

## Introduction

It was the middle of the night in the summer of 1999. I was knee-deep in mud searching for a piece of wood or a large stone to place under one of the tyres of our Russian jeep to lever it out of the swamp. Finally, my boot knocked against a large rock. I called out to Bataa. We submerged our arms into the cold mud and lifted out the rock, wedging it underneath the tyre. He pressed down hard on the accelerator and in one mud-splattered second we were out of the swamp and off again. Just a week earlier I had met Bataa on a street corner, close to the central post office in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital. Bataa owned a Russian jeep and that day in Ulaanbaatar, he convinced me that I should survey a beautiful area for a potential field site along the north-east Mongolian-Russian border where he had many 'friends' to whom he would introduce me. In the late 1980s, Bataa had been the official driver to the provincial governor and because of this he assured me that he knew the area like the back of his hand. His 'friends', I was to find out, were mainly jovial middle-aged women—the postal woman, the nurse, or the kindergarten teacher—who resided in the district centres, the small administrative hubs that are dotted across the vast Mongolian countryside. Needless to say, we made a few detours before I got to what I only later realized was my destination.

After an initial visit to Mongolia, I carried out my PhD fieldwork there over sixteen months in 1999–2000. Subsequent visits took place in 2001, 2003, 2005, and 2007. Before I set off on my journey with Bataa in 1999, I had been scurrying between towering Soviet-style apartment blocks that were crumbling on the vast semi-arid steppe in an eastern Mongolia mining town. The flat, open landscape caused persistent dust storms so that people scuttled between looted apartment blocks, previously inhabited by Russian and Ukrainian miners. One weekend I was invited to visit a small border town on the north-east Mongolian border. We travelled out over the steppe that rippled with herds of wild gazelle before entering the cool luminous-white birch forests, arriving at a small district centre perched on a hillside. My trip to the countryside that weekend forced me to reconsider my research plans. Instead of working

for part of the time in a city, and then moving to the countryside, I decided to base all my research in the countryside. After visiting Bataa's many friends along the north-east Mongolian-Russian border, we set off on our last journey to a small district called Ashinga, in Hentii Province, where his in-laws lived.

## The district

More than two thousand residents live in Ashinga district. According to local government statistics for 2000, the population is made up of over 70 per cent Buriad people (also commonly spelt Buryat or Buriat). The Buriad are an ethnic minority who migrated to Mongolia in the early 1900s from a republic in Siberia called Buryatia. The rest of the population are recorded as Halh Mongols, the dominant nationality in Mongolia. The district is divided into four areas. The first is Norovlin, the administrative centre (*sumyn töv*), where a thousand or so people live on a semi-permanent or permanent basis. The surrounding countryside, populated by herding households, is then divided into three sub-districts—Barh, the area to the west, with 462 inhabitants, Onon, to the north, with 363, and Hurh, to the south, with 450. The area as a whole is registered as having 570 households, and 32,000 heads of livestock. During the socialist period these sub-districts formed brigades where herders tended to cattle, goats, sheep, horses, and sometimes camels for the local 'Strength Co-operative' (*Batjil negdel*) and people still refer to the areas designated into brigades using the term '*bag*' (a small administrative unit). Before the district was established in 1952, Ashinga had been under the authority of a district to the south-east and was referred to as 'Eg' after the name of the river running through the main valley.<sup>1</sup>

Because of its dominant Buriad population, Ashinga is linked to other Buriad districts along the border where many people have family members residing. In 1925 the whole area was administered by the 'Onon River Banner' (*Onon golyn hoshuun*; the term Banner refers to an administrative unit) in Tsetsen Han Province.<sup>2</sup> When the Buriad families migrated here

<sup>1</sup> I have used a pseudonym for the name of the district and for all personal names. The name Ashinga comes from the name of a local river and from a monastery located here before the district centre was established (variously spelt 'Ashanga', 'Ashinggin', 'Ashingyn', or 'Hashing', and referred to as a monastery '*hiiree*', or a small temple '*dugan*').

<sup>2</sup> Prior to this, it was under the authority of Hövchiin Daichin Jonon Vangiin hoshuun (Van Jonon's banner, warrior of the whole mountain range and forest). In 1926 the province comprised 87,498 residents but by the 1930s was recorded to have only 7,278. The dramatic decrease in the population can be linked directly to political persecution in the area, but it is mostly due to the redefinition of the province boundaries.

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from Russia, between 1909 and 1927, they passed through a border crossing and made their way west towards Ashinga. In 1931 the provincial border was redefined and Tsetsen Han Province became Han Hentii Province with a total of twenty-four districts. It should be noted that while people do use the names of provinces, districts, and sub-districts, in the way I have been describing them, it is also, in some senses, distorting. During the socialist period, people were forced to inhabit areas defined by administrative borders. Today, these borders still exist, but people move across them and have links with relatives that traverse these boundaries. Their relationship with this landscape also has a history that pre-dates current administrative boundaries. Although this book focuses on a particular district, the relations it explores span beyond its boundary to other districts, provinces, and cities. In this sense, it would be more accurate to refer to this place as an area *along* the north-east Mongolian–Russian border.

In 1952, the district was established in the north-western part of Hentii Province and renamed Ashinga. The landscape of Ashinga is wooded but open, hilly but seldom craggy (although some peaks reach over 2,000 metres above sea level). The district centre is located in an open valley surrounded by forested hills. With its large rivers (which include the Onon, Eg, Barh, Bayan, and Balj) and abundance of wildlife, the area is renowned for its natural beauty. Following the establishment of the district administration, a primary school and medical and veterinary centres were formed, and, in 1958, the local co-operative was founded. In addition to the Buriad who came here in the early 1900s, some two hundred workers from western Mongolia were sent to work in Ashinga in 1960 at the newly established sawmill, to the east of the district centre.<sup>3</sup> During this period, people in the surrounding countryside came to the district to deliver dairy products, meat, and timber to the co-operative and the sawmill, to attend meetings at the cultural centre, and to visit the clinic, government building, or the post office. They also came to collect their children from the school's boarding house (for eight to sixteen year olds), and procure provisions and clothes from the state-run shop.

With the end of state-run co-operatives in the early 1990s and the introduction of an open market economy, Mongolia's countryside changed dramatically. At first, life was economically hard. All the services that had regularly distributed produce through the state suddenly came to a halt. No more Czechoslovakian high-heeled boots, no more flour from the western provinces, no more fluttering red ribbons for one's daughter's hair at pioneer

<sup>3</sup> Most of these non-Buriad residents had moved away from Ashinga by 2007.

meetings. In the late autumn of 1991, my friend found that she was without winter boots, something everyone had previously been able to purchase from the state-run shop. Her mother took out an old pair of Buriad antelope-skin boots which had been given to her on her wedding day by her own mother. Slowly and carefully she took them apart to see how they were made. She then made an exact replica for her daughter, being careful to decorate the heels with the same pattern as her mother had done. When I first visited this area in 1999, I was told that the early 1990s had been incredibly difficult. The great economic and political change did not just mean a loss of jobs and services; people's basic survival and security had been challenged. Some households had gone without adequate food and clothing.

In response to this great change, many families formed their own herding groups, often based around the animals they acquired through redistribution from the co-operative. They moved out to the pasturelands, with men claiming winter encampments where their parents had herded. In order to secure a means of subsistence, most people in Ashinga are now herders. They move, sometimes up to four times a year, with their cattle, sheep, goats, and horses, which make up the main livestock in the area. This household-based subsistence economy is, therefore, something that has emerged out of the economic and political shifts that began in the early 1990s. Increasingly, some people are turning not just to herding as a form of survival, but as a strategic choice to ensure they raise the means by which their children can achieve a different kind of life. For instance, many people in their forties and fifties continue to herd livestock in order to acquire the means to pay for education and goods (such as flats and cars) that will offer a different kind of future for their children.<sup>4</sup> This has meant that there is increasing social stratification between those households that are able to diversify their activities and incomes and those that cannot.

Despite this emerging diversity, the district centre still provides the main administrative facilities for those who live in the district. The government building, stadium, post office, cultural centre, and petrol station are all still located here. In addition, two local businessmen have acquired the previously state-run sawmills. It is the continued (although by no means constant) activity of the local sawmills that has generated limited opportunities for employment in the area. While government salaries are infrequent and

<sup>4</sup> The ability to pay university fees, for instance, is often generated by selling dairy products, such as dried curds and cream. School and university graduations are huge occasions, with different relatives donating money for outfits, feasts, hair-extensions, make-up, shoes, etc. The graduation and the photographs taken during these events conceal the fact that most graduates will be hard pressed to secure a job as a result of this education.

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many teachers and doctors have turned to herding, there is still a school, kindergarten, and medical centre in Ashinga's district centre and many people live here. Several young female entrepreneurs, who procure goods from the provincial capital, have also opened a variety of shops and kiosks.

Many local people acquire goods from these shops through a credit system, whereby the name of the person and the product they take is noted by the seller. The entry is deleted when the person brings something to the kiosk owner in exchange for the products they have taken. Sometimes, money is exchanged. Pension books are often taken as a form of security and returned once the pension has arrived. Forms of barter are also common, especially with high inflation in the cost of everyday goods. Produce, such as meat, dairy products, skins, pine nuts, and berries from the surrounding countryside, is frequently exchanged at district centre kiosks for sunflower oil, cigarettes, vodka, sugar, flour, soda, school textbooks, and other items brought to the district from markets around the country. Herding families may also exchange produce (such as cream or butter) with others in return for favours or the use of some crucial equipment. Barter of this kind tends to occur between people who know each other well, not least because the exchange of goods is often delayed.<sup>5</sup> The main kiosks in the district centre are each run by three young female traders (*naimaachin*), and their partners.<sup>6</sup> Such kiosks also purchase berries, pine nuts, and animal parts, especially antlers, which the female kiosk owners' male contemporaries, who left school in their early teens, spend many hard and often dangerous months hunting and gathering in the surrounding forests to earn an income. Animal parts, such as antlers, are then sourced by middlemen who sell them to city traders for medicinal purposes in China and Korea.

The district centre is essentially an in-between place—it is neither a town nor is it truly the countryside. It has the feel, at least initially, of a forgotten remnant of an unfinished Soviet project. There is no real meeting space apart from public areas, such as the school, the post office, and the kiosks, and the intimate space of people's homes (cf. Humphrey 1999: 7 on Soviet Russia). Areas of past productive activity, such as the milk-collecting depot, the co-operative storehouse, or the sawmill's workers houses, are

<sup>5</sup> On the familiarity of exchange partners, Humphrey (1985) notes that delayed barter 'can only occur when there is a large amount of information about partners (or other social pressures for repayment)' and that '[p]art of the calculation is the extent to which people can trust one another' (Humphrey 1985: 52, 60).

<sup>6</sup> The term '*naimaachin*', meaning trader, has replaced the term '*panzchin*', meaning travelling merchant, speculator, and pedlar. This was a derogatory term used during the socialist period for a person who sold privately owned goods, outside of the co-operative.

slowly left to crumble, or rust away. But slowly, as the district centre begins to remake itself as a place on its own terms, this sense of stasis is changing. For those who live here, wealth and status is immediately visible in the clothes one wears, the wooden house one builds, and the political networks one is able to sustain. It is hard to live here, in part, because one's activities and relations are under permanent surveillance and judgement by others. When leaving their houses, for example, people spend a substantial amount of time getting dressed and making sure that they look presentable, for appearances are everything. Equally, when visiting a neighbour, one must go with news of some kind so as to appear to have a purpose. This preoccupation with outward appearance is not confined to people—houses in the district centre have also become the 'agentive artefacts' that display to others, through innovative extensions and additions, their occupant's ability to accumulate economic wealth and social prestige.

### **Location in a household**

Before Bataa left for Ulaanbaatar, he made sure I was safely housed in the one-roomed family home of a man named Bat-Ochir, who was one of the local sawmill owners as well as being a wealthy herder. There had been some debate about where and with whom I should stay. Local government officials had intervened and recommended that I stay with this family because 'they do not drink and are hard-working people'. It was only later that I came to realize that this recommendation was highly political and a manifestation of the kinds of favours that were exchanged between people who held power in the district centre. Bat-Ochir was a dedicated and successful herder and because of this, he did not usually live in the district centre. This year was to be the first winter the family had spent there since his wife had left her job as a primary school teacher in the late 1980s. They had to be in the district centre this year because they needed to oversee the construction of three large wooden houses which had been commissioned by wealthy clients in the city. They had hired local people to build the houses using machinery acquired when the local sawmill collapsed in the early 1990s. Their young son was to attend kindergarten for the first time, and their daughter, who normally stayed with relatives in the district during term time, would be living with us too. Like me, they were nervous about staying there. But we had different reasons for feeling apprehensive.

While I was concerned about my fieldwork, Bat-Ochir and his family were anxious that their recent economic activities and obvious accumulation

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of wealth might provoke jealousy and unwanted attention. Arson attacks in the district centre had been happening for three years before I arrived in Ashinga in 1999. By 2005, a total of fifty-five buildings had been targeted. Few people had been hurt in the fires, but tensions between people created a sense of unease that flickered in people's eyes as they interacted in public. Speculation as to the possible cause of the attacks was varied, but the response was uniform: people sought to avoid any form of confrontation or direct accusation that might spark jealousy and anger in the form of arson.

During this first period of my fieldwork, I stayed in the district centre with Bat-Ochir for just over six months. I worked at the local kindergarten in the mornings and spent my afternoons with the young women who ran the local kiosks and with the district centre's grandmothers who gathered with unfailing regularity to play cards and gamble at each other's houses. It was through contact with these people that I learnt about the migration of the Buriad, who fled from the Russian Revolution and the war in Russian Buryatia to Mongolia in the early 1900s, and the subsequent persecution, violence, and destruction that these people experienced in Mongolia in the 1930s (*helmegdliin üe*), when most of the adult male members of the community were either taken away or killed in terrifying night raids. Throughout much of the twentieth century, I learnt, the Buriad had felt marginalized by the Mongolian state (Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Empson 2007a). During this period I also got to know the local diviner, Burgaasnii Oyunaа (lit. Oyunaа who lives by the willows), and shamans, as Bat-Ochir and his wife visited them frequently with concerns that people were speaking ill of them and spreading malicious gossip (*tsagaan / har hel am*) about their entrepreneurial activities which caused boils to appear regularly on Bat-Ochir's face and his cattle to become ill. It was the shaman and diviner who told me that, because of the persistent threat of arson, people were keen to avoid public disputes of any kind.

The more connections I made with people in the district, the more I realized that I was very much defined by being 'elder brother Bat-Ochir's person' (*Bat-Ochir ahyn hūn*). Increasingly, people I met outside the house began to comment about the family I was living with and what this must mean for me. They would ask me questions about them and their activities. At the house, the family were similarly curious about my movements. They wanted to know who I was visiting and what had been talked about during my visits, but they rarely introduced me to anyone. Instead, I had to make my own connections while they deliberately kept themselves away from people and got on with managing the construction of their wooden houses and increasing their herds. Like other foreign anthropologists who have worked

in rural Mongolian district centres, I began to realize that the people I lived with played an important role in determining the kind of connections I was able to make (Højer 2003). My own position in the family was that of an object to be viewed from a distance and certainly kept at arm's length. At the same time, I also acted as a mirror. By asking how people had received me, they were able to gauge how people in the district were viewing and perceiving them. In this sense, I was an active extension of who they were.

After the Lunar New Year celebrations, I began to realize that by basing myself within this family, my ability to move among different people was severely restricted and that I must try to find another host family. My close friend Tsendmaa, a young married woman of my own age who lived on and off in the district centre, helped me to leave. She suggested that I stay with her in-laws in the countryside. One evening, her husband met me at the gate of our house to negotiate the logistics of my move. It felt dramatic and I was warned that the situation would have to be handled delicately. Moving to a different household could be interpreted as my wish to sever links with Bat-Ochir and his family and as my rejection of them as people. In fact, when I had raised the issue with Bat-Ochir a few weeks earlier, he became extremely agitated and concerned about what other people might think of him if I did leave. He told me that they would view my move as an indication that he and his family were 'bad' people and he tried, for several days, to prevent me from going. In the end, my friend's husband was able to borrow a small tractor on to which we could pile my belongings. Before I left, we agreed that I would stay with Bat-Ochir and his family again in the summer, once they had returned to the countryside. Bat-Ochir appeared moved by my departure and said 'Now that the spring birds are arriving, Rebecca is leaving us.' But as we were about to leave, he held on to the frame of the tractor and, leaning towards the driver, murmured to him in a hushed but angry voice: 'Why are you taking my person?' (*Yagaad manai hūniig avsan be?*) The implication was that he was the 'master' (*ezen*) of the household and I was under his custody and should not be separated from him in this way.

## The countryside

Arriving at Tsendmaa's in-laws' winter pasture, I found myself quickly but firmly placed in the position of daughter (*basgan*) and expected to take part in the activities of an extended family. I was handed an old dirty Mongolian coat (*deel*) and was shown how to wear my Mongolian black army boots



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(*bakaal*) partially folded down in the style currently fashionable among the younger herders. Their winter pasture was located on the edge of the deep taiga forest, with a small stream nearby and large mountains behind. The wooden cabin, which consisted of one room with a fire in the centre, was messy and chaotic. Visitors were frequent and there were many guns and large knives lying around. At night, the dogs would bark at the wolves while the wind made shuddering sounds as it wound itself around our house. Every morning, I would jump on to a horse and, pulling a small cart with a metal container attached, would ride across the steppe and down through the bare shrubs to a stream where I was taught how to break the ice so that I could collect our water for the day. I also worked with the other women, milking cattle and feeding them with the hay that had been collected in the late summer. Slowly, I learnt how to identify the cows through their personal names and to milk them, even in the frozen landscape at  $-30^{\circ}\text{C}$ . I helped with sewing boots and gloves for sale, preparing food, and making sure that tea was always available for visitors and hunters as they returned from the forests.



**Figure I.1** Setting off to collect water for the day.

Tsendmaa's in-laws were known as a generous, vibrant, and giving family who were a frequent source of advice and help to their friends and neighbours. Renchin, the father of the household, was a larger-than-life,

charismatic man who spoke in a thick melodic Buriad dialect and tended to recount the history of the Buriad and sing a lot when he drank. When sober, he could carve almost anything from wood and was an excellent hunter and storyteller. These skills, along with his large but slightly bent figure, meant that people often referred to him as the 'King of the Eg River', after the name of the river that runs through their summer pasture. Delgermaa, his wife, was from a poor family and had few relatives in the area, but her hard-working socialist attitude meant that she was without pretension, could relate to all kinds of people, and greatly valued her many friends. Renchin and Delgermaa had three sons and one daughter. While both of their parents had been herders, they themselves only became herders in 1990. Prior to this, Renchin had been a woodwork teacher and Delgermaa had worked for the co-operative. While Renchin welcomed the political reforms of the 1990s and was a staunch democrat, Delgermaa was more nostalgic for the socialist past and the possibilities it had created. My friend, Tsendmaa, was married to their eldest son, Bayar, and they had one daughter.

In terms of livestock, Renchin's brother was currently looking after their sheep and goats as they focused their attention on their cattle and horse herds. Renchin and his sons prided themselves on their horses (*aduu*), geldings (*mor*), and stallions (*azraga*). They were a source of prestige, particularly as they lived close to the forests where there was the persistent threat of wolves and horse thieves. When not tending to things at the encampment, or in the forest hunting, they would check that the animals were all right or bring them closer to the encampment (*aduundaa yavna*). This might take an afternoon, depending on how far the animals had gone, but territorial boundaries between different stallions meant that it was rare for them to go too far, unless a wolf-attack had scared them. Horses were sometimes broken in for everyday use, for hunting trips, and for hay collecting, as well as for horse races, but mostly they were left to graze in the meadows and pastures nearby. In contrast, women had a closer relationship with the cows. It was mostly they who milked and cared for them, ensured they had enough food at winter, and transformed their milk into different kinds of produce.

Throughout the late autumn and during most of the winter, Renchin's three sons were away hunting and collecting pine nuts in the forest. They returned intermittently, often in the middle of the night, with different kinds of meat, such as elk, wild boar, and deer, which sustained us throughout the winter. Sometimes, their daughter-in-law was also absent as she worked for part of the time in the district centre at the kindergarten and Renchin's only daughter was also away at school in Ulaanbaatar. At such times, it was common for there to be only four of us at the encampment and the repeti-



**Figure I.2** Lassoing a horse for riding.

tiveness of each other's company and daily routine was broken only intermittently by some passing visitor, or an event to do with the animals. At the autumn and spring encampments we were sometimes a few more. In contrast, up to sixteen members of the extended family gathered at the summer encampment in order to help with the preparation of milk products and the collection of berries for the winter. The summer pasture was also closer to the district centre and this allowed for riding trips to evening dances held in the cultural club, or visits to friends and relatives one had not seen all year.

This movement to different seasonal places is integral to livestock herding practices, whereby summer encampments, based on the lush, open steppe and a good water source, allow for maximum pasture for young animals and many people are needed to tend them. In contrast, winter encampments, based close to the forest edge at the foot of the mountains, provide shelter from the wind and snow throughout the winter months. People's interactions with one another also undergo dramatic seasonal changes, with individuals perhaps being separated from each other for long periods while engaging in other activities, only to rejoin again in the summer months at a different place altogether. In contrast to my movement from Bat-Ochir's house in the district centre, this kind of seasonal separation from people and place is not something that is considered problematic or difficult. Rather, it is a

necessary means by which growth of one's herds and one's wealth is achieved.

Reflecting on these initial experiences, I can now see how and why people reacted to me in the way they did. At the time, things seemed strange and unsettling. I kept wondering what it was that made movement or separation difficult in some instances, yet necessary and vital in others. Why was it only later that I was able to move about freely? Was it because I was willing to be 'someone's person' and utilize and honour the extended networks that this allowed? The more I relied on Renchin's family, the more I began to realize that by participating in their daily lives, I was able to turn to what Humphrey and Sneath (1999: 141) have termed their 'relations of obligation'—that is, to the extended social networks that they rely on for the transfer of goods and services in a domestic-based subsistence economy. In contributing to these relations, a whole web of connections and possibilities opened up to me.

In opening this Introduction with an account of my own discomforts, shifts, and changes of focus, my aim has been to highlight how my initial assumptions about people and the places they inhabit were turned on their head through periods of intense participation and engagement. Most of my time at Renchin's encampment was spent working with the women, preparing different kinds of dairy produce, looking after the cattle, collecting hay, and other seasonal tasks. Extreme temperature changes and bitterly cold winds, coupled with the never-ending glare of the sun, meant that I had little energy for visiting households or conducting interviews after such tasks were completed. Most reflections were conducted in the evenings, when I wrote my fieldnotes by candlelight, or spoke with people in the house as we hosted passing visitors. My visits to other households or to special events were an outcome of the people I was living with going there too, or on the off-chance that I was able to borrow a horse or gain a lift from a passing visitor to a particular place. Taking part in the routine of everyday life in this way, I came to realize what kinds of movements away from the encampment were accepted and what kinds were not. I also came to realize that the way you conducted yourself outside the house was viewed as a reflection of those in the household, and as an extension of them as people. Taking these examples into account, this book underlines the kind of ethnographic description that Englund and Leach (2000) have referred to as 'a practice of *reflexive* knowledge production' (2000: 226, *italics in original*). From a methodological perspective, I have attempted to maintain a certain level of transparency regarding the process of fieldwork and the gradual emergence of the sense of connections that prevail in adversity. This methodological

approach is also an attempt to reflect on the way in which anthropological knowledge is made to appear through long-term fieldwork and the writing process more generally. The people and the places I moved between and my own realization of how this had to be done in 'acceptable' ways become very important in this book. Through my ongoing relations with these people, they taught me to see what I had initially perceived as perplexing and strange in a different way.

### **Separation and containment**

This book addresses a set of seemingly paradoxical questions that emerged out of my placement in a family and extends to wider spheres of social life for the Buriad: (1) How do people who traverse the border zone between two countries and have no private land or state of their own accumulate possessions and grow things? (2) How can people who have lived under intense persecution during the socialist period, when most of their male relatives were either killed or taken away, harness such loss and absence to generate a proliferation of relations? (3) Why is it that when these people display wealth in a stationary form, they destroy these exhibits through acts of arson that separate each other from such accumulation? Such questions seem to turn on a broader level of enquiry: what makes separation from people and places necessary and vital in some instances, yet difficult and contested in others?

For the herding households that I became familiar with, separation appeared to be an equivocal concept (for comparisons with China, see Stafford 2000a, 2003). On the one hand, it is a necessary means by which fecundity is ensured for the growth of people and animals, as people live apart from places and from each other at various times throughout the year. Yet, it is also something that is experienced as forced upon them, by either 'external' or 'internal' pressures, and results in destructive outcomes. In examining this tension, this book proposes a framework by which to think about the relationship between personhood, memory, and place. This framework is drawn from an indigenous idea about when it is appropriate to separate and move and when it is not. This idea is influenced by a wider concern with fortune as a force that can be harnessed or dispersed at moments of separation or movement. Scattered throughout the anthropological and historical literature on Mongolia we can find intriguing references to practices that involve extracting parts of people, animals, and things when they leave or separate, and then containing these parts inside the

household (Atwood 2000; Bumochir 2004; Chabros 1992; Humphrey 2002a). Such practices appear on many different levels when people need to 'harness fortune' (*hishig hürteh*). The term 'fortune' (*hishig*) can be translated in a variety of ways to mean 'grace', 'favour', 'benefit', or 'fortune', and points to an element or feature that is held to be necessary for the growth of animals, people, and things. When paired with the term '*hürteh*' (to receive, or accept, parts of a share) it points to a respectful act of receiving, accepting, harnessing, or sourcing an allotment, or share of fortune.<sup>7</sup> Varied practices are employed to harness fortune from outside the house to ensure an increase in livestock, people, and things.

Practices associated with harnessing fortune are to be viewed not as somehow archaic or timeless, but as a part of the way in which wealth and prosperity are currently held to be achieved. In this sense, I want to highlight that local ways of understanding wealth and prosperity include attention to a series of different elements, such as fortune, might, and luck, with which we may not be familiar. This book traces how such ideas are increasingly held to be important in the emerging open market economy where economic differences between households are ever more marked. As in communities in central Vietnam noted by Kwon, nationwide de-collectivization, privatization of property, increasing foreign investment, and other market-oriented reforms have 'provoked a forceful revival of ancestral and other related ritual activities in local communities' (Kwon 2007: 74), all of which are held to secure wellbeing and prosperity in the present.

Focus on the emerging importance of these practices also provides a conceptual framework through which to explore the ways in which personhood, memory, and place are currently generated in and through people's interactions with each other and through various objects, such as photographic montages, pieces of people and animals, embroideries, and various household items. The analytical purchase of working with this framework is that several aspects of social life can be understood through it. It appears in different encounters when people need to draw attention to a contrast between people's mobility or movement and ideas about their centredness or replication.

Attending to practices associated with harnessing fortune also highlights wider moral concerns, in that performing them correctly is considered the 'right' way in which people constitute themselves as subjects (Humphrey 1997). In this sense, we may say that in order to be recognized as a person, one must engage in particular practices and activities (Leach 2008: 320;

<sup>7</sup> It is also commonly paired with the term '*huraah*', meaning to accumulate.

Willerslev 2007: 21). These practices are also thought to have some kind of effect, beyond the subject, in which growth and wealth may be generated. To show how practices associated with fortune generate growth, I contrast this concept with 'naturalist ontologies' of growth found in horticultural practices (Strathern 2005; Viveiros de Castro 2004). In so doing, I am able to draw out the complexity of the Buriad concept of fortune and open up the analytical space that a naturalist ontology obfuscates.

By starting my analysis with an indigenous practice, I am able to question and challenge our own assumptions about themes such as wealth accumulation and ideas of growth (Henare *et al.* 2007). It is also to acknowledge, as suggested in the description of my own shifts and changes, that 'the ethnographer can never assume prior knowledge of the contexts of people's concerns' (Englund and Leach 2000: 236). In saying this I take the position that cultural meanings are realized in practice which, rather than expressing consensual values, creatively constructs and conveys them (Battaglia 1990: 217). By focusing on practices performed by herding households in the Mongolian countryside to harness fortune we see how Buriad personhood is enacted through people's relations with others as well as with various objects. Saying this, my aim is to trace the way in which memories, objects, and places come together to form different ideas about the person. In taking this methodological approach, my work does not take the person for granted, but instead looks at where and how the person is located in different material and bodily forms. In using a Mongolian concept, such as fortune, to do this, I do not mean to reify ideas about fortune as some kind of abstract mental artefact. Rather, I aim to stress how meaning is always situated in people's enactments of certain practices and as a response to wider concerns.

### Personhood and modes of agency

Previous literature on Mongolian kinship was predominantly structural-functional and tended to emphasize the overarching importance of agnatic ties that preserved the 'shared bone' of patrilineal ancestors over generations (Vreeland [1954] 1962; Krader 1954; Levi-Strauss 1969; Pao 1964a, 1964b).<sup>8</sup> These accounts often emphasized kin terms as a way of understanding prescribed or prototypical behaviour and then elaborated from these as to

<sup>8</sup> Other, more recent works that deal indirectly with ideas about Mongolian kinship, include Humphrey with Onon (1996), Sneath (2000), Pegg (2001), and Bulag (1998).

possible types of 'social structure'. In so doing, they did not take actual ethnographic events, processes, or interactions as their starting point for understanding how people came to make kinship out of such events more generally. Sneath (2006) has pointed out that these approaches tended to classify nomadic societies as modelled on ideas about descent and tribal groups, whereby economic and political activities were based around lineages. This model of a tribal or kinship-based society became popular during the colonial era, when evolutionary social theory postulated that pre-state society was based on kinship clans and lineages and was seen to operate differently from those societies based on states. Focusing on early Inner Asian political formations, Sneath (2006) reveals that in contrast to these approaches, the concept of 'tribe' was in fact often a political formation rather than necessarily a kinship unit. Indeed, much steppe society was under the authority of various kinds of aristocratic orders, based on ruling lords and their subjects or vassals, where the ruling lords were not always related by descent to the people they ruled (Sneath 2006: 14). This produced local levels of aristocratic power (or pastoral polities with social stratification) that were independent of an overarching central authority, amounting to what Sneath describes as a kind of 'headless state' (2006: 18).

In line with an emphasis on agnatic (or descent-based) relations, other anthropological accounts of Mongolia have suggested that a shift occurs as we move from northern North Asia, or Siberia, to southern North Asian societies, such as Mongolia (Pedersen 2001). In the former, bilateral kinship, egalitarian societies based on hunting and horizontal relations characterized by animist or shamanist modalities are prominent. In the latter, vertical relations based on the hierarchy of aristocratic (or Buddhist reincarnation) lineages and the replication of agnatic relations prevail (Hamayon 1990; Humphrey with Onon 1996; Pedersen 2001). In relation to this geographical shift, the Buriad occupy an ambiguous position. Living as pastoral herders on the geopolitical border that divides these types of sociality, the Buriad currently traverse this territory and bridge this position, never fully inhabiting either of these modes.

Rather than questioning whether terms such as 'clan' or 'tribe' are appropriate, or whether 'vertical' or 'horizontal' forms of social organization prevail, my analysis pivots around a very different axis. Recent approaches to kinship in anthropology have emphasized a relational approach, whereby people are able to shift between different modes of engagement and performance. Here, relational perspectives exist prior to the position of the person with whom the relation is held, so that existing relations create positions or modes of sociality and it is people who are able to move between



them (Strathern [1988] 1990; Viveiros de Castro 2009). In such a way, Strathern (1994) has emphasized that: 'a performance is always a reduction: a single act created out of composite relations' (Strathern 1994: 248). I aim to highlight how such an approach, which acknowledges shifting relational perspectives (or subjectivities), might inform the way in which personhood among the Buriad is created out of activities which centre around the separation and containment of people, animals, and things.

These activities point to different modes of agency that replicate on different scales. For example, the widespread Mongolian concept of the person (the socially recognized idea of the individual) posits that people are made from the 'bone' from their father (*etsgiin töröl*, *γasan töröl*) and the 'blood' or 'flesh' from their mother (*ehiin töröl*, *tsusan* / *mahan töröl*) (Bulag 1998; Diemberger 2006).<sup>9</sup> The idea of shared bone is used in the formation of agnatic kin. Here the male component of a person is contained in the idea of shared bone that is passed between generations. Agnatic relations are also visible at annual mountain ceremonies, in political formations, and at marriage, and these connections may be conceived as a metonym for ideas about a rooted sense of personhood or the need for replication. In contrast, women, who are separated from their natal families at marriage, are held to contribute blood to their in-laws. What kind of model for agency does the idea of shared blood point to? I suggest that relations based on 'shared blood' are not objectified in particular sites or ceremonies, or in more general ideas about containment. Instead, they point to hidden or concealed relations that are housed inside the person and are only visible through particular interactions.<sup>10</sup>

A similar kind of contrast between modes of agency has been made in relation to different kinds of social prominence in Mongolian societies. Humphrey with Onon (1996), for example, have drawn a contrast between

<sup>9</sup> Diemberger (2006) notes: 'According to Mongolian and Tibetan ideas of kinship, fathers transmit bones to their children through semen. Mothers pass on flesh and blood. Bones are therefore associated with paternal ancestry, patrilineal kin-groups and patrilineal transmission of religious and political roles' (Diemberger 2006: 160). Diemberger also points out that a bilineal kinship system is common in Tibet whereby 'bones are passed on patrilineally while flesh and blood are passed matrilineally' (Diemberger 2007b: 122). 'Even though the bones are usually highlighted, under some circumstances the flesh / blood line may be used to make claims and can become significant' (Diemberger 2007b: 122). 'The female line, represented symbolically by blood or flesh, can thus be used in two different ways: as a negative factor associated with impurity or as a positive factor that enabled women to negotiate certain rights on the ground of matrilineal relations' (Diemberger 2007b: 122–3).

<sup>10</sup> Describing these as male and female components is a short hand. In the following chapters we see that this distinction is also cast in many other ways (cf. Strathern [1987] 1992: 272).

the central pre-revolutionary Daur position of the 'old man', and the marginal, or interstitial, position of the shaman. In political and religious terms, these two positions are contrasted as 'poles of sensibility' (Humphrey with Onon 1996: 63). A similar contrast has also been made between two types of leaders or specialists, defined in terms of central prominence versus peripheral or marginal prominence (Pedersen 2006). This disjuncture has also been conceptualized in terms of topographical differences. Pastoralists move between 'absolute centres' fixed along a particular trajectory or route, and these striated points or roots are inherited 'vertically' through men. In contrast, hunters and women move along horizontal trajectories that disperse without a trace, into a smooth or rhizomic 'nomadic void' (Pedersen 2006, 2007). In each of these accounts, I suggest that we can identify a fluid counterpoint that weaves around a stable or centred mode. This counterpoint does not have to be an equivalent of the thing being described. It can also be of a totally different order, to such an extent that it does not resemble a person, but points to a wider sensibility, such as a sense of fear. Extending modes of agency beyond the subject is often emphasized in object-relations theory, whereby an object can be the objectification of a subject, such as 'the mother', as well as an object, or thing (see Gomez 1997).

Seen in terms of these wider contrasts, a double conceptualization appears, whereby blood, separation, and mobility provide a counterpoint to a different kind of sensibility centred on ideas about bone, containment, and replication. I suggest that, together, these can be seen as two modalities that scale outwards and permeate relations in Ashinga. Ceremonies at stone cairns, ideas about clan affiliation through shared bone, photographic montages which project relations attached to a household, and the replication of deceased ancestors through intra-kin rebirths, may all be viewed as modes of agency centred on containment, where accumulation over generations is valued. In contrast, a counterpoint to this mode of agency is found in other places among women who, as daughters and as affines, are never fully located among their natal or in-laws' kin. This affinal mode can be conceptualized through the contribution of blood, a substance that is not passed on over generations, but is considered fluid, temporary, and mobile. It points to more fleeting modes of relatedness that evoke a sense of absence or separation from places and people, and extends to include the Buriad's sense of their interstitial position in Mongolia.

While different instantiations of these two modalities can be observed, I do not cast these against each other as opposite counterpoints. Rather I suggest that it might be fruitful to view these modalities as internal to each other, as people shift between various forms of sociality. By this I mean that,

in taking seriously the idea that a person is made from the coming together of blood *and* bone, a person has the potential to embody either of these modalities, so that they may be conceived of as ‘internal elements within a person’ (Strathern [1987] 1992: 282). For example, people may switch between affinal (blood) and consanguineal (bone) modes of relatedness (as different ‘kinds of people’; Astuti 1995). At one point they may be viewed as containers that house the rebirth of a deceased relative, while at another time they may be viewed as the son or daughter of people in the present. In turn, a woman is both a container that gives birth to children for her husband’s relatives, while also being a separated affine, a person who has left her natal family and who has come from outside. The Buriad may view themselves as detached from their homeland and, therefore, distinct and different from others, or they may see themselves as part of a wider Mongolian nation contained in the country of Mongolia. Equally, they may recognize that their intellectuals brought socialism to Mongolia, while being quick to point out that they also suffered as a result of this ideology. And while destruction has been inflicted on them from outside, it also exists internally, through the persistent threat of arson. Here, differences between Self and Other are not opposed as external negative counterparts. Instead, the Other (be this multiple or singular) appears to be internal, as one acts as the ground by which to foreground the other, and people move between these modalities in different interactions (cf. Navaro-Yashin 2009).

This view that people are not fixed by some single form of sociality, or agency, and that they contain the potential for multiple relations with others, avoids a dual idea of bone versus blood, elders versus shamans, or centre versus periphery, district centre (or city) versus countryside. It suggests instead a way of understanding how people are generated in and through their interactions with others and, in so doing, contain the potential for different modes of engagement. It is also to stress the importance of events (as both decisions and actual happenings) to shape subjects as individuals (see Humphrey 2008). Certain aspects of the person come to the fore, or are elicited (often in a singular mode), through particular activities, or events, which involve relations with others but also, crucially, through their attention to various things. A virtue of viewing personhood in a relational way (through particular events, decisions, and interactions) is that one is able to maintain the complexity of multiple forms of sociality while also specifying the conditions under which certain modes or forms appear.

Viewing personhood as an outcome of differentiation achieved through different practices is common in anthropology (Strathern [1987] 1992: 298). Leach (2008), for example, states that ‘[t]o study the “person” is to

investigate how an entity must appear and how they must behave in a given social network in order that they be recognised as a person' (Leach 2008: 320). The emergence of the person is, thus, a social issue that requires the study of social relations and wider social forms. In turn, Willerslev (2007) notes that 'personhood, rather than being an inherent property of people and things, is constituted in and through the relationships into which [people] enter' (Willerslev 2007: 21). Here, personhood is perceived as something that is achieved and constituted in various social transactions and activities. Rather than being defined by consanguineal or affinal positions, then, we may instead think of people as revealing or concealing different aspects of themselves in different relational encounters. As Butler (2006) has noted, when speaking about concepts such as personhood, or the subject, we are speaking not always about an individual but also about *a model for agency*. In this sense, we may say that people take up a variety of different subject positions or modalities within different discourses and practices. This is to privilege a view of the self that is produced in interaction with others—be those humans or non-humans—in culturally specific ways (Moore 2007: 30, 40–1; 2008).

In adopting this approach, I also think it is important to note that it is not just persons, but also objects and places that may house the potential for models of agency. This kind of approach opens up our field of analysis to include the idea that the Buriad have had to accommodate the Other that is Mongolia as part of their personhood, not least because the land on which they currently live is considered the cradle of Mongolian nationalism, the place where Chinggis Haan (commonly referred to in English as 'Ghengis Khan'), the so-called founder of the Mongolian state, was born. Further, this plurality of subjectivities can be viewed in terms of spatial dislocations, as people are separated from each other for much of the year. It also includes temporal shifts, as people house the rebirth of deceased relatives inside themselves, but crucially have to learn how to act out a different model of agency that allows them to be the sons and daughters of people in the present. The tension between making such modalities visible or invisible can be said to echo the tension between the desire for separation and containment of people, animals, and things found in practices involved in containing fortune.

## Memory and place

Ortner (1978) has noted that writing ethnography using classical anthropological categories such as 'kinship' or 'religion' is problematic. She argues that this is partly because of their externally imposed character, but also because such terms imply a static quality that renders social life fixed and structured. Such categories 'do not carry one into an experience of the interconnections that must be at the heart of the discussion' (Ortner 1978: 1). Instead, she suggests we focus on 'representative anecdotes' or analyses of 'cultural performance'. Focus on different kinds of personhood enacted through performance and practice highlights that the given aspect of consanguineal relations (that is, those based on blood and bone, ethnicity and clans) are not the only concern, nor are they always given. Instead, it is important to acknowledge 'a view of kinship created, not through birth but through a continual becoming . . . [a] cumulative transformation through the taking on of new appearances which you become but which in the process you also make your own' (Bloch 1998: 77). Growing out of this need to redefine our understanding of kinship, Carsten (2000a) suggests that the term 'relatedness' can be used to convey 'a move away from a pre-given analytic opposition between the biological and the social on which much anthropological study of kinship has rested' (2000a: 4). Such a focus allows for an examination of relations between people that are dynamic and creative; they can be activated and deactivated through practice in one's relations with others and are not simply determined at birth. Rather than reifying ideas about the person as determined by a dominating structural principle, then, by taking seemingly everyday 'domestic' relations as a starting point, we find that ideas about personhood extend to include multiple spheres of social life.

What kind of everyday practices am I talking about? In the following chapters, I explore the way in which, in the course of everyday life, people attend to various objects, such as pieces of hair, stone cairns, household chests, photographs, embroideries, mirrors, houses, places in the landscape, and intra-kin rebirths. Focusing on these items, I use the term 'object' to refer to things as well as to people and places. In tracing the way in which these objects come into being and are tended, perspectives of Buriad personhood quite different from dominant narratives about Buriad ethnic distinctiveness emerge. This is not to exclude more overtly political dimensions, but to recognize that many seemingly everyday practices are inherently politicized because they compete with other ways of appropriating places or memories, or accumulating wealth. Seen in this way it is obvious that there is a con-

tentious historicity to these practices, where different agendas are cultivated for different means. Attention to the creation of various things through these everyday practices also has an effect on those who reside in their vicinity, not least because in the process of making and tending to these things, people claim a sense of historical depth to their lives.

The anthropological literature on people's relations with objects can be said to fall into two distinct spheres. On the one hand, writers have stressed that objects become inscribed with meaning by those who create or live in their vicinity (Hoskins 1998; Gell 1998). In this sense, objects may be said to carry, abduct, index, or represent the intentions and memories of those who encounter or make them. One may say that this is an essentially symbolic, linguistic, and subject-centred analysis that privileges social construction. Here, non-human subjects are rendered a blank slate on which to mediate the intentions of people, so that it is people who define, or inscribe, objects and spaces and project their own biographical history and intentions *on to* them. On the other hand, writers have suggested that objects, places, and environments exude affects *on to* people. This requires the analysis of a network (assemblage or nexus) of different elements that includes humans as well as non-humans in order to gain a better understanding of social relations and forms of knowledge production. Here, non-humans (objects, places, and other material forms) may be viewed as agentive in that they affect those in their vicinity. They contribute to social life in such a way that personhood or subjectivity can be said to emerge out of people's relations with various non-human forms (Bender 1993; Latour 2005; Mitchell 2005; Henare *et al.* 2007; Navaro-Yashin 2009).

In relation to this polarity in the literature, Navaro-Yashin (2009) has highlighted that while the former approach privileges the subject to the exclusion of non-human agency, the latter approach does not address the historical contingency, emotionality, and politics of the assemblage of human and non-human agents in the analysis, whereby subjects and objects are treated as symmetrical agents in a simultaneous field. While one approach appears to be rooted in the specifics of biographical history, the other accumulates all kinds of elements in an ever-increasing network or rhizome (the term is used here to differentiate it from the networks based on shared bone, which may be considered roots). Theoretically, it appears that we are forced to take one side or the other. Following Navaro-Yashin (2009), however, I suggest that instead of siding with either of these approaches, it is important to be sensitive to the idea that human–non-human and non-human–human relations may relate in multiple, complex, and sometimes contradictory ways. In this sense, we may talk of layering different ways of apprehending these

relations in our analysis, rather like a form of montage, whereby each perspective appears to rest alongside or overlap the other.

This is also to acknowledge that the relations that people forge with objects must be studied in their historical specificity. Taking the view that “assemblages” of subjects and objects must be read as specific in their politics and history’ (Navaro-Yashin 2009: 9), I suggest that the way in which pastoral herding households currently engage with various objects, people, and places is informed by and very much an outcome of important events from the past. Memories of migration, political persecution, and the place in which they currently live (see Chapters 1, 3, 6, and 7) are a constant presence in the life of these people. I also hold that some of these forms come to life and are held to be affective in an animist sense, as they move through people to create particular kinds of environments, places, or people (see Chapters 2 and 4). A certain kind of agency lingers in other people’s bodies, in household chests, and in formations in the landscape. In this way, objects, such as a piece of tail hair, a child’s umbilical cord, or a particular mountain, might act as subjects in their capacity to affect those who live in their vicinity, while also acting as objects through which people inscribe their own meanings and memories.

In a similar way, the literature on memory in anthropology can, broadly speaking, be said to fall into two main strands. First, anthropologists drawing on the work of Halbwachs (1992) and Connerton (1989) have focused on ‘collective’ or ‘social’ memory to explore how critical events, such as war or migration, are recalled through a collective mnemonic medium (Antze and Lambek 1996; Said 2000; Humphrey 2003). Here, anthropologists have focused on the way in which a collective or shared memory is reproduced or commemorated by a group of people over generations. Secondly, a focus on how individual life stories are recalled and narrated through different mnemonic devices has allowed anthropologists to explore how memory plays an important role in the construction of the person and the creation of different forms of subjectivity (Hoskins 1998; Küchler 1987; Radley [1990] 1997).<sup>11</sup> In the following chapters, I bridge debates found in these two prominent approaches to memory. On the one hand, people recall shared

<sup>11</sup> This is, of course, not an exhaustive review of the approaches to memory in anthropology. In contrast to works which focus on how memory plays an important part in the construction of identity and self, anthropologists, sociologists, and philosophers have focused on memory as something that we encode in our mind (Cole and Gay 1972; Bloch 1998; Sperber 1989; Yates 1974). Others have focused on embodiment, whereby memory is constituted in the act of bodily recalling (Casey 2000; Connerton 1989; Csordas 1994; Hallam and Hockey 2001; Olick and Robbins 1998).

memories of migration and political persecution through narrative idioms that highlight ethnic difference. On the other hand, individual memories may be reproduced over generations as they come to life through the bodies of children, or in the tending of everyday material forms, such as embroideries or photograph albums. Taking this dual approach, I attempt to show how everyday processes of relatedness speak to larger-scale political concerns. In saying this, I follow Carsten (2007) in focusing on how ideas about personhood are located in personal and familial histories that connect to the wider political formations of which they are a part.

I should state that this book is not explicitly about post-socialism. That is, I do not view current social life in Mongolia as only reducible to an outcome of its recent history. While there is no doubt that the collapse of the socialist state was a difficult experience for everyone, the introduction of a neo-liberal economy, coupled with the promotion of Mongolian nationalism, has equally brought its own problems. What is an outcome of Soviet policy or the current rewriting of history is slippery and often difficult to define. To attempt to do so would, I think, be to objectify, in a top-down way, how people in the Mongolian countryside experience change. Taking my lead from anthropologists working on post-socialism, I think it is important to stress that 'the unmaking of earlier ways of living and the putting together of new ones' are always *mutually constitutive* (Humphrey 2002b: xxiv). This is to stress that people are not living in a way that they consider to be 'transitional'. The Mongolian government still retains enormous decision-making powers over the district, its people, and resources (cf. Hann 2002), but people create local ways of manoeuvring within different kinds of adversity and constraints. In attending to this it is also important to hold in mind what has gone before. This is especially the case for the Buriad who have a haunting relationship to their past, which is tinged with memories of violence and loss that live on in a very real way in the present. I will show how this past energizes and enables current forms of subjectivity. Indeed, focus on the remaking of particular kinds of relationships and ideas about inheritance might point to wider experiences of post-socialism more generally. This book can be read in many ways: as an outline of Buriad concepts of personhood, as a description of a marginalized ethnic minority and their struggle to find a place for themselves in a landscape that is not their own, or as a theorization of object-person relations. Together, these point to the mutually constitutive relationships between people and objects, the dead and the living, and land and people.



## Outline

The book is divided into three parts. In the first part, I focus on narratives of loss and migration, practices concerned with harnessing fortune, and media displayed inside the house, such as embroideries and photographic montages. These seemingly disparate spheres may be viewed as different sites that gather and discharge affects on the people who recite, engage, or view them. They may also be viewed as political gestures that serve to situate people in a rooted web of connections with others. In Chapter 1, I present narratives concerned with people's past experiences of loss and migration. This is explored through the prism of their current interstitial position as an ethnic minority living in Mongolia's far countryside. Narratives about the Buriad's sustained persecution by the Mongolian state are often evoked as a means by which to objectify themselves as different from other Mongolians. In contrast, narratives of continuity revolving around the tracing of clans and genealogies are used to highlight connections to a wider Buriad diaspora. Focusing on the way in which people define themselves against, or alongside, others I reveal some of the idioms by which people evoke different kinds of personhood. These narratives provide a background against which ideas of separation and containment can be used to think through other aspects of Buriad social life. In Chapter 2, I examine practices by which a household manages its fortune through attention to its herds and in mountain ceremonies. These practices point to domestic ways of forging a sense of personhood in the present, whereby people are viewed as the custodians of the land in which they currently live. They also involve attention to particular objects and so they highlight the moral means by which fortune is harnessed and contained. Focusing on objects inside the household, in Chapter 3 I explore how photographic montages and embroideries project different aspects of the person on to visitors to the house. These objects outwardly display the relations of obligation available to people within the household, while provoking individual memories of absent people and places for those who live in their vicinity.

In the second part of the book, I use the idea of separating and containing fortune to explore ideas about the temporality of personhood. In Chapter 4, we see how the creation of hidden pieces, such as umbilical cords and pieces of tail hair from herd animals, contained within the household chest, point to modalities of personhood, quite different to those objectified on the outer surface of the chest. Here, people are brought into being, not through repetition and stasis, but through their separation and movement across time and space. In Chapter 5, I examine the role of the mirror, which

is placed at the centre of the display, to reveal an exemplary kind of person made from each of the parts that constitute the household chest. Drawing on recent work in artefact-oriented research (Gell 1998; Latour 2005; Hoskins 1998; Mitchell 2005; Navaro-Yashin 2009), these visible and hidden components of the household chest appear as inter-dependent perspectives that index different concepts of the person. They reveal that relations based on affinity, separation, rupture, and difference are the necessary, yet invisible, background that supports the visibly foregrounded relations based on shared bone, containment, and sameness. When viewed together, through the mirror that stands at the centre of the display, we see that a person is made from each of them. Far from being a mere psychological reaction to external stimuli (Jay 1996: 3), here vision of oneself through the mirror becomes the 'tool' through which an exemplary kind of personhood is revealed. While things kept in the household chest are the means by which different forms of sociality maybe created between living people, in Chapter 6 I explore the relationship between memory and kinship (Carsten 2007; Das 1995; Humphrey 1992), to show how people's bodies can also be viewed as the containers that 'house' deceased kin. This is necessary, we realize, because a sense of being separated from one's relatives embraces many levels of life for pastoral herders in Ashinga. Primarily, there is a sense of absence from place as the Buriads escaped war and disruption in Russian Buryatia and migrated to Mongolia in the early 1900s. As mentioned, in Mongolia, the Buriad were heavily persecuted during the socialist period and people were prohibited from communicating with their ancestors through shamanic performance. Intra-kin rebirths, common to most families in this area, provide a way in which to negotiate the politics of memory and wider feelings of loss. Nevertheless, when people are born into a world where they are both the rebirth of their grandfather and the daughter of someone in the present, life becomes a process of learning how to separate out this multiplicity in order that one may become the son or daughter of a person in the present.

The final part of the book draws on theoretical approaches to the anthropology of landscape and the morality of people's means of accumulating wealth (Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Bender 1993, 2001; Englund 1996; Pedersen 2007a). With the shift from a command economy to an open market economy (*zah zeeliin üye*, lit. the age of the market), much attention has been paid to the increasing migration of people from the countryside to the ever-growing cities in Mongolia (see Brunn and Narangoa 2006), but little attention has been paid to the people who remain in the places that these people leave behind and to their different economic strategies. In Chapter 7, I focus on accumulating wealth through herding. For pastoral herders,

movement across the landscape is the dominant means by which fortune is harnessed and growth in animals achieved. Here, fecundity and wealth are visible in mobile and transitory forms. At the most basic level, it is the herds that form the landscape as it is they who traverse the land and contain the fortune that engenders the fertility and vital energy that makes 'places' (see Humphrey and Hürelbaatar, *in press*). In the face of competing claims on the landscape, local shamans are motivated to establish relations with previous inhabitants who are held to reside in particular places. In so doing, they gain endorsement from past historical figures who claim that they are good people who should remain there. In securing this endorsement, I suggest, the Buriad go some way in gaining authority over the place in which they currently live. In contrast to the more dominant narratives based on migration, persecution, and ethnic difference, the display of images in the household (Chapter 3), intra-kin rebirths (Chapter 6), and shamanic performance (Chapter 7) reveal how multiple dimensions of history compete for recognition. Focus on these diverse areas allows for a more fluid way of apprehending the ways in which people may be said to move between different subject positions. When movement ceases, however, wealth becomes visible in static forms. In Ashinga's district centre, wealth is increasingly visible in the form of people's elaborately constructed wooden houses. In Chapter 8, we see that these static displays have, over the past decade, become the target of serious arson attacks. Such attacks bring to the fore memories of past terrors where people's property was confiscated in the dead of night. But the threat of arson should not be viewed simply as an extension of a previous terror. Instead, through a focus on Mongolian ideas about fire, arson appears as a form of purification, as people question the morality of one another's new means of accumulating wealth and power.

Practices involving separating and containing people, animals, and things can be said to revolve around a series of tensions. For example, the mountain cairn appears as a gathering point for fortune and prosperity. At the same time people live some distance from this place and extract pieces from it in order to harness fortune for their households (Chapter 2). Similarly, objects placed outside the household chest emphasize infinite replication and inclusion (Chapter 3), while its interiority draws attention to separation and movements (Chapter 4). This tension is made visible when people look into the mirror and see an image of themselves as made from multiple parts (Chapter 5). A tension also appears when living people are viewed as rebirths of deceased relatives, while also being the sons and daughters of people in the present (Chapter 6). Similarly, for nomadic pastoralists wealth is stored in mobile forms that exist apart from people, but it can also appear as a resource

when people attend to the history of the landscape in certain fixed sites through shamanic ceremonies (Chapter 7). In the district centre, wealth is visible in static sites, such as elaborately decorated wooden houses, and yet people are forcibly separated from these sites through acts of arson, dislodging people from these forms of accumulation (Chapter 8). While people may be drawn towards containment and accumulation at certain sites, the need for separation from these sites is seen to generate a kind of growth. This idea echoes the need for seasonal movement from places and peoples engaged in livestock herding practices more generally. In this wider sense, a generative potential exists in being able to maintain a position between them.

In attending to a tension between that which is visible (or contained) and that which is hidden (or separated), I draw attention to aspects that are often left out, or buried, in our own anthropological descriptions. The book ends by reflecting on the distinction between naturalist ontologies of growth and those found in the Mongolian concept of fortune. Review of these ideas in relation to the ethnography suggests that previous distinctions, which have usually been considered as distinct modes or ways of being—such as ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’, or ‘agnatic’ and ‘consanguineal’—should instead be viewed as instantiations of a wider archetype for perspectival traffic. By focusing on the transformations afforded when parts are extracted from people, animals, and things and then contained, or housed, to allow for growth and generation, we see that these distinctions are always internal. In shifting between them, fortune is harnessed and growth is made visible.