing against Russians, of course, or even against other nations, it's just the way it is with us. I tell my daughter: let him be Russian but convert to Islam. Then I'll be [for it]. (female, 40, Makhachkala)*

The last type of marital normativity is formulated in reverse. According to its logic, a person can act as a marriage partner without restrictions that exist in the first four types of normativity. In

the informants’ discourse, the answer “*anyone*” is often encountered in different variations and formulations in response to the question about a potential groom/bride. Typically, however, such an attitude is accompanied by an indication of the importance of several other parameters. These may include the presence of romantic feelings, appropriateness of behavior and mindset, education, psychological compatibility, the partner’s looks, and others:

> **Interviewer:** *By the way, can your wife be religious or not?*
> **Informant:** *[(obsc., emot.) “Doesn’t matter”]!< ...>*
> **Interviewer:** *And what does your dad tell you?*
> **Informant:** *Dad says, [(obsc., emot.) “I don’t care at all!”] who you marry! It’s you* **who’ll have to live with her! <…>**
> **Interviewer:** *How do your parents feel about you marrying someone of another nationality?*
> **Informant:** *It doesn’t matter. Well, like the main thing for them is that she is normal, healthy, sane! Like they probably tell you the same thing—you’ll have to live [with her], you choose! My sister had an unsuccessful marriage when she was 20 years old. Then I asked my mother, like, mom, didn’t you see it? You knew him. My mother says, “It’s not my choice... it’s up to her to decide”! (male, 19, Makhachkala)*

> **Informant:** *It doesn’t make any difference to me anymore, like, well, it could be an Avar, a Dargin, any nation. It doesn’t make any difference to me anymore, well... The main thing is that the person is good. There are no bad nations, there are bad people, as they usually say. (male, 21, Makhachkala)*

Additionally, sometimes informants with children spoke about non-interference and the inappropriateness of transmitting attitudes about a marriage partner to their children:

> **Interviewer:** *Ah, I see. But what did you tell your children about choosing their future spouses? Were there any priorities?*
> **Informant:** *No. I tell my son, whoever you love—go get them, you will live just fine, you’ll both live. I did not interfere with their lives. And I told my daughters, too, love whoever you want to. Live your life. I did not interfere. (female, 60, Nizhniy Katrukh)*

Interviewer: *And did you give any instructions to your children?*

Informant: *No, no. I tell them that they need to get married because it's time to get married. "You need to decide," I say. It doesn't matter exactly. You just need to decide.*

Interviewer: *It doesn't matter at all who [they are]?*

Informant: *It doesn't matter at all. The main thing is that they decide.*

Interviewer: *And what if they go for Russians?*

Informant: *Well, what... Russians are people too, right? (male, 53, Arakul)*

Interviewer: *What will be important to you about your daughter's husband?*

Informant: *Oh, I totally understood that this works exactly [like that]. You don't need to be born beautiful, but happy, and the rest is not important. Well, and also that they can provide for themselves. (female, 49, Makhachkala)*

Quantitative ratios and determinants of marital attitudes

How are these types of normativity distributed in the collected data? Interviews, which often discussed both the informant's position and the views held in the family when he was growing up, made it possible in most cases to reconstruct this normativity concerning both the informants themselves and their parents.

Table 1 — Marital Attitudes: Distribution of answers

	Attitudes			
	Parents N	% (valid)	Informants N	% (valid)
Same village	36	54	17	17
Same nationality	11	16	4	4
Dagestanis	1	1	11	11
Muslims	9	13	40	40
Anyone/other	10	15	27	27
Valid	67	100	99	100
Missed	57		25	
N	124		124	
Chi-square = 41.197, asymptotic significance (bilateral) < 0.001				

It should be noted right away that as the selection of informants was carried out based on

various quotas, the informants in the array are of different ages, the minimum age being 18 years, while the maximum is 86 years. In other words, the difference between informants and their parents is not exactly a difference between young people and the older generation. However, although no specific question was asked about the age of parents, from general considerations one can expect an approximately 20-year age gap between these groups, and if the median age of informants is 38 years (born in 1984), for parents this value, accordingly, is about 58 years (born in 1964).

The distribution clearly shows that the prevailing attitude among parents is that one should marry residents or people from the same village. This attitude is coded as dominant among the parents of 54% of informants. The idea that the marriage market in terms of ethnic categories should be regulated by Islamic norms or that one can marry anyone—regardless of the categorical membership of the groom and the bride—is less common (13% and 15%, respectively). Nationalities as a limiter of the marriage market also significantly "lose" to the attitude "to marry fellow villagers". In other words, the parents of informants from the array are predominantly for intra-village marriages.

A completely different picture characterizes the aggregate of informants themselves: the most frequent option is the attitude towards marriage within the framework of Islamic norms (40% of informants adhere to this position), but humanistic universalistic attitudes are also widespread (27%). The idea that one should marry fellow villagers is less widespread (17%). And it hardly ever happens (4%) that the informant's narrative is dominated by the idea that one should marry a representative of the same nationality. According to this data, attitudes change, and the idea of "marrying fellow villagers" leaves the community as a whole, but it is replaced by either an Islamic or universal framework. Nationalities have little significance in the parents' generation, and in the children's generation this significance is almost completely absent.

These results suggest that attitudes are related to age or generational affiliation. To test this, the nominal variable given above was recoded into a binary variable, where attitudes toward marriages with representatives of one's village, the same nationality, and Dagestanis were coded as "particularism," and Islamic attitudes and the absence of restrictions were coded as "universalism". A correlation analysis was performed, which found a relationship between the attitudes of both informants and parents with the age of informants ($r=-202$, $p=0.045$; $r=-240$, $p=0.05$). A more detailed regression analysis, however, showed that the main explanatory variable was not the age but rather the place of informants' socialization, and if it happened in a rural area, the probability that an informant would adhere to particularistic positions was 4 times higher than if they were socialized in the city. In other words, particularistic attitudes are a territorial factor, and in the course of urbanization, these attitudes weaken.

Table 2 — Regression analysis of factors associated with marital attitudes of informants

	B	Sign.	Exp (B)
Age	-.014	.289	.986
Gender	.136	.782	1.145
Educational level	.147	.597	1.159
Socialization (0—rural locality, 1—city)	1.401	.008	4.060
Constant	.448	.574	1.566
Cox and Snell R-squared	.128		
Nagelkerke R-squared	.179		
N	92		
Dependent variable: attitude (0—particularism; 1—universalism			

Other calculations were also carried out, comparing the positions of informants and their parents. According to the results, if generations of a family differed in terms of marital attitudes, these changes occurred in the direction of universalism—Islamic or humanistic.

Table 3 — Intergenerational dynamics of marital attitudes in families

Parents' position–informants' position	N	% (valid)
Universalism–particularism	2	4
Not changed, particularism	17	30
Not changed, universalism	15	26
Particularism–universalism	23	40
Total	57	100
Total	124	

In general, based on this data[6], it can be concluded that marital attitudes in Dagestan are changing: a transition is taking place from the particularistic attitude of "marrying fellow villagers" to one of the types of universalism—Islamic, within which the marriage market of a Muslim is the entire ummah (and if a non-Muslim accepts Islam "for marriage"—the marriage market turns out to be even wider),—or humanistic, within which there are no categorical restrictions on marital

[6] Data collected over the course of this study is not fully representative in the scope of the entire Republic of Dagestan, however, the process of the informant selection (approximately equal representation of the informants from the mountainous areas and the Makhachkala agglomeration) as well as the matching procedure that was essentially applied in some calculations, in which the views of children are juxtaposed to the views of their parents, allow us to make, though quite restricted, conclusions on the dynamics of the described events in the context of the republic as a whole. The generalizations made in this and further fragments, thus, should be considered with these points in mind, and become hypotheses of a future quantitative study using a survey methodology.

behavior. At the same time, nationalities, both in the case of parents and to an even greater extent in the case of informants, are not and, at least in recent decades, have not been any significant primary restriction on marital behavior, and the transition is taking place directly from rural particularism to one of the types of universalism, bypassing nationalities. Simply put, nationalities play virtually no role in regulating marital behavior. But in cases when they do play a role, and where the informant or his parents are classified as primarily inclined towards the position of "one should marry representatives of the same nationality"—what is this role? These rare cases were analyzed, and several discursive logics were identified, that is, standard models of explanation on the part of informants, in which the importance of marrying representatives of the same nationality is indicated, and this importance is explained.

Discursive logic behind the "marry people of your own nationality" attitude

The first discursive logic is cultural similarity. People of the same nationality, according to this logic, are people who are similar to each other from a cultural standpoint, and such similarity facilitates understanding within both the nuclear and extended families. In particular, (1) the newlyweds themselves, (2) the newlyweds, on the one hand, and the parents/older generation of their spouse (in this case, this also concerns the language, as older people may not know Russian very well or want to speak with their son-in-law/daughter-in-law "in their own"), (3) relatives from both sides, meeting at family events,—will understand each other better.

> **Informant:** *And then, there is another point we have to address. Yes, we are friends with each other, regardless of nationality, and at work too. But when it comes to family, everyone, most of those you ask will want [the spouse to be the nationality of] their own. "Their [own]" daughter-in-law, they will say: "Because we have a common culture, because we have a common language." (female, 38, Makhachkala)*

> **Interviewer:** *And they forbade you [to marry] a Russian woman?*
> **Informant:** *They didn't want to, especially my mother said: "I don't know this language." I said: "She [the Russian daughter-in-law] will know our language, she works as a teacher." "No, no, I don't want to," she told me. (m, 80, Tlyadal)*

> **Informant:** *You won't have to... Let's say, if you're a girl, you marry a man of another nationality, you go to his family, and let's say they're used to speaking their language there, you don't understand them, it will be unpleasant for you to*

speak another language. Or you may simply not understand their customs or peculiarities that they have. But generally, probably, here and there, everything is the same. Well, maybe there will be some little things. (female, 21, Makhachkala)

Whether representatives of one nationality will indeed be more culturally similar than representatives of different nationalities, and what exactly the cultural similarities and differences consist of, the informants either do not discuss in detail, arguing that—in addition to language—we are talking about "adats", "traditions" and "rituals", in particular wedding ones, or mentioning empirical differences between families known to them, which they attribute specifically to nationalities:

Informant: *As if the two cultures were completely different as if this were an American and I-don't-know-who else. There's a big difference in terms of upbringing, there are customs. I remember this one time, there was a wedding: we can't do this, we can't do that, it's not done that way, we don't understand it. Women start there, mostly women, and women rule everywhere, men don't interfere, men just don't interfere. (male, 37, Makhachkala)*

Interviewer: *And what, for example, what traditions can lead to conflict?*
Informant: *Sometimes it's the worldview itself, the attitude towards people, how else do I phrase it, towards the perception of everything. Or the upbringing of children can be different, sometimes their upbringing is tough-love, and sometimes it's very soft. (male, 21, Makhachkala)*

The second discursive logic is also related to culture, but it can be defined as the value of preserving culture. According to this logic, in the modern world, "one's own culture" or "national culture" is being eroded and lost. The reason for this is, among other things, marriages in which the husband and wife belong to different cultures, and if they belong to the same culture, it is more likely to be passed on to the child. Such transmission, however, does not happen on its own, and parents will need to make a certain effort to achieve this.

Informant: *You should at least try to understand your native language. Look, a son is born, he doesn't know it, or rather, he supposedly knows it, just for show, and his children already won't. And that means they won't know what you're*

saying. And then it turns out that nationality is already lost. Therefore, it's not for reasons like not to marry or anything. It's necessary to preserve your valuable nationality. You see with the Chechens, the Chechens don't lose anything anywhere. For example, I'll marry a Russian, a Dargin, someone else, but the child… I work, I'm somewhere, I'm something, all that's left is to rest. Naturally, she doesn't know Lak [language], but she'll teach them her nationality. Therefore, if, for example, the wife knows her husband's language, it's good. You know, so that she teaches the children both her language and her husband's language. (male, 32, Makhachkala)

Informant: *Interethnic marriages are already very common. But the probability that their son, daughter will be born without a specific nationality, without knowing their language, is very high. Based on this, many are also afraid of us, so that their children do not grow up like that. Parents forbid it because it is embarrassing. (male, 21, Makhachkala)*

The third discursive logic is one of information and control. One should marry representatives of the same nationality because they and their families are closer territorially and more closely connected socially. As a result, firstly, before the wedding it is easier to find out the "ins and outs" of "the other side" and, if necessary, to call off the marriage (if the future spouse is of another nationality, such "inquiry" into their background will be more difficult). Secondly, if married life is associated with problems, it will be easier for the bride's side to influence representatives of their nationality—they live closer, and there will always be friends of friends who can influence the situation.

Informant: *It's convenient because when you marry a person of your nationality, they check you. You are already in a certain system where everyone knows each other. Recently my friend was engaged, my mother called and said that she knew whose son it was, he lives two streets away. That is, they are already checking everyone, who he is, what he is, what he does. A certain circle that everyone knows, and everyone is calm. Husband, wife, we know them, their families, we have mutual acquaintances. Sort of like a precaution. (female, 25, Makhachkala)*

It was precisely these discursive logics that, in one way or another, were reproduced from

interview to interview when the informant expressed the opinion that one should marry representatives of the same nationality.

There was also one case that stood out from the logic described. An informant who grew up outside Dagestan and indicated that she was Tabasaran by nationality said that she would theoretically like to marry a Tabasaran ("*Of course, I would like to find a Tabasaran, it's cool, their own language and so on. But, on the other hand, I understand that the main thing is for the person to be good*" (female, 25, Makhachkala)), however, as follows from the analysis of the interview, none of the logics presented above apply to her case; rather, we are talking about modern urban identification processes, when closeness is constructed essentially from scratch based on nominal categorical similarities.

Thus, when explaining the importance of marrying members of the same nationality, Dagestanis mainly assume that nationality partly ensures cultural similarity, which is important both for understanding within the family and for the reproduction of culture, as well as network closeness, which makes the selection process, as well as the life after the wedding, more transparent and controllable.

Attitudes from "the same village" and "the same nationality" as variants of particularism

According to classical works (Barth, 1998) and the modern constructivist consensus (Wimmer, 2009), however, various elements of culture usually correspond to official classificatory categories with a certain degree of arbitrariness. There is no reason for it not to be the case in Dagestan. Nominal Avars, originating from villages whose inhabitants were classified as belonging to different nationalities in the 1926 census but later merged into a single national category, are unlikely to understand each other due to substantial linguistic differences, and marriage adats, for example, often differ in neighboring villages where the language is the same (Aligadzhieva, 2014; 2015). What kind of cultural similarity is in question then? The general assumption is that nationalities in this case—regardless of how much they actually "capture" cultural similarities and differences—are a way of imagining and structuring cultural diversity *per se*, although previously such a role was played by other categorical arrangements, including those classifying the surrounding people by villages and jamaats.

If this is so, an indirect indication of it could be the reproduction of the same discursive logics in explaining why marriages between representatives of the same rural jamaat and the same nationality are preferable. An additional analysis of the interviews was conducted, during which variants were indeed found for each discursive logic, where the need to marry residents/people from the same village is explained in this way. In particular, it may—by analogy with nationalities—be explained by cultural similarity ("Well, of course, it is more preferable to marry someone from your

village, even not from your area, but from your village. This is preferable because they are close in spirit and in these…" (male, 36, Makhachkala)), the need to preserve culture ("Of course, it would be good for them to marry [a person] who knows their language. I would like that. But you can't stop it. It's all already going away. There will remain languages that have more information and are easier to learn" (male, 64, Kaspiysk)), and network proximity ("Of course, they try to marry from their native village first of all because you know about them, you know the family, you know the tukhum, because if they allow themselves too much, it's a matter of time, they will find out anyway" (male, 40, Makhachkala)). Moreover, in some cases, informants directly state that marriage with fellow villagers is desirable but often impossible, and in this situation, a compromise option would be marriage with a representative of the same nationality: "Our parents told us... Here are the brothers who have wives from our village. They said, of course, [you need somebody] from our village, but in extreme cases, you can just marry a Lak." (female, 39, Makhachkala). This allows us to reasonably assume that "the same village" and "the same nationality" are different versions of particularistic logic, which, as the statements above demonstrate, is being replaced by different types of universalism.

Conclusions and discussion

It is obvious that changes in marital norms are taking place, and Dagestan, moving away from the norm of "marrying fellow villagers" and bypassing the national framework, finds itself inscribed in one of two universalist projects: Islamic, where any Muslim can be a spouse, and humanistic, where any person can be a spouse regardless of categorical affiliation. These projects tend to be the "marriage ideology" of young city dwellers, while rural particularism "remains" in the villages and is losing ground due to the urbanization of the republic. An analysis of the literature, however, indicates that urbanization does not necessarily lead to universalization and inter-categorical marriages, and, based on it, one can conclude that in Dagestan, universalizing factors are stronger than particularizing ones (for example, the logic of resource conservation). It is not surprising that the only case of rural particularism from a person socialized in the city is the case of a native of the village of Kubachi, where strong particularistic attitudes are convincingly explained by the village's long-standing craft specialization in silverware. In other cases, the ideas common in villages do not reach people who grew up in the city, where—for different reasons—other marital norms and ideologies are common, and it is under the influence of the latter that the people plan their marital behavior and act accordingly. There is another reason for the "extinction" of the rural particularistic framework—there might be too few villagers and natives of the required gender and age, and universalistic logic turns out to be more practical since it allows

for a more effective response to the demands of those entering the marriage market.

A compromise logic in such a situation—in urban conditions—could be particularism “by nationality”. It has been shown that the logic used in arguing in favor of marriages with representatives of the same nationality is “borrowed” from rural particularism, but the marriage market in such a situation is significantly expanded. Why is it not used given that, from other literature (Mitchell, 1956), it is known that cities in a situation of intensive urbanization are often structured through particularistic categories similar to Dagestani nationalities?

This question can be formulated more generally: why do nationalities in modern Dagestani cities not organize relations between people? The answer to this question is currently non-existent in the literature, just as it has only recently begun to be asked in this phrasing (Varshaver, 2022b, 2025). Nevertheless, we can hypothesize that the reasons for this are, on the one hand, weak institutionalization of nationalities, on the other—the absence of visible markers of differences between representatives of different nationalities, on the third—a different coalition structuring of the political field, on the fourth—the presence of powerful ideological competitors in the form of the Islamic framework and secular humanistic universalism.

Nationalities, therefore, did not become the leading classification structuring the marriage market and marriage behavior, and this finding adds to the arguments in favor of the hypothesis that nationalities as a classificatory framework are becoming irrelevant (Varshaver, 2022b, 2025; Varshaver (ed.), Gutsunaev et al., 2022; Varshaver et al., 2024), and it can be expected that within a few generations people will stop classifying themselves and others as belonging to any nationalities.

Another argument in favor of this is the prevalence of the idea of the “mixed-ness” of children from interethnic marriages in urban Dagestan, which contrasts with the ideas widespread in rural areas, according to which children from interethnic marriages are assigned to the category of the father. In a situation of an increase in the share of such marriages, more and more people will not be able to be classified as representatives of a particular nationality, and therefore the descriptive power of nationalities as a whole will decrease. Nationalities, therefore, in a sense, “die out”. But is ethnicity “dying out”?

To summarize the contemporary constructivist consensus, ethnicity is defined as relevant social classifications based on categories in which membership is typically inherited. An additional important consideration is that ethnicity is contextual, that is, different classifications may be relevant in different contexts; people do not live in all contexts at the same time, only some are primary for them at any given moment, and therefore the classifications that are relevant for them are those that are used to differentiate people in that context.

In this regard, the answer to the question of whether ethnicity is “dying out” in Dagestan or

not can be given by answering the question of which classifications that satisfy the definition given above, are relevant to modern Dagestanis, and are produced in the contexts in which they often find themselves.

It can be said that the ethnic classifications that re-describe the population of Dagestan arise in three contexts: (1) within the Islamic framework (dividing people into Muslims, People of the Book, and pagans), (2) within one of the Russian cities outside of Dagestan, where the categories of "Dagestani" and "Caucasian[7]" are relevant, and (3) within that of nation-states, where Dagestanis are considered Russians. It is precisely these classificatory frameworks that are replacing the outdated classification by nationality, even though this classification, in all likelihood, never really regulated the marriage market at all.

But what about secular humanistic universalism, an ideology of which the focus on marital universalism is a variant? To what extent is it an opportunity to escape the "wheel of samsara", within which one ethnic classification is constantly replaced by another as it becomes relevant? There is no clear answer to this question. Some studies appeal to the evolutionarily developed human tendency to classify other people. Ethnicity, according to this notion, is always "somewhere around" due to the evolutionarily developed characteristics of humans as species (Gil-White, 2001; Cosmides, Tooby & Kurzban, 2003). There are also other works in which the undoubted "omnipresence" of ethnicity is proposed to be associated not with human nature, but with the universality of the struggle for resources, in which ethnicity turns out to be an effective tool of exclusion (Jenkins, 2008). Moreover, humanism—both in terms of marriage and in general—is first and foremost an ideological framework, and it often turns out that people are not guided by the things they declare, hence universalism turns out to be painfully particularistic.

So, ideological universalism does not lead to real marital and, ever more broadly speaking, behavioral universalism? Then how does the obvious marital universalization in Dagestan fit into broader trends, and what are these trends? Can we claim that humanity is moving towards "unity"—that is, speaking in the language of the model described above, the categories of relevant classifications are gradually embracing ever larger populations of people, and this classificatory growth is linear? The answer to this question is not simple either. On the one hand, with globalization in its broad sense, classifications intended to describe all of humanity should "enter every home", on the other hand, local contexts in which the struggle for resources takes place and ethnic classifications are implemented continue to be the main arena for most people on earth.

The situation is further complicated by global inequality, which is both supported and attacked by various classificatory instruments (citizenship, religion), which are also exclusionary. If

[7] Note that in Russian the category "Caucasian" is generally used to indicate people from the region of Caucasus, as opposed to its frequent use as a racial category in general in English.

we look at the situation in the long-term, it looks like universalization occurs, but each time it encounters new, broader in terms of categorical coverage and types particularism, and it is precisely these global "particularisms" that humanity increasingly lives with. In this regard, we can turn to the theories of the so-called "*glocalization*" (Robertson, 1995; Bauman, 1998) and conclude that marital behavior is on the one hand a "hostage" of this phenomenon, and on the other—its "fuel".

The study—taking into account the described limitations of the method—showed that the marriage market for Dagestanis is expanding; and that the residents of the republic are gradually moving from the attitude of "marrying fellow villagers" to one of the universalistic frameworks—Islamic and humanistic; that nationalities currently practically do not regulate the marriage market and, most likely, have never seriously done so. Thus, the paper is on the one hand a contribution to the research of marriage attitudes in Dagestan, and on the other—to international research at the intersection of marriage and ethnicity, as well as ethnicity itself, due to Dagestan's transition from one ethnic classificatory framework to another, and marriages becoming one of the spheres in which and due to which this transition occurs.

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