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## EVERYDAY ETHNICITY IN ASTANA: FAMILY STRATEGIES, RELIGION, AND MEMORY AMONG INGUSH, TATARS, AND DUNGANS

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**Abstract.** This article examines how ethnicity is constructed and maintained within Astana's urban environment among Ingush, Tatar, and Dungan communities. The theoretical framework combines J. Berry's acculturation model, F. Barth's "ethnic boundaries" approach, and the concept of everyday religiosity, complemented by a historical-contextual analysis of colonial governance of Islam, deportations, and the Virgin Lands campaign. The study demonstrates that marital practices and post-marital residence patterns remain key mechanisms of boundary maintenance: among the Ingush, endogamy and patrilocality are normative (with urban variation); among the Tatars, nuclear autonomy prevails alongside high tolerance for mixed marriages; among the Dungans, a shift is observed from compact endogamy toward greater openness, while maintaining a religious criterion in marriage. Economic niches are correlated with family strategies and networks of mutual assistance: construction and entrepreneurship are typical for the Ingush; the Tatars combine public-sector employment with trade and services; the Dungans display a dual model linking Zhambyl (agriculture) and Astana (services and catering). Religion, language, and cuisine act as stable markers of belonging, while urban institutions—such as ethnocultural centers and sites of memory—connect groups without dissolving their boundaries. The study concludes that integrative configurations dominate, though local pockets of separation persist, with practical implications for urban policy.

**Keywords:** Astana, everyday ethnicity, acculturation, ethnic boundaries, religion, marital practices, memory.

### Introduction

Astana stands as one of the most multiethnic cities in contemporary Kazakhstan, where the flows of internal migration, post-Soviet diaspora trajectories, and institutional practices of managing cultural diversity – exemplified by the Assembly of the People of Kazakhstan –

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intersect. Within this context, ethnicity functions not as a fixed and immutable set of traits, but as a dynamic process continually enacted through everyday practices: family scenarios of marriage and cohabitation or separation, religious routines, economic strategies, and linguistic behavior. Both material “nodes of memory” (historical districts, mosques, memorial sites) and immaterial forms (rituals, cuisine, norms of piety) play a significant role in translating the past into a resource for the present. The research focuses on three groups: Ingush, Tatars, and Dungans. These communities differ in their historical trajectories of settlement in Kazakhstan and in the strategies they employ to maintain ethnic boundaries, yet they encounter shared challenges characteristic of metropolitan life: reconciling kinship and marital prescriptions with the rhythms of the urban economy, aligning religious norms with multilingual and multicultural everyday realities, and balancing the preservation of cultural distinctiveness with participation in the wider urban networks. The empirical foundation of the study consists of field interviews interpreted within a coherent theoretical framework

### **Research Problem and Objectives**

The purpose of this study is to demonstrate how, in the context of a large multiethnic city, ethnicity is “made” and maintained at the level of everyday practices. We proceed from a processual understanding of ethnicity as a result of the intersection of family decisions, religious regimes, economic strategies, and the functioning of urban institutions.

The research objectives are formulated as follows. First, to describe marital attitudes and post-marital residence patterns, comparing expectations of endogamy and exogamy with actual urban practices and taking into account religious criteria, kinship obligations (including patrilocal rules), and housing constraints. Second, to characterize economic niches and forms of “urban capital” (construction, trade and services, public and cultural sectors), linking them with family strategies and networks of mutual assistance. Third, to reveal the role of everyday religiosity and community centers as mechanisms of regulation and integration without the loss of boundaries. Fourth, to interpret intergroup differences in the coordinates of acculturation, ethnic boundaries, and everyday religion, correlating them with the “long” historical regimes (imperial governance of Islam, migrations and deportations, Soviet urbanization) that define the corridors of opportunity for contemporary practices.

In line with these objectives, the study is guided by the following research question: “How do marital and kinship norms, everyday religious regimes, and economic specializations interact to produce integrative, assimilative, or separation-oriented configurations among Ingush, Tatar, and Dungan households in Astana, and through which everyday boundary-making practices are these configurations sustained across the family life cycle?”

### **History and Theoretical Framework**

In John Berry’s acculturation model, the strategies of groups and individuals are described along two independent dimensions: (a) the desire to maintain one’s own cultural practices and (b) the willingness to engage with the host society. The intersection of these dimensions produces four configurations: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization (*Berry, 1997; 2005; 2006*). In the everyday urban life of Astana, the integrative vector is observed more

frequently; however, localized “pockets” of separation are consistently reproduced where marital and kinship regulators remain strong (including gender-asymmetric endogamy) and where the spatial compactness of settlement supports dense intra-group networks. Contemporary revisions of the concept of acculturation emphasize that it is not a linear trajectory but rather a set of situational regimes that depend on the institutional environment and the family’s life cycle (Schwartz *et al.*, 2010). In the case of Kazakhstan’s capital, these dynamics are further shaped by the features of the “metropolitan project” and everyday urbanization – the redefinition of space, patterns of employment, and sites of memory (Laszczkowski, 2016; Fauve, 2022).

Fredrik Barth’s approach shifts the focus from the “content of culture” to the mechanisms of boundary maintenance: marital filters, rules of cohabitation, exchanges and reciprocal obligations, linguistic regimes, and ritual cycles (Barth, 1969). In later developments by Andreas Wimmer and Rogers Brubaker, such “constructed” boundaries are understood as the outcome of everyday classifications and institutional “rules of passage” that determine who is considered “one’s own” in marriage, who bears the duty of caring for elders, and which languages and practices are legitimized in public and domestic spaces (Brubaker, 2004; Wimmer, 2013). In the metropolitan context, this explains why, despite high interethnic mobility, expectations of endogamy, patrilocal orientations (“the youngest son lives with parents”), and recurring ritual cycles continue to operate, drawing participants back into the ethnic order.

In this article, we use the concept of “everyday ethnicity” to denote the routine, taken-for-granted practices through which ethnic belonging is enacted, recognized, and reproduced in daily life—through family arrangements, rituals, bodily norms, linguistic habits, commensality, and micro-interactions in domestic and neighborhood spaces. Unlike Michael Billig’s notion of banal nationalism, which centers on how states reproduce national imagination through symbols and official discourse, everyday ethnicity shifts attention toward the micro-social domain: kinship expectations, caregiving obligations, marriage filters, foodways, and intimate moral norms. It also differs from approaches to everyday nationhood and everyday multiculturalism, which prioritize civic routines or intergroup coexistence; here, the analytical focus lies primarily on the subtle procedures through which boundaries are drawn and maintained within families and small urban communities, and on how these procedures are recalibrated by the pressures and opportunities of metropolitan life.

**The Perspective of Everyday Religion** The perspective of everyday religion reveals how micro-rituals—domestic prayer, fasting, commemorative meals, charity, codified norms of modesty, dining practices, and the choice of language in communication—routinely reproduce both belonging and the moral economy of the family (McGuire, 2008; Ammerman, 2014). Studies of Central Asia further emphasize the resilience of these “grassroots” mechanisms: they outlast linguistic shifts, changes in employment, and migration, remaining “sticky” markers of boundaries while easily adapting to the multiethnic urban environment (Privratsky, 2001; Louw, 2007; Rasanayagam, 2011).

The historical background is crucial for understanding differences among groups. In the Russian Empire, Islam in the steppe and border regions was regulated through the Orenburg Muslim Spiritual Assembly (OMSA)—an institution responsible for licensing the clergy, registering mosques and maktabas, and mediating the state’s communication with Muslim communities (Frank, 2001; Crews, 2006). Turkic-speaking Tatars often acted as urban intermediaries—mullahs, scribes, translators, and merchants—thus forming the early infrastructure of urban Islamic life

(Ross, 2020). This “intermediary capital” helps to explain both the prominence of Tatars in the early Soviet urban fabric and their relatively higher tolerance toward mixed marriages, while still maintaining their own communal institutions.

Dungans and Ingush: Historical Trajectories and Contemporary Strategies. The Dungans are descendants of Hui Muslims who migrated to Central Asia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. The compact nature of their settlements, their own language (Sinitic dialects), and the disciplined character of everyday religiosity established a separatist contour of marital and kinship norms, while also consolidating cuisine as a recognizable cultural symbol (*Rimsky-Korsakoff Dyer, 1983; Gladney, 1996; Lipman, 1997; Harris, 2004*). In the post-Soviet period, the expansion of cross-border trade with China activated a form of “border capital” – linguistic and network advantages enabling participation in logistics, retail, and the restaurant business. In the capital, however, these resources are more often transformed into integrative strategies, including mixed marriages, diversification of employment, and involvement in urban institutions (*Nyíri, 2009*).

For the Ingush, the “long shadow” of the 1944 deportations remains a key factor shaping family memory and urban networks. Special settlements, restrictions on mobility, and the high losses of the first years of exile produced a specific “moral economy of kinship” and enduring expectations of mutual aid. The partial rehabilitation of 1957 anchored part of the families in the Kazakh SSR, primarily near transport hubs and major urban arteries (*Martin, 2001; Naimark, 2001; Polian, 2004*). The trajectory of their settlement in the cities of central Kazakhstan was also influenced by the Virgin Lands campaign: large-scale resettlements, infrastructural investments, and the expansion of labor markets provided access to housing, equipment, and initial capital. In the long term, these conditions facilitated the emergence of entrepreneurial and professional dynasties and the redefinition of marital and residential strategies in accordance with the rhythms of the urban economy (*Olcott, 1995; Dave, 2007; Pianciola, 2012*). Kazakhstan’s language policy and kinship-network practices complement this framework, explaining the resilience of family obligations and the forms of inclusion into metropolitan life (*Schatz, 2004; Smagulova, 2008*).

Everyday ethnicity is also shaped by gendered regimes and generational trajectories that structure how boundaries are reproduced in daily life. Expectations surrounding marriage, obligations of care, co-residence with parents, and participation in economic niches are differentiated by gender and shift across generations—older cohorts tend to uphold stricter norms of endogamy and kin-based obligations, whereas younger cohorts adapt these norms to the opportunities and constraints of metropolitan life. This intersection of gender and generation forms an important layer through which everyday boundary-making is enacted in the three communities.

## Methods

The empirical basis of the study consists of 11 semi-structured interviews conducted in Astana between January and May 2025. Recruitment was carried out using convenience and snowball sampling methods (street locations, markets, personal recommendations), in line with established practices in qualitative research on urban everyday life. All interviews were conducted with informed consent; conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed.

Anonymity was ensured: pseudonyms and depersonalized identifiers (ethnicity, occupation, city, age) were used in the publication, and no personal data were collected beyond what was necessary for contextualizing quotations. Audio files and transcripts are stored in encrypted form.

The selection of Ingush, Tatar, and Dungan communities is purposeful: it brings together three contrasting historical trajectories that illuminate different mechanisms of boundary-making. The Ingush case reflects the long-term effects of deportation and the moral economy of kinship shaped by exile; the Dungan case represents a compact diaspora with a strong linguistic and religious core linked to borderland history; and the Tatar case illustrates a long-standing urban intermediary group that historically occupied key positions in religious, commercial, and administrative networks. These divergent trajectories allow for a comparative analysis of how everyday ethnicity is recalibrated in the metropolitan context. Kazakhs and Russians are not included, not because they are less relevant, but due to a deliberate sampling focus on diasporic groups with distinct historical pathways.

The interview guide included sections on family history, marital attitudes and post-marital residence, employment, religious practices, language, cuisine, and participation in community institutions. The analytical procedure followed a hybrid design: the initial coding framework was developed deductively from the theoretical model (acculturation, ethnic boundaries, everyday religion) and subsequently expanded through inductive codes derived from the interview corpus. Coding was carried out by two researchers; 30% of transcripts underwent double-coding, followed by discussion of discrepancies until consensus was reached. For synthesis, thematic matrices such as “group × domain” and “life cycle × practice” were employed, enabling comparison across cases and tracing of recurring configurations.

**Table 1 presents a simplified coding scheme used during the analytical stage. The table summarizes the core deductive and inductive codes across the five analytical groups**

Nº	Group	Marriage	Residence	Economy	Religion	Language & Food
1	Ingush	Endogamy; gender asymmetry; kin approval	Conditional patrilocality; youngest-son obligation	Construction; family-based entrepreneurship	Everyday religiosity; ritual continuity	Adat norms; home-based practices; stable cuisine patterns
2	Tatar	Mixed marriages; selective endogamy	Nuclear autonomy; temporary co-residence for economic reasons	Public sector + services/trade	Varied religiosity; sites of memory	Language classes; cultural centers; family cuisine
3	Dungan	Religious filter; village/city difference	Stepwise autonomy; youngest-son duty	Agriculture (village) / trade & catering (city)	Disciplined everyday religion; commemorations	Home language; cuisine as identity marker

Table 1 thus functions as a cross-case matrix that summarizes the main configurations observed across groups and analytical domains, providing a visual outline of recurring patterns identified in the interview material.

Thematic saturation was achieved at the level of domain-specific topics. Along five thematic axes—marriage/post-marital residence; economic engagement; ritual practices; language/cuisine/places; and participation in community institutions—a stable core of meanings and variations was identified according to settlement type (for Dungans: “village/capital”), generation, and gender. Subsequent interviews reproduced previously observed patterns without significant expansion of the thematic field.

We acknowledge the researcher’s positionality. The interviewers—Russian- and Kazakh-speaking researchers in their early thirties, unaffiliated with any ethnocultural centers – may have influenced the depth of statements on religiosity and marital norms. To reduce the “expectation effect” of direct questioning, the narrative section of the interview guide was used, and sensitive topics were approached through everyday scenarios (holidays, commemorative rituals, children’s schooling, mortgages, and housing decisions). In the text, field excerpts are marked as field testimonies with standardized respondent attribution.

## Discussion

### 1) Marital Norms

Endogamy, Religious Criteria, and Urban Openness Our material on the Ingush demonstrates a stable orientation toward endogamy accompanied by marked gender asymmetry: “not giving daughters away” outside the ethnic group remains a normative expectation, whereas marriages between men and Muslim women of other nationalities are tolerated. A. (Ingush, programmer, Astana, age 37) formulates this directly: “It is customary to marry within our own... Men can marry girls from other nationalities, but we try not to give our daughters to men of other nationalities.” His account also underscores the role of teip (clan) solidarity and the “supervision” of elders: the choice of a spouse and subsequent residential decisions are coordinated with kin expectations, while the youngest son typically remains with his parents.

However, in the urban environment, this rigid matrix is notably softened. M. (Ingush, private sector, Astana, age 56) speaks openly about the increasing share of mixed marriages in the capital and the disappearance of late Soviet-era sanctions for interethnic unions. The biography of L. (Ingush woman, accountant, Astana, age 35) provides another example of urban “loosening” of boundaries: her family already spans several generations of interethnic ties (her mother is Russian, her paternal line is German), and L. herself is married to a Kazakh. Here, the religious criterion functions as a “minimal common denominator” of permissible exogamy. In terms of acculturation strategies, this represents a relatively rare combination: separation as a normative expectation and integration as everyday practice—prompted by urban mobility, mixed educational and professional environments, and a broader marriage market.

Tatar interviews consistently describe mixed marriages as socially acceptable and part of everyday normalcy. V. (Tatar woman, teacher, Astana, age 58) describes her family as “bicultural”: her husband is Russian, he learned Tatar, their children grew up bilingual, and the “Tatar” dimension is not decorative but a functioning domestic norm. In her circle, she notes, monoethnic marriages were traditionally encouraged, but her personal choice was not met with disapproval—a characteristic case of integration without assimilation.

At the same time, another pattern appears-conscious endogamy as a means of intergenerational transmission. A. (Tatar man, cultural sector, Astana, age 39) explicitly states that he wishes to marry a Tatar woman to preserve linguistic and everyday continuity. The role of “meeting places” is crucial here: R. (Tatar woman, pensioner, Astana, age 71) describes in detail the network of Tatar-Bashkir centers and Sabantuy festivals as spaces where social ties are maintained, acquaintances (including marital ones) are formed, and a sense of belonging to one’s own circle is reproduced. Taken together, these patterns create an integrative regime: interethnic marriages are common, yet endogamy remains a legitimate and meaningful choice for families who prioritize linguistic and cultural continuity.

In the Dungan materials, the dependence of marital norms on the type of settlement is particularly evident. Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Astana, age 33) describes a “soft norm”: parents are “loyal” toward different nationalities, but in the case of marriage with a Slavic woman, conversion to Islam is expected; at the same time, “30–40%” of families in his circle still prefer to “marry within their own.” In Astana, the picture changes. B. (Dungan man, entrepreneur in food service and trade, Astana, age 45) describes a social environment in which most friends are Kazakh, while school and work create mixed social networks. F. (Dungan woman, head of a community center, Astana, about 50 years old) clearly distinguishes between the “Korday model” (more endogamous) and the metropolitan one (more open), emphasizing that the religious requirement remains unchanged.

In other words, the Dungan case demonstrates a dual regime: separation in compact rural communities and a growing share of mixed marriages in the capital. Religion continues to serve as the filter of marital permissibility, yet the city expands horizons of choice and “loosens” marital circles without eroding the religious core.

Comparison of the three cases highlights different ways of maintaining boundaries while remaining integrated into the city. Among the Ingush, marital endogamy and kin-based control continue to set a high “threshold” for women’s marriages, yet the urban setting mitigates earlier sanctions and broadens the field of interaction. Among the Tatars, an integrative model predominates: mixed marriages are the social norm, while endogamy becomes a conscious strategy for preserving language and everyday practices. Among the Dungans, the trajectory moves from compact separation toward urban openness under the persistent condition of religious conformity. In Barthian terms, it is not the content of culture but the procedures of demarcation—who counts as “one’s own” in marriage, who bears obligations toward elders, where and how potential spouses meet—that sustain boundaries. The city, in turn, acts as a general softening mechanism: it widens social circles, alters regimes of sanction, and creates new, broader marital horizons—yet without abolishing the internal regulatory frameworks of each group.

## 2) Post-Marital Residence and Kinship

In Ingush family narratives, patrilocality appears as a self-evident foundation of household organization: parents remain with the youngest son, and the responsibility for their care is reinforced not only morally but also through the structure of the teip (clan). A. (Ingush man, programmer, Astana, age 37) expresses this without hesitation: “Our parents stay to live with the youngest son... Among the Ingush, there are teips... If you don’t take care of your parents, the elder members of the teip may take offense... I’m also the youngest son, and my mother

lives with me.” At the same time, urban life introduces notable adjustments. M. (Ingush man, private sector, Astana, age 56) directly connects temporary separation between generations to housing constraints: “If the apartment is small, they live separately.” In other words, the normative ideal is co-residence, yet it often collides with material limitations. Parallel to this, we also hear voices advocating autonomy immediately after marriage. For instance, T. (Ingush woman, housewife, Astana, age 45) emphasizes: “My husband and I live separately... Usually after the wedding, relatives try to live independently, apart from parents,” linking this to a desire for self-sufficiency in managing household matters and childrearing. Finally, in some families, the configuration shifts in stages. L. (Ingush woman, accountant, Astana, age 35) describes how, after several years of independent living, she returned to live with her mother due to family circumstances and later moved out again to form a separate household. Taken together, these accounts portray a pattern of conditional patrilocality: the moral obligation of caring for elders remains intact, yet the ways of fulfilling it are flexibly adapted to the urban realities of housing and employment.

Among the Tatars, a different pattern predominates: a young couple separates from the parental household immediately after marriage, and this is perceived as a normal and intergenerationally reproduced practice. A. (Tatar man, cultural sector, Astana, age 39) describes this as self-evident: “It is customary for us to live separately. My parents also lived apart after they got married.” V. (Tatar woman, teacher, Pavlodar, age 58) adds an important note of continuity: “We held this view when we were young, and my children share it as well.” At the same time, the metropolitan economy introduces its own temporary “bridges.” R. (Tatar woman, pensioner, Astana, age 71) describes prolonged periods of co-residence undertaken to save money or while waiting for a mortgage. Yet these phases are seen as pragmatic rather than obligatory—the desired state remains that of nuclear autonomy.

In Dungan families, we observe a sequential, stepwise scenario: initially, the newlyweds live with the parents—a period devoted to saving resources and receiving organizational support—followed by a transition to an independent household. “After marriage, a son first lives with his parents, and later separately; if there are finances, why not,” summarizes B. (Dungan man, entrepreneur in food service and trade, Astana, age 45), highlighting the active role of the older generation in providing assistance. At the same time, in suburban and rural localities, a stricter norm of caregiving obligations remains in place: “the last (youngest) son stays with the parents.” Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Astana, age 33) formulates this unambiguously: “The elder sons mostly live separately, the youngest must live with the parents... One cannot leave the parents behind.” In urban Astana, this logic is softened by the opportunities of the housing and labor markets, yet the principle of the youngest son’s priority continues to hold normative strength.

### **3) Economic Niches and Urban Resources**

According to the interview materials, Ingush families in Astana show a stable tendency toward small and medium-sized businesses in adjacent sectors. This is not only a source of income but also a means of consolidation within the urban economy: contracts, partnership chains, credit, and rental arrangements set the planning horizon and sustain intergenerational continuity. A direct formulation of specialization is characteristic here: T. (Ingush woman, housewife, Astana, age 45) notes that “construction—from entertainment centers to multi-storey residential complexes—provides the family’s main income.” The accumulation of urban resources (financial,

social, and organizational) relies on kinship-based networks of mutual assistance and on the forms of co-residence described earlier (§2). Such reliance facilitates entry into capital-intensive projects and allows risk distribution within extended families. At the same time, the city acts as a filter: when resources are limited, families temporarily shift to separate living arrangements or rental housing; as their businesses strengthen, they return to joint strategies of investment and elder care. This stepwise household assemblage—from autonomy to temporary co-residence and back—is evident in the biography of L. (Ingush woman, accountant, Astana, age 35), where housing decisions are adjusted to cycles of employment and caregiving. Overall, the combination of construction and entrepreneurship transforms kinship ties into a mechanism for accumulating urban capital and encourages long-term family planning.

Among Tatar households, income diversification is typical: a stable position in the public sector (education, medicine, culture) is often combined with more flexible earnings in trade and services. This dual-contour model reduces vulnerability to economic fluctuations and makes housing and educational strategies more predictable. V. (Tatar woman, teacher, Astana, age 58) describes this combination directly: “I work at a school, and my husband runs his own business; our income comes from a state salary and trade.” Paths of urban mobility are supported by family networks and the infrastructure of medium and large cities: her parents’ move to Pavlodar in the 1970s provided the next generation with a starting platform—employment, housing, schooling. In Astana, young Tatars often choose the service and education sectors: L. (Tatar woman, manager, Astana, age 32) notes that her husband runs an educational project (preparation for studying abroad); within her extended family, there are restaurants, cafés, and wholesale trade enterprises, while the older generation retains stable “anchor” professions (doctor, builder). Community resources also play an important role—Tatar–Bashkir cultural centers and Sabantuy festivals. According to R. (Tatar woman, pensioner, Astana, age 71), regular meetings and excursions foster horizontal ties that often evolve into employment opportunities, partnerships, and cultural projects. As a result, Tatar families are characterized by a stable “public sector + entrepreneurship” linkage that enhances household resilience and supports intergenerational mobility.

The Dungan material reveals a pronounced regional differentiation. In the Zhambyl region, the economic core remains family-based vegetable farming, farmer cooperatives, and small-scale processing—serving as a kind of “school of entrepreneurship” for younger generations. B. (Dungan man, entrepreneur in food service and trade, Astana, age 45) summarizes: “In Zhambyl, it’s all agriculture—we live off vegetables.” Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Astana, age 33) adds: “On average, about 80% are engaged in farming (Zhambyl region); in Almaty and Astana—it’s trade; in Western Kazakhstan, trade also predominates,” highlighting both diversification and the outflow of some youth from labor-intensive agricultural work. In the capital, trade and the service sector dominate—including school catering under government tenders, public food service, and retail—while a stable layer of professionals (doctors, civil servants) is gradually expanding. B.’s own biography illustrates a long trajectory between Almaty and Astana: from several years in trade to nearly two decades in the capital’s food-service industry under contract. Entry and stability within these niches are facilitated by kinship and regional networks, and at times by a “border” resource—linguistic and cultural competencies and connections with China, which simplify logistics and supply chains. Thus, a dual economic model emerges: in Zhambyl, family-based agriculture (primarily vegetable farming); in Astana, trade and services

supplemented by stable professional employment—together forming vertical trajectories of mobility from field → market/café → metropolitan service sector.

#### **4) Religion and “Everyday Religiosity”**

In Ingush narratives, religiosity emerges as an ordinary order of life in which ritual actions and family ethics are inseparable. Daily prayer, fasting, almsgiving, and care for parents are not seen as a set of discrete practices but as an integrated norm of the “proper” way of living. T. (Ingush woman, housewife, Astana, age 45) expresses this unequivocally: “I am a believer... my husband is also a believer, he performs namaz... From the birth of a child to death, everything is connected with Islam.” Even during the Soviet period, rituals never fully disappeared but retreated into the domestic sphere: L. (Ingush woman, accountant, Astana, age 35) recalls how her father prayed at home when it was discouraged at work. The festive cycle varies in scale: preparation for Uraza Bayram (Eid al-Fitr) is especially meticulous, while Kurban Bayram (Eid al-Adha) is often celebrated within the family circle. A. (Ingush man, programmer, Astana, age 37) directly links the expansion of public celebration to the relaxation of restrictions: “We started celebrating openly when it became allowed, around 1980.” Thus, among the Ingush, “everyday religion” operates as a rhythm that simultaneously regulates family relations (respect for elders, mutual assistance) and sustains the continuity of ritual life.

Tatar interviews display a wide range of practices—from cultural identification without strict observance of rituals to regular namaz and fasting. L. (Tatar woman, manager, Astana, age 32) identifies as Muslim but performs prayers irregularly; A. (Tatar man, cultural sector worker, Astana, age 39), by contrast, emphasizes stable rhythms of worship, fasting, and participation in religious holidays. The spatial dimension of religiosity – “nodes of memory” – is also significant. A. regularly visits the preserved fragment of the fence of the 1885 Tatar Mosque in old Akmolinsk/Astana, reciting verses from the Qur’an and linking personal piety with the local history of the community. Institutional infrastructure complements this “map”: centers such as Duslyk organize language classes, volunteer and cultural programs, and trips to Sabantuy festivals, thereby sustaining a stable connection between the religious and ethnocultural spheres. R. (Tatar woman, pensioner, Astana, age 71) articulates the moral ideal simply: tolerance, “cleanliness of home and soul,” lawfulness, and observance of canons. Here, everyday religion appears not as a fixed set of obligatory rituals but as a spectrum of practices anchored in sites of memory and community institutions.

In the Dungan material, religion is described as a self-evident order of life—“as it is written in the Qur’an, so we follow.” Hence, the familiar prohibitions (alcohol, gambling, smoking) and the emphasis on regular practice. B. (Dungan man, entrepreneur in food service and trade, Astana, age 45) calls faith an obligatory norm, without which “life does not go right.” A central motif is commemoration: Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Taraz, age 33) speaks about reading the Qur’an for those who perished crossing the Tian Shan, while also stressing a modern self-identification: “We no longer consider ourselves migrants... we see ourselves as Kazakhstani.” In the capital, the home language occupies a special place: Dungan remains the language of the household and of children, turning into an everyday “ritual” of belonging and linking religion with cuisine and the rhythm of family gatherings (see §5). At the same time, some wedding and domestic practices adapt to the Kazakh urban environment—the religious core remains intact, while its external form coexists with the “rules of the city.”

### 5) Language, Cuisine, Sites of Memory, and Networks

In Ingush narratives, the core of everyday norms is formed by adat (customary law) and religious prescriptions. Older respondents emphasize simple but strict rules: one stands up when elders enter, refrains from smoking or swearing in their presence, and excludes any behavior that contradicts Islam. M. (Ingush man, 56, private sector, Astana) explicitly refers to these “everyday prohibitions” as the framework of propriety on which the upbringing of the younger generation rests. Ritual life unfolds both in the home and in communal spaces. The Kunta-Haji Mosque is mentioned specifically: it has a room for ritual washing of the deceased, a hall for commemorative meals, and hosts zikr ceremonies. Together, these practices create a dense fabric of everyday life in which religious actions, family gatherings, and ethnic norms reinforce one another.

Urban belonging is articulated with confidence. T. (Ingush woman, housewife, Astana, age 45) says: “Kazakhstan is my homeland, Astana is my native city... I’ve never been to Ingushetia.” This is an important detail: the sense of being “urban” does not replace Vainakh identity markers but rather reaffirms them in a new environment—precisely through adat, family discipline, and ritual continuity. As a result, everyday life and sites of memory (the mosque, the cemetery) stitch together private and communal existence, and Astana is experienced as “home” without the loss of ancestral orientation.

Among the Tatars, the stability of cultural practices is ensured through a combination of institutional and family initiatives. R. (Tatar woman, pensioner, Astana, age 71) describes the regular activities of the Tatar–Bashkir cultural center: about 250 active participants, tea gatherings, Qur’an readings, workshops, and ensemble rehearsals. This everyday “small work” of the community is complemented by trips to Sabantuy festivals (including those in neighboring regions), where horizontal ties are maintained and expanded. The centers also run language courses and children’s classes—an accessible format for families where Tatar proficiency has weakened but where there is a desire to restore it, along with elements of history, music, and cuisine.

At the level of domestic practice, “small museums” operate within households. A. (Tatar man, cultural worker, Astana, age 39) keeps a tubeteika, chapan, and belt; friends contribute new pieces to the collection. Tatar music is played at home, and traditional dishes are regularly prepared. Thus emerges a continuous chain—from family artifacts and tastes to community activities and urban sites of memory—that sustains both language and a sense of collective belonging. In Dungan families in the capital, language and cuisine serve as the main everyday markers of identity. B. (Dungan man, entrepreneur in food service and trade, Astana, age 45) emphasizes: Dungan is spoken at home, by adults and children alike; some wedding and household practices have adapted to Kazakh urban norms, but the home language and culinary routines remain unchanged. Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Astana, age 33) calls cuisine one of the “four pillars” of culture: around it are built cafés and restaurants in Astana, Almaty, and Zhambyl, where the “memory of taste” retains customers while simultaneously reproducing ethnic identity.

In Astana, these cultural resources are directly tied to economic trajectories: food service and trade become extensions of family traditions (including school catering through government tenders). Alongside this, a stable stratum of professionals—doctors, civil servants—is growing, yet the core of urban cohesion continues to be formed by kinship and regional networks that facilitate entry into markets, supply chains, and contract distribution. Ultimately, the linkage of “home language + cuisine” connects household and marketplace, transforming cultural continuity into a sustainable urban practice.

## **6) Gendered Regimes of Everyday Ethnicity**

Gendered regimes play a central role in structuring how everyday ethnicity is enacted and reproduced across the three communities. Among the Ingush, gender asymmetry is particularly visible in marital norms: “not giving daughters away” outside the group remains a strict expectation, whereas marriages of Ingush men with Muslim women of other ethnicities are more readily tolerated. This asymmetry is reinforced by kinship hierarchies and by the responsibility placed on sons—especially the youngest—to care for parents and sustain extended family networks. In economic life, male family members are more often involved in construction and entrepreneurship, while women are situated within domestic care roles or flexible forms of informal labor.

Within Tatar households, gender roles display a more balanced pattern but still maintain generational continuities. Women frequently occupy stable positions in the public sector (education, healthcare, culture), while men may combine salaried employment with entrepreneurial activity. The expectation that young couples should live separately also carries gender implications, placing value on women’s autonomy in managing the household, while community centers and cultural events often rely on women’s organizational labor to maintain linguistic and cultural continuity.

Among the Dungans, gendered divisions are expressed in the sequential household model: newly married sons live with their parents to accumulate resources, and the youngest son bears the normative obligation of long-term co-residence and elder care. Women participate actively in family-based economic activities—especially in agriculture, catering, and small-scale trade—while men often engage in logistics, commerce, and entrepreneurship. At the same time, the religious filter governing marriage is applied equally to men and women, although decisions about marriage partners still pass through the authority of parents and elders.

Taken together, these patterns show that everyday ethnicity is not only a matter of cultural practices or boundary maintenance but is deeply rooted in gendered expectations and generational negotiations. Marriage choices, caregiving responsibilities, economic roles, and forms of participation in community institutions are distributed along gendered lines, shaping how each group reproduces its norms in the metropolitan environment.

## **7) Social Memory and Commemorative Practices**

Across all three communities, social memory and commemorative practices serve as important mechanisms through which everyday ethnicity is sustained and transmitted. Among the Ingush, the memory of the 1944 deportation forms a deep moral background for kinship obligations and expectations of mutual aid. Respondents consistently refer to the “losses of the first years of exile” and the moral duty to care for elders as a legacy of this collective trauma. Family narratives include references to special settlements, restrictions on movement, and the gradual normalization of life after the partial rehabilitation of 1957. These memories are reproduced not only in explicit stories but also in the moral economy of kinship that shapes decisions about marriage, care, and co-residence.

Within Dungan families, commemorative practices are articulated through narratives of migration across the Tian Shan. Z. (Dungan man, entrepreneur, Taraz, age 33) highlights the practice of reading the Qur’an for those who perished during the crossing, linking contemporary religious life to the memory of ancestral suffering. These commemorations produce a sense of

historical continuity and reinforce the perception of Dungan identity as both long-rooted in Kazakhstan and shaped by transregional mobility. The phrase “we no longer consider ourselves migrants... we see ourselves as Kazakhstani” illustrates how collective memory is integrated into present-day belonging.

Among Tatars, sites of memory – such as the fragment of the fence of the 1885 mosque in old Akmolinsk–anchor everyday religiosity in local history. A. (Tatar man, cultural sector, Astana, age 39) visits this site, recites verses from the Qur’an, and frames his personal piety through the continuity of the Tatar presence in the region. Community centers reinforce this link by organizing readings, gatherings, and celebrations that maintain horizontal ties across generations. Together, these practices reveal that social memory–whether of deportation, migration, or early urban settlement–remains a living resource that shapes everyday understandings of belonging and moral obligation.

## **Results**

Comparison of the three cases reveals distinct ways of maintaining boundaries while remaining integrated into the city. Among the Ingush, marital endogamy with gender asymmetry and clan control sets a high threshold of acceptability; in the capital, however, sanctions against exogamy are weakened, and the religious criterion becomes the “minimal common denominator” for mixed unions. Among the Tatars, an integrative model dominates: interethnic marriages are a social norm, whereas conscious endogamy serves as a tool for intergenerational transmission of language and everyday practices. The Dungan case exhibits a “dual regime”: separation with a religious filter in compact settlements, and an increase in mixed marriages in Astana, where the religious condition remains constant. In Barthian terms, boundaries are sustained not through a “set of traditions” but through procedures of demarcation–who counts as “one’s own” in marriage, where encounters occur, and what conditions (including religious ones) are recognized as sufficient for inclusion.

The three observed configurations – “conditional patrilocality” among the Ingush, nuclear autonomy among the Tatars, and “stepwise autonomy” with the fixed obligation of the youngest son among the Dungans–demonstrate different ways of balancing family duties with the resource constraints of the capital. Across all groups, the city functions as a “regulator of resources”: housing size, income, mortgages, and rent directly shape co-residence practices. Among the Ingush, the moral obligation of living with elders may temporarily yield to separation without negating the duty of care; among the Tatars, prolonged cohabitation phases are understood as an economic strategy rather than a normative state; among the Dungans, independent households typically follow an initial phase of co-residence, while the youngest son’s duty remains normative. In each case, boundaries are maintained not by declaration but through the everyday geography of generations and the distribution of care.

Despite differing profiles, entrepreneurship serves as a universal mode of urban adaptation. For the Ingush, the “construction and SME” nexus converts kinship networks into access to contracts and capital; for the Tatars, public-sector positions are stably combined with flexible income from trade and services; for the Dungans, a regional duality is evident – “Zhambyl: agriculture” and “Astana: service/food sector”–alongside the growth of a stable professional stratum in the capital. The urban economy encourages income diversification, while kinship

and regional networks reduce entry barriers and accelerate the transformation of cultural and social capital into economic outcomes.

In all three groups, religion functions as an everyday regulator—ranging from obligatory rituals to a “quiet” moral ethics of respect for elders, mutual assistance, and temperance. Among the Ingush, ritual practice is tightly bound to kin-based morality and cycles of family care; among the Tatars, individual religiosity is more varied but anchored in sites of memory and community centers; among the Dungans, religious norms are reinforced by memorial rituals of migration and the disciplined use of the home language. These “soft” mechanisms maintain boundaries not through opposition to the city but through their daily integration into urban rhythms.

Language, food, sites of memory, and networks of regular gatherings constitute the most stable, “lower” layer of boundary maintenance. Among the Ingush, the focus on adat and ritual spaces (mosque, cemetery) turns respect for elders and the religious cycle into a practice of education and self-discipline. Among the Tatars, institutional forms (centers, Sabantuy, language courses) interlock with domestic collections and family cuisine, forming a dense cultural infrastructure. Among the Dungans, the linkage of “home language + culinary world” literally ties the household to the urban economy of food service and trade, rendering identity both visible and socially relevant.

Astana functions as a common softening mechanism: it expands marital and professional circles, reduces the sanctioning of deviations from “strict” norms, and provides institutional bridges (cultural centers, school and workplace networks). Yet internal regulators—marital filters, kin obligations, ritual cycles, linguistic and culinary practices—do not disappear; they are recalibrated to urban conditions and continue to sustain difference in a “soft” mode. This combination—an urban expander of opportunities plus resilient “grassroots” practices—explains the predominance of integrative configurations alongside persistent local pockets of separation.

## Conclusion

The study demonstrates that in the metropolitan context, ethnic boundaries are maintained primarily through everyday procedures—family arrangements, kinship obligations, ritual cycles, and “grassroots” linguistic and culinary practices. The city, in this sense, does not function as a “melting pot,” but rather as an environment of recalibration: it broadens social circles, modifies the sanctioning of norms, and opens institutional bridges (schools, labor markets, community venues) without erasing the internal regulatory systems of ethnic groups.

Theoretically, the research confirms the analytical productivity of combining Berry – Barth – everyday religion perspectives, complementing them with a historical – sociological lens: “long regimes” (imperial institutions of Islam, deportations, Virgin Lands urbanization, cross-border trade) delineate the corridors of opportunity within which everyday ethnicity is enacted. Methodologically, the study contributes to the operationalization of “boundaries as practices” by proposing thematic matrices (“group and domain,” “life cycle and practice”) and a combined coding procedure that allows transparent comparison across cases and identification of mechanisms rather than declarations.

Practically, the findings suggest that urban policy should be oriented toward fostering inclusion without assimilationist pressure: – developing community spaces as bridges between groups; – introducing targeted language and culture programs (including for mixed

families); – recognizing culinary and family economies as legitimate channels of participation; – and considering the family housing cycle (transitional co-residences, mortgage trajectories) in designing “family-oriented” urban infrastructure. A positive policy trajectory would, for example, support neighborhood-level cultural centers that host joint events without prescribing uniformity of practices, or introduce optional language and heritage programs for mixed families without framing them as corrective or compensatory. Conversely, policies that impose standardized cultural formats, restrict community-based economic niches (such as family food enterprises), or promote assimilationist rhetoric under the guise of “modernization” risk eroding trust and weakening the very mechanisms that sustain integrative configurations in everyday life.

The study did not focus on confrontational or high-conflict situations, and interactions of these communities with larger ethnic groups—such as Kazakhs, Russians, and others—remain outside the analytical scope. These intersections, together with the dynamics of mixed neighborhoods and interethnic public spaces, represent a promising direction for future research.

Limitations concern the scale and design of the sample (small size, convenience/snowball sampling) as well as the potential “capital bias.” Future research would benefit from a comparative approach (cities of different scales, border regions), gender differentiation (male/female generations), and longitudinal design (life courses of mixed families), supplemented by administrative statistics and cartography of sites of memory. In addition, the sample is skewed toward respondents with relatively high levels of entrepreneurial, professional, or cultural capital, which may shift the overall picture toward more resource-rich trajectories of urban adaptation.

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**Ibraev R.K.** – project administration, research design and conceptualization.

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**Aikynbaikyzy A.** – critical review of the manuscript's intellectual content, final approval of the version to be published.

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## **АСТАНАДАҒЫ КҮНДЕЛІКТІ ЭТНИКАЛЫҚ БОЛМЫС: ИНГУШТЕР, ТАТАРЛАР МЕН ДҮНГЕНДЕРДІҢ ОТБАСЫ СТРАТЕГИЯЛАРЫ, ДІНІ ЖӘНЕ ЖАДЫ**

**Аңдатпа.** Мақалада Астана қаласында ингуштер, татарлар және дүнгендер арасында этникалық болмыстың қалай қалыптасып, сақталатыны талданады. Теориялық шеңбер Дж. Берридің

аккультурация, Ф. Барттың «этникалық шекаралар» тұжырымдамасын және күнделікті діндарлық концептісін біріктіреді. Бұған қоса мақалаға исламды отарлық басқару, депортациялар және тың игеру науқанына қатысты тарихи-контекстуалды талдау енгізілген. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендей, неке тәжірибелері мен некеден кейінгі бірге тұру үлгілері этникалық шекараларды сақтау тетіктерінің өзегін құрайды: ингуштерде эндогамия мен патрилокалдылық (қалалық ортаға тән икемділікпен) қалыпты сипатта болса, татарларда аралас некелерге төзімділік жоғары, ал отбасылық өмірде нуклеарлық автономия басым. Дүнгендерде тығыз эндогамиядан діни шартты сақтай отырып, ашықтыққа беталыс байқалады. Экономикалық нишалар отбасы стратегияларымен және өзара көмек желілерімен тығыз байланысты: ингуштерге құрылыс пен кәсіпкерлік тән; татарлар арасында «мемлекеттік қызмет + сауда/қызмет көрсету» байланысы қалыптасқан; дүнгендерде «Жамбыл – ауыл шаруашылығы / Астана – қызмет көрсету және тамақтану» үлгісіндегі дуалды құрылым басым. Дін, тіл және ас мәдениеті топтық бірегейліктің тұрақты белгілері ретінде сақталса, қалалық институттар (этномәдени орталықтар, жад орындары) түрлі топтарды біріктіргенімен, бұл этникалық шекаралардың жойылуына алып келмейді. Мақалада интеграциялық конфигурациялар басымдығына қарамастан, жергілікті бөлініс ошақтарының да сақталатыны басты назарда. Зерттеу нәтижелері қалалық саясат үшін практикалық ұсыныстармен толықтырылған.

**Негізгі ұғымдар:** Астана, күнделікті этникалық өмір, аккультурация, этникалық шекаралар, дін, некелік тәжірибелер, жады.

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### **ПОВСЕДНЕВНАЯ ЭТНИЧНОСТЬ В АСТАНЕ: СЕМЕЙНЫЕ СТРАТЕГИИ, РЕЛИГИЯ И ПАМЯТЬ У ИНГУШЕЙ, ТАТАР И ДУНГАН**

**Аннотация.** В статье анализируется, как в столичной среде формируется и поддерживается этничность у ингушей, татар и дунган. Теоретическая рамка объединяет модель аккультурации Дж. Берри, подход «этнических границ» Ф. Барта и концепт повседневной религиозности, дополненные историко-контекстным анализом колониального управления исламом, депортаций и кампании освоения целины. Показано, что брачные практики и режимы послебрачного проживания остаются ключевыми механизмами поддержания границ: у ингушей нормативны эндогамия и патрилокальность (с городской вариативностью), у татар преобладает нуклеарная автономия при высокой терпимости к смешанным бракам, у дунган наблюдается переход от компактной эндогамии к большей открытости при соблюдении религиозного условия. Экономические ниши коррелируют с семейными стратегиями и сетями взаимопомощи: для ингушей характерны строительство и предпринимательство, для татар – связка «бюджетная занятость + торговля/услуги», для дунган – дуальная модель «Жамбыл – сельское хозяйство / Астана – сфера услуг и общепит». Религия, язык и кухня выступают устойчивыми маркерами принадлежности, а городские институты (этнокультурные центры, места памяти) соединяют группы, не приводя к растворению границ. Делается вывод о доминировании интеграционных

конфигураций при сохранении локальных очагов сепарации; обозначены практические следствия для городской политики.

**Ключевые слова:** Астана, повседневная этничность, аккультурация, этнические границы, религия, брачные практики, память.

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