

INTRODUCTION

Creating Difference from Within



Most Mongol tribes think and speak of most other Mongols with a mixture of dislike, suspicion and sometimes envy. At the same time all who speak the Mongol tongue, they feel, are *aha-dū*, elder and younger brothers, and ought to stand together against all who are not Mongols ...

It is, I think, inherent in the character of the nomad life that there should be this wavering between unity and dispersal. Nomadism cannot be uniform.

—O. Lattimore, *Mongol Journeys*

I had heard of her the previous day. She used to be a colleague of Ulaanhüü, a local teacher and the father of my Mongolian host family, but she had now gone to live in the capital, where she had settled as a diviner of some repute. She had become well known and wealthy, I was told, and her name had even appeared in the newspapers. Rumour had it that she was a hermaphrodite. Now that she was sitting in front of me, I could see why locals might think so. She was abrupt and heavier than most Mongolian women, acted like an assertive male authority and was bizarrely dressed. Wearing leather trousers and big golden rings, she did not look like the Buddhist lama she was said to be. Neither lamas nor Mongolian women – especially when alone – are supposed to drink, but this woman was greedily devouring meat and fat while relentlessly ordering the poor mother of the household to bring her more

Mongolian milk-spirit (*shimiin arhi*). She was indeed terrifying and a living paradox at that: a drunk woman, a female Buddhist lama in a conspicuous outfit and – in gendered terms – a hermaphrodite, neither man nor woman.

I was visiting a decaying socialist-style sanatorium in the remote Mongolian countryside with my Mongolian host family and fieldwork assistant when we were all invited to visit a family in their small log cabin on the other side of the river. We did not know that the family had another visitor, but we soon realised that the lama diviner was the reason we had been invited. The host family served us drinks and meat from a recently slaughtered sheep, while the lama was keen on telling us how lucky we were to be offered the head of a sheep. The hidden agenda behind the hospitality was difficult to miss because she soon asked us, in a rather impolite fashion, whether we had room in our car to give her a lift back to the main village of Chandman'-Öndör District, my fieldwork base. Ulaanhüü,¹ my Mongolian host, replied that we would not be going straight back to the village, but he was obviously not telling the truth. Having tasted the offered milk-spirit, we then decided to leave after what – for my Mongolian friends – had been an unpleasant visit, but just as we were about to go, the lama asked my fieldwork assistant to stay behind for a moment, as she needed to talk to him face to face. Ulaanhüü seemed uncomfortable about this, so while the rest of us waited patiently outside, he went into the house on two occasions to ask them to hurry up. When my assistant finally appeared, he was not very informative. The lama had told him, or so he brusquely informed me, that we would have a pleasant trip back to the village.

While walking back to the sanatorium, Ulaanhüü declared that he would never give a lift to a woman like her. She had been impolite and had shown no respect, he said, and civility was to be expected of a woman who had once been his younger colleague at the local school. My fieldwork assistant had feared the lama, and he later told me that she could not have been genuine. A lama would be calm, properly behaved and modest, he said. They all agreed that she had only invited us and made the family serve the sheep's head in order to get a lift. The lama had arrived to perform a service, and now she could not get back to the village, it seemed. This was not a thoroughfare, not even by Mongolian standards, and only very few cars would pass by here. To the north, there was only taiga and then mountains.

On one evening a few days later – when back in the village centre of Chandman'-Öndör District – my assistant told me what had really happened in the log cabin. The lama diviner had informed him that my host family was a bad family and that they would try to get as much as possible out of me. We had to be careful, she had confided. While secretly attacking our host family, she also made sure that the information would stay concealed: there would be war (*dain*), she had cautioned my assistant, if this information was revealed

to anyone. The warning, and the lama's whole appearance, had made him anxious, and he had not dared inform me straight away. I only saw the lama once more. She had been drinking and was riding a motorbike through the village. Later on, she went back to the capital, and six months later I heard that she had passed away. She was, however, somehow proved right in her prediction of conflict.

There is no doubt that the lama's transgressive and odd behaviour was distressing and immediately effective, simply because her presence alone begged one question: did she have the power of her frightening appearance? Just as her appearance drew attention, so did her words brand one's memory, at least for a while. At the very same time, her improper and indecent behaviour was what made her unreliable: was she an impostor or simply mad? She could not be ignored, though, and once her words had been spoken, they had become a potential truth that affected our actions towards others. Concern was raised: might the host family indeed be bad? And what about the lama? Could she be believed, let alone relied on? Ulaanhüü had undermined her authority, but, according to the lama, he was not to be trusted anyway. As was often the case during my fieldwork, concern, disquiet and idioms of deceit were integral to the fabric of social life. Appearances deceive, I was often warned, and contained in the message provided by the lama was the necessity of secrecy, of working under the surface. The form of transmission (delivering information behind closed doors with a warning not to pass it on) and the content of the message (anticipation of conflict and bad, unreliable people) made this clear. The lama had disseminated a piece of information that, from the beginning, was not known to all (only the fieldwork assistant was told) and that could – by its very mode of transmission – not be made known to all: 'If he told this to anyone, there would be war' (the warning itself already instigating this war). As with the case of rural French witchcraft, where words always wage war and objectivity and neutrality is impossible, the nature of persons and relations only made sense from a position within the system (cf. Favret-Saada 1980 [1977]: 10).² The account itself could not be made public; it was partial in nature and unverifiable. The only thing known for sure was that 'someone' was not to be trusted, because relationships were cast in an idiom of mistrust.

This story may be deemed idiosyncratic and irrelevant if it was not for the fact that I repeatedly encountered similar expressions of mistrust and enmity during my fieldwork (see also Højer 2003, 2004). Additionally, suspicion and antagonism, even violence (Pedersen 2011), have since then been shown to be prevalent features of social relations in many other Mongolian districts (see e.g. Empson 2011: 268–315; Swancutt 2012; High 2017: 74–75), even to an extent where one could speak of a 'community of mistrust' and 'living with an assumption of malice' (Buyandelger 2013: 125–29). Indeed, Lattimore's impression in the introductory quote is often repeated in local

theory about local life, such as when a middle-age female interlocutor in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, once explained to me that – having lived in Mongolia for years – I myself, for one, should be able to understand that in Mongolia everything is ‘just for one person’ (wrestling, horse racing etc.) and that ‘people like to do things on their own and haven’t worked together for ages’ (cf. Bruun 2006: 132). ‘We are nomads,’ she told me, ‘and if we work together, we have arguments’ (see also Bulag 1998: 65). Another interlocutor, a male flour vendor, similarly brought this out as an indigenously concerned when he echoed Lattimore in bluntly stating that ‘no one can unite Mongolians, only Chinggis Khan could do so. Mongolians are separate and dispersed’ and ‘they only pretend to respect each other’. Such views are even echoed in analyses of Mongolian political life; for example, when D. Jargalsaihan (known as Jargal DeFacto) in his weekly televised DeFacto Review often laments the disorganised state of Mongolian politics and once even proclaimed with a knowing and maybe resigned smile on his face that ‘in Mongolia, nothing is institutional, it is always individual’.³ While I do obviously not want to take such local conceptualisations as face value explanations of inherent traits of nomadism or Mongolian culture, nor make them into the only – or key – operative principle of social relations in Mongolia (or accept the reference to an assumed pre-cultural ‘individual’), they do point to important aspects of anti-social relations that are often underexplored in Mongolian ethnography, at least as a significant trope in its own right, and equally undertheorized in general anthropology.

In this book, I thus set out to explore mistrust, suspicion and enmity and the Mongolian concern with the dangers involved in communicating, even in relating. In doing so, I aim to take issue with the core of much anthropological theorising,⁴ where social life is taken to imply, much in line with Rousseau, that social man constantly lives ‘outside himself [and] knows only how to live in the opinion of others’ and that it is only from the judgement of others that ‘he derives the consciousness of his own existence’ (Rousseau 1967 [1762, 1755]: 245; see also Lévi-Strauss 1978a [1973]⁵). While this may be a reasonable assumption for any sociology or social anthropology, it is equally sensible to ask, I argue, what then happens when these others – through whom we live – also exist *as* others and when we start knowing ourselves through the eyes of what is believed to be different and sometimes unreliable, unknown and feared others? What are the implications when the others through whom we are realised are, in effect, others and when this realisation leads to uncertainty, avoidance, precautions and danger, rather than to the certainty of playing a set role vis-à-vis other set roles in a fixed social system, ‘a society’ composed of ‘social relations’, where selves are as clearly defined and known as others? How do we approach a world of relations where the unknown other and danger in social relationships are important

features and where the avoidance of such ‘social relationships’ are – at least in part – constitutive of our coming into being? This is, essentially, what this book is trying to tackle.

Chandman’-Öndör District

While I contend that mistrust and animosity are important and often overlooked aspects of life in Mongolia, this is obviously far from all there is to relatedness in rural or urban Mongolia – and it is certainly not instability, anxiety and concern that characterises Chandman’-Öndör District at first sight. Indeed, to most foreign visitors, the village centre of the district (*sum*) would appear to be a calm and quiet place to live, where social problems such as poverty, repeated bursts of violence and excessive drinking, while certainly not absent, are less prevalent features of everyday life than in many other Mongolian districts a decade or so after the collapse of socialist society (see e.g. Pedersen 2011). Life is unhurried, few people are to be seen and the sound of a jeep making its way along the rough dirt tracks of the village only rarely interferes with the prevailing silence or the few barking dogs (or, in the summer, mooing cows) of Mongolian rural life. Many young people move away, mainly to the Mongolian capital, for education and work, and the ones that remain or return usually take up a life of herding, teaching or small-scale business. The village is indeed located in the remote periphery of Mongolia, more than seven hundred kilometres – and at least twenty-four hours of non-stop driving – from Ulaanbaatar, the capital city and centre of Mongolia. It is reached from the provincial centre, Mörön (see Figure 0.2), after a long and rough 137 kilometre ride on a bumpy and occasionally muddy track that is increasingly surrounded by forested slopes. Depending on the car, the weather and the driver, this journey rarely takes less than five hours and often much more. Located at a small stream, a tributary to the Arig river, and surrounded by hills covered in larch trees, the village is home to the district administration, a school, a clinic, a post office, a village hall and a number of small shops, and it is the only local hub for business, communication, entertainment and government. This is where herders send their children to live when attending school, and it is the place for shopping, attending larger festivities and exchanging the latest news. Apart from the occasional celebratory gathering at the local school or village hall, the central square – located just south of the dominant school area and surrounded by the district administration, village hall, a handful of shops and a low wooden fence to keep out horses and other livestock – is where most people are to be seen. Children are on the lookout for candy; teachers and suit-wearing officials are on their way to work; and a few herders, wearing the traditional



Figure 0.1 Chandman'-Öndör District centre in summer, 2006. Photograph by the author.

Mongolian *deel* (a kaftan-like garment), are often sitting on the ground next their horses, exchanging cigarettes and information. If space tends to be perceived by reference to centres rather than borders in the vast 'empty' territories of the Mongolian countryside (cf. Pedersen 2003),⁶ the village, as it were, *is* Chandman'-Öndör District – and its absolute centre.

Located in Mongolia's northernmost Hövsgöl province, Chandman'-Öndör District stretches out from the southeastern shores of Lake Hövsgöl (see Figure 0.2), a scenically located alpine lake just south of the southern Siberian Sayan Mountains. The district is home to approximately 3,000 villagers and pastoral nomads and almost 40,000 heads of livestock – horses, sheep, goats and cows/yak – and it covers an area of roughly 4,500 square kilometres. When entering Chandman'-Öndör territory from the south, one is struck by the increase in forest and rivers compared to the Mongolian steppe land. This is where the steppe vanishes in favour of the Siberian taiga; geographically it is the borderland between Inner Asia and Siberia. The northernmost part of Chandman'-Öndör District and the northern part of the large neighbouring Tsagaan-Üür District is one of the most uninhabited regions of Mongolia, a land of forests, mountains, highland, rocks and rivers. More than two thirds of the administrative district is covered by forest,

mainly larch, and the area is interspersed with river valleys of various sizes, the biggest of which is the Arig river valley in the southern part of the district (see Figure 0.2). The rainfall is considerable during summer – at least compared with most other parts of Mongolia – forcing most people to abandon their Mongolian *ger* (the circular nomadic dwelling, also known as yurt in English), which is suited to a drier climate, and move into wooden houses from late spring. In the village, most people live in wooden houses all year round, and it is probably one of only a few villages in Mongolia where no concrete buildings, visible signs of socialist modernity, are to be seen.

Not much is known and documented about the pre-revolutionary history of the region east of Lake Hövsgöl, and it has never been studied by anthropologists conducting long-term fieldwork. In 1934, for example, Čeveng (1991 [1934]: 74) wrote that it was impossible to say anything about the area, as nobody had ventured into it to do research.⁷ The Darhad and Duha people west of Lake Hövsgöl have – in contrast – been the subject of much more work in Mongolian, English and French (see e.g. Badamxatan 1987; Wheeler 1999, 2000; Pedersen 2006, 2011; Kristensen 2007, 2015; Hangartner 2010).

Yet, based on the available literature and information on the region, it is possible to establish that until the socialist revolution of 1921, the area east of Lake Hövsgöl had, due to its geographical location, been on the fringes of most previous empires. During the Manchu Qing domination of contemporary Mongolia from 1691 to 1911, the border went right through present-day Chandman'-Öndör territory (see Figure 0.2). Border watch-posts (*haruul*) were set up in 1727 (Banzragch 2001: 29), when a group of Halh Mongols, the majority group in contemporary Mongolia, was sent to the area as a result of the Khiagta treaty between the Russians and the Manchu Qing empire. The Halh Mongols arrived from present-day Arhangai and Övörhangai provinces in central Mongolia to settle at Hüh Tolgoi, north of contemporary Chandman'-Öndör District centre, so as to protect the border and prevent relationships between Russians and Mongolians. Along with Hüh Tolgoi, six other border watch-posts were set up east of the Hövsgöl lake. While Tannu-Urianhai (roughly present-day Tuva), like Outer Mongolia, was officially registered as an 'outer dependency' (*wai-fan*) and thus was included in the Qing empire, the belt of watch-posts were placed south of Tannu-Urianhai (see Figure 0.2) and Lake Hövsgöl, possibly because Tannu-Urianhai – and most likely also the Turkic-speaking people living around Lake Hövsgöl – 'fell into the loosest category of "outer barbarians" (*wai-i*)' (Ewing 1981: 188). Also, the terrain to the north was difficult, the control of the unknown Tannu-Urianhai was still not secure and senior Qing officials, apparently, did not visit the area (Ewing 1981: 189). This meant that the Turkic-speaking people, who were related to present-day eastern Tuvians and whose descendants are

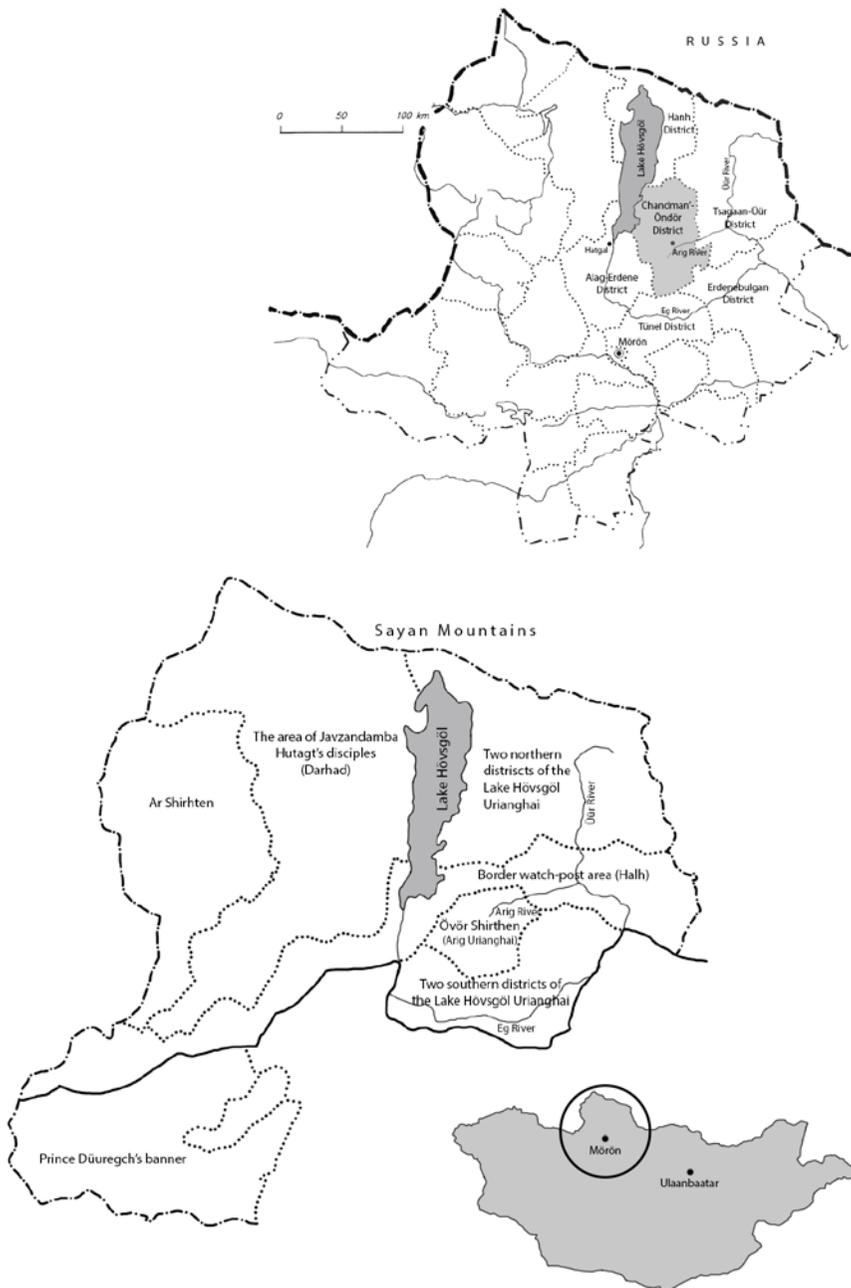


Figure 0.2 Contemporary (top) and pre-revolutionary (bottom) Chandman-Öndör District in Mongolia (bottom right). Maps created by the author and Åse Ghasemi. The pre-revolutionary map was inspired by Banzragch 2001: 244.

nowadays referred to by locals as Soyod Urianhai, lived in a land north of the border watch-posts (a part of which is now Chandman'-Öndör District) that was less strictly governed by the Qing empire (see Figure 0.2). Their origin is unknown, but in the neighbouring Tsagaan-Üür District, Ganbaatar, a local 'Uighur' (an often used ethnonym for the Tuvan-speaking people inhabiting the northernmost part of this particular district) could relate a legend about a group of poor hunters from Tuva led by Bogdyn Baatar, who had come to ask for – and was granted – land in the area east of the lake and north of the border in very old times. There seem to have been differences even back then, though, between the 'Uighurs' living around the Üür River in the neighbouring Tsagaan-Üür District and the Soyod Urianhai in present-day Chandman'-Öndör District. While the exact pre-revolutionary affiliations between such Tuvan-speaking groups are unclear, they all seem to have been organised into the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai banner from the late eighteenth century up until a few years after the socialist revolution in 1921. On pre-revolutionary maps at the museum in Mörön, the provincial capital, the area east of the lake and north of the border watch-posts simply appear as 'all the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai' (*Hövsgöl Nuuryн Urianhain Bүgd*), the seat of administrative leader(s) being at present-day Hanh District centre, at the northern end of the lake, and in other publications the area is also simply named (the region of) 'the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai' (*Hövsgöl Nuuryн Urianhai*) (Rinchen 1979: 16–17; Sanjdorj 1980: xviii–xix; Banzragch 2001: 56–58, 244; Atwood 2004: 9, 556). Prior to the revolution they were, according to Banzragch and others, divided into four districts (Banzragch 2001: 56), two of which were south of the border. It was the Northeast District (*Ar züün sum*), one of the two Urianhai districts north of the border, that was part of contemporary Chandman'-Öndör District.⁸

South of the border watch-posts, in the territory around the Arig river lived – and lives – the Mongol-speaking Arig Urianhai, the majority group in present-day Chandman'-Öndör District. According to Banzragch (2001: 59–60), the Arig Urianhai are descendants of an Urianhai tribe from the area around the Irtysh (Erchis) and Chüi river (Banzragch 2001: 59), who used to be subjects of the Zünghars, a branch of the Oirat or western Mongols, outside the Manchu dominion. Led by Horolmoi, this tribe secretly penetrated Halh territory to hunt but were caught by the Manchu-supported Hotgoid noble, Bүүvei, around 1710. After submitting to the Manchus, settling at the Tes river, then fleeing and finally being recaptured, they were given land at the Arig river in present-day Chandman'-Öndör District. When they once more tried to flee, Horolmoi was executed, and his tribe finally settled down permanently at the Arig river. From the early eighteenth century and throughout the Manchu rule of Mongolia, the people living at the Arig river were satellite subjects (*har'yaa*) of the banner of prince Dүүregch, centred in

present-day Tsetserleg District in the western part of the Hövsgöl province. Possibly, it was Genden, a Hotgoid ruler, who decreed the area around the Arig river to be part of this banner (see Wheeler 2000: 24). As such, the Arig Urianhai people, or Övör Shirhten as they were called,⁹ were ruled by chiefs (*zaisan*) appointed by prince Dүүрегч. According to a local herdsman, whose ancestor had been chief of the Övör Shirhten, they were supposed to provide the banner centre with animals and fur to be sold to Russians and Chinese (also see Dorjgotov 1979: 6).

The term Urianhai is thus somewhat misleading given that the Soyod Urianhai north of the border watch-post and the Arig Urianhai south of the border watch-post could be contrasted in more ways than their names would suggest. The northern Soyod Urianhai used to be shamanic, Turkic-speaking and outside the border watch-post area, whereas the Arig Urianhai are Mongol-speaking and used to be inside the border in pre-revolutionary times, and more influenced by Buddhism. Indeed, the Arig Urianhai are often referred to as the Halh Urianhai (i.e. Mongol Urianhai) and a few vague and controversial but not necessarily contradictory claims are made about their 'genuine' Mongol origin (see also Chapter 1).¹⁰

Nowadays, the differences between the various groups of people populating Chandman'-Öndör District are often said to be negligible, although dialectical differences do exist and a few people in the northern part of the district, apparently, still understand Tuvan language. Yet, much in line with socialist census tradition, a distinction between Arig Urianhai and Soyod Urianhai was not even made in a census from 1992. According to this census, there were 533 Halh, 2,231 Urianhai, 12 Darhad and 32 Buriats within the district territory. Yet, the area is mostly presented as being Arig or Halh Urianhai by the official administration, a bias that is occasionally lamented by local Soyod Urianhai because it neglects their presence in the district. Also, there is still a conception that it was not just in the past that the northern Soyod Urianhai were wild and 'without masters' (*ezengüi*), i.e. outside 'control' and political order. The two Buddhist lamaseries in the south (*Arigün Dood Hüree* and *Arigün Deed Hüree*) were built in 1744 and 1803/4, whereas the lamasery (*Rashaany Hüree*) in the north at the Bulnai spring – in what was Soyod Urianhai, and traditionally 'shamanic', territory – was not built until 1904.¹¹ We might therefore very tentatively speak of the pre-revolutionary region of present-day Chandman'-Öndör District as expressing an Inner Asian paradigm of shamanism, hunting and non-state people in the north versus centralised and Buddhist pastoralists in the south (cf. Humphrey 1980; Pedersen 2001). Yet people in the south were also hunting and had shamans and, in contrast with the Darhad area to the west of the Hövsgöl Lake (see e.g. Pedersen 2011), Buddhism and shamanism were not strongly opposed in this region.¹² This is attested to by the historical

prevalence of yellow shamans ('Buddhist' shamans) and red Buddhists ('shamanic' Buddhists) in the area (see also Chapter 4).

The socialist revolution of 1921 came to stir up the region considerably. In the first years after the revolution, the administrative units still coincided with the distribution of ethnic groupings in the area, but administrative reforms throughout the 1920s finally led to the new law on the division and classification of Mongolian territory in 1931, when the present-day Chandman'-Öndör District came into being. The area then followed the familiar Mongolian (and to some extent Soviet) pattern of change. The Buddhist Church was destroyed between 1937 and 1939, when the four monasteries of the district were demolished and most lamas imprisoned or executed.¹³ An old man from the Arig river valley recalled how they had taken his lama father away in 1937, just as the grass had turned green in spring, and confiscated most of the family's property, including most animals. An extraordinary harsh winter followed, and the remaining animals were lost, leaving the family highly impoverished. They now had to work for other, richer families until the collective farm (*negdel*), *Leninii aldar* (Lenin's glory), parallel to the district in terms of administration and the territory covered, was formed at the end of the 1950s. The collectivisation of property that this entailed may explain why poor families that had fallen victim to the purges in the late 1930s often later turned out to be staunch believers in socialism. A primary school had already been established in 1940, and in 1971–72 a secondary school (a year eight school) was founded. The Bulnai sanatorium, renowned for its healthy hot springs, was established in 1968 as a state sanatorium in the northernmost part of the district, and a post office, a bank, a saw mill, a clinic, a power station and administration, plus other modern institutions, were set up in the district centre – located where the Arig Urianhai and the Halh border guard territory used to meet – alongside or before the establishment of the collective farm.

The socialist period saw the creation of an official administration and a socio-economic organisation based on strong vertical structures and, as in Manchu times, weak horizontal links between districts (Bulag 1998: 49). Almost all property was collective, the economy was planned, redistributive and strongly centralised, at least in its official version, and nobody, not even leaders, could consider themselves outside an all-embracing hierarchy centred in Ulaanbaatar and ultimately in Moscow. In short, the socio-economic organisation of the state was laid out as a monstrous centralised and highly codified system (Humphrey 1998: 109). While socialism was still praised for order, stability and equality at the time of fieldwork, especially by elderly people, many locals mainly emphasised the strictness of hierarchy and planning in socialist times, and one herdsman related that 'people had a terrible "milk plan" (*süünii tölövlögөө*) in the summer. They used to milk cows until

late fall, and if they couldn't fulfil the requirements, they would have to pay with their own money. Also, when they lost animals, they paid for it.'

Socialism was most certainly radical in its organisational, economic and ideological restructuring of society, but its time span was relatively short (50–60 years of official atheism and a little more than 30 years of planned economy), and it was not entirely successful in controlling less institution-alised, alternative and unrecognised domains outside official life – i.e. practices that did not take place in spaces visible to the gaze of the official state. Apart from the fact that the official economy was converted into a less official one where disposable property or manipulable resources – rather than accumulated capital (as in a capitalist economy) – was converted into priceless rights over people through exchange (Humphrey 1998; see also Pedersen 2011: 97), these parallel spheres were, for example, gambling, illegal hunting, the secret practices of Buddhist lamas and the quiet celebration of the traditional New Year, especially in the countryside. One lama could even remember how he managed to buy a religious book from the local state shop.¹⁴ Economic entrepreneurs such as the *panz* (trader, speculator, spiv) also operated alongside the collective economy and, while they were often despised for not doing physical work and for 'sucking' other people's labour, their activities were well known.

There is nothing to suggest, though, that such illicit practices took place within the confines of large-scale secret institutional structures of opposition. Rather, they seem to have been private, implicit and largely unspoken and sometimes even practised by officials themselves. Some people, for example, sought out religious practitioners when biomedicine failed. Potential lamas became interested in religion through experiences of illness or a personal belief in the truth and value of religion, and officials who were supposed to reveal religious activities themselves had religious partners. One man who – when head of the province union – was asked by the authorities to find out if any young people kept 'sutras, gods or idols' told me that he himself had brought a monk to his home in order to cure his wife's allergy. Different 'ideological' domains – i.e. domains not necessarily opposed to, or involved in, each other (cf. Yurchak 1997) – seem to have been present. On the one hand, there was a domain of public language that left no space for either hidden counterculture or fundamental critique to emerge from within. Many people did believe in socialism in rural Mongolia, and the literal message of socialist slogans – such as 'the truth is our way', written on a painting of Lenin and a little girl on the wall of the local village school – was not necessarily lost, as Yurchak claims was the case among urban Russians (1997: 168–69), but he seems right in observing that 'the socialist slogan' 'became a signifier of immutability' (Yurchak 1997: 168–69) where 'the official system of representation was the only possible ... in the system's official sphere' (Yurchak 1997:

164–66; see also Pedersen 2011: 48–52). The Lenin painting on the school wall is still there, more than ten years after the collapse of the socialist system, and even though a local antagonism surely exists between the old Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party (headed by the principal of the school) and the new Democratic Party (headed by the local governor), there is a distinct socialist feel to most local public events, such as collective workdays (*subbotnik*) and village hall gatherings. The many medals and diplomas awarded at district-level celebrations, for example, is an enduring socialist practice (cf. Zimmermann 2011) that appears unquestionable to locals, and so are the memorable tunes played on the Hammond organ in the local village hall when distinctions are awarded.

On the other hand, there was the domain of ambiguous discourse and small hidden acts of defiance towards disliked leaders, as well as private experiences kept for oneself and not reducible to official ideology. The strong ideas of the public, the official and the collective fed similarly strong notions of secrecy and privacy, such as when families secretly kept their own sacred books or objects at the bottom of their chest (see also Bruun 2006: 10). The considerable trade in religious objects following the collapse of the socialist system revealed that many such items must have been hidden in Mongolia during socialism, and Szykiewicz even argues that while the institutional church was abolished in socialist times, some of the central values of Buddhism were retained. 'This was perhaps due to the official regard for classical Marxist writings,' he writes, 'which in popular perception became just a gloss to the holy scriptures. The latter were neither quoted nor discredited, which contributed to their continued esteem'. 'Moreover,' he continues, 'it enabled a Mongol intellectual tradition to survive in those strata of society which were beyond the reach of routine purges among the town intelligentsia' (1993: 164). Nowadays, people still move with unease between the present and the socialist past, between official and less official versions. Some people are reluctant to talk about the past, at least in very specific terms, possibly because incidents from socialist times are bound up with the feelings and public morality of when they happened and maybe also because the past is too obviously irreconcilable with the present and what people do now.

In the early 1990s, the Revolutionary Party lost its monopoly of power, and policies were implemented to transform Mongolia into a democratic country with multiparty elections, private property and a liberal market-based economy. The present is often imagined in stark opposition to this socialist past (authority versus freedom, security versus insecurity, collective versus individual etc.), and such imaginings have a very concrete form in the (physical) dismantling of the local collective farm, the privatisation of domestic animals and machinery, the 'revival' of religion and tradition, and the instigation of democracy and market-based exchanges during the

1990s. The socialist system thus left at least one legacy behind: it had produced a radical distinction between the collective state/socialism and the individual person/capitalism. Thus, when the state disappeared, it created a 'sudden and conspicuous absence' (Fernández-Giménez 2001: 49) and only its own opposition – 'individualist capitalism' – was left. 'Communist ideologies had warned,' Ghodsee writes with reference to communist Bulgaria, 'that capitalism was an immoral system, and privatization seemed to provide empirical evidence that those who were the least scrupulous were the ones that benefited the most from the sudden dismantling of the socialist system' (2011: 184). Privatisation had its costs and led to many arguments in Chandman'-Öndör also, where people in the right positions managed to gain the most, and concerns with – and evidence of – inequality, unscrupulous leaders, deprivation, rising prices and the growing importance of 'money' had become widespread at the time of my fieldwork, and such concerns were often contrasted with the stability, equality and collective morality of socialism. As such, it was not simply individual *nature* that re-emerged when the social contract of state socialism broke down. What emerged was rather – at least in part – the socialist state's own alterity.

While an important context for this study, then, is the apparent social disintegration that followed the collapse of state socialism in a remote rural district of villagers and nomadic pastoralists in the northernmost part of Mongolia, the book does not simply explore disintegration as a return to a Hobbesian natural state of chaos in the aftermath of societal failure. To be sure, people did face rising unemployment, a lack of basic necessities and the breakdown of most collective state institutions in the 1990s, and the neighbouring village *was* described as a place of wild drinking and uncontrolled fur business immediately following the 'democratic revolution'. Such circumstances, however, did not appear in a cultural vacuum where the ugly face of nature simply reappeared as the stable exchange relations of planned economy broke down. Apart from socialist 'tradition' itself producing its own alterity – 'ugly capitalist nature' following a 'socialist civilisation' that had disappeared almost overnight – the uncertain relations usually associated with the anxieties of post-socialism (see e.g. Buyandelgeriyn 2007; Hangartner 2011), I argue, were as much internally cultivated in indigenous Inner Asian perceptions of social relatedness as they were externally confronted in post-socialist surroundings of unemployment, business and diminished social security.¹⁵ Uncertainty and societal breakdown did certainly 'happen to' people and *was* also confronted as an external 'condition of post-socialism', but disintegration and 'war', as we saw in the beginning, was also created through cultural and witchcraft-like idioms that stressed the perilous nature of communication and exchange and generated 'otherness', uncertainty and division from within. In other words, the book follows Sahlin's laconic insight that '[i]t

takes a lot of culture to make a state of nature' (2011: 27). This obviously needs elaboration, theoretically and ethnographically.

Society and Exchange?

Throughout the history of modern social anthropology, the conception of social life has had a crucial bearing on the notions of exchange and reciprocity (see e.g. Malinowski 2010 [1922]; Mauss 1990 [1950, 1925]; Lévi-Strauss 1969 [1949]; Bohannan 1955; Sahlins 1972; Bourdieu 1979 [1972]; Gregory 2015 [1982]; Parry 1985; Appadurai 1986; Strathern 1988; Parry and Bloch 1989; Weiner 1992; Laidlaw 2000; Graeber 2001; Sykes 2005). Strathern writes that

[t]he discovery of the gift ... was the discovery of people exchanging things which they did not need, and unpacking that paradox has dominated anthropological theorising on exchange ever since. For here the challenge was to uncover the principles by which people "needed" to exchange at all – and the answer has invariably been that people need society, viz. to lead a socially integrated life and interact with those around them, the transactions expediting such integration. (1992b: 169)

This, at least, was the case in Mauss' seminal work on the gift, where he made reciprocity the tangible communicative glue of Durkheim's more abstract notion of society (Durkheim 1938). Mauss' theory of the gift was, if anything, a theory of human solidarity and societal integration, and a gift that does 'nothing to enhance solidarity', Douglas has written with reference to Mauss, is simply 'a contradiction' (1990: vii). The question for this defining take on sociality and exchange, then, is how social agents come to be entangled with each other – i.e. how bonds are created through reciprocal exchanges where human agents absorb each other's different parts and thus become 'one' through exchanging gifts. So when Mauss asked rhetorically: 'What ... compels the gift that has been received to be obligatorily reciprocated? What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?' (1990: 3, original emphasis removed), his answer was that 'the thing received is not inactive' but possesses something of its giver (1990: 11–12). The thing has a hold over the receiver because the giver has not left it, and the exchange thus produces a tie through things and between souls (1990: 12). Differences are integrated, and gift-giving, in the abstract, is what compels a response, or simply another way of conveying how responses prompt new responses because people are, or have become, part of each other. Interestingly, however, refusal and detachment are explicitly left out

when the ties produced through gifts and obligations are so strongly emphasised (cf. Parry 1985). Mauss makes clear that '[t]o refuse to give, to fail to invite, just as to refuse to accept, is tantamount to declaring war; it is to reject the bond of alliance and commonality' (Mauss 1990 [1950, 1925]: 13), and Sahlins, in his interpretation of Mauss, even goes further in noting that '... primitive society is at war with Warre [in the Hobbesian sense], and ... all their dealings are treaties of peace. All the exchanges, that is to say, must bear in their material design some political burden of reconciliation' (1972: 182). Active refusal, the making of dissociation and the apprehension of difference – when, for example, refusing to reciprocate the gift of a sheep's head, when told to abstain from getting involved with your Mongolian host family or when trying to avoid communicating in a Mongolian village – are conspicuously absent from such perspectives on sociality as integrity-enhancing exchange.

This is not a feature of an early French sociological tradition only. Malinowski similarly accentuates aspects of a tribal society 'permeated by a constant give and take' (2010 [1922]: 167) and a 'love of give and take for its own sake' (2010 [1922]: 173), and Lévi-Strauss, in an altogether different structuralist vein, highlights how exchange in the form of 'exogamy represents a continuous pull towards a greater cohesion, a more efficacious solidarity, and a more subtle articulation'. 'Exchange,' he writes, 'and consequently the rule of exogamy which expresses it – has in itself a social value. It provides the means of binding men together' (1969 [1949]: 480). In the chapter exclusively devoted to reciprocity in 'The Elementary Structures of Kinship', he even goes as far as to conclude that 'a continuous transition exists from war to exchange, and from exchange to intermarriage, and the exchange of brides is merely the conclusion to an uninterrupted process of reciprocal gifts, which effects the transition from hostility to alliance, from anxiety to confidence, and from fear to friendship' (1969 [1949]: 67–68). We find many instances of the deep-seated and ingrained nature of this perception in anthropological theorising and also in some of the most influential and more recent literature. Gregory carefully distinguishes between gifts and commodities, the former being prevalent in Melanesia. Gifts, according to him, are characterised by perpetual personal interdependence arising from the reciprocal exchange of inalienable things (Gregory 2015 [1982]: lxii, 6, 13). Likewise, Strathern, in *The Gender of the Gift*, sees 'enchainment' as 'a condition of all relations based on the gift' (Strathern 1988: 161), and according to Godelier, reciprocity is similarly about a lack of separation (Godelier 1999). 'If the counter-gift does not erase the debt,' Godelier writes, 'it is because the "thing" given has not really been separated, completely detached from the giver. The thing has been *given without really being "alienated"* by the giver' (1999: 42, emphasis in original).

When not associated with societal integration, Mauss' argument about reciprocity is occasionally (mis)read through an economizing lens, assuming that 'nobody does anything for nothing' (Parry 1985: 454–55). In this case, exchange is coupled – although often in complex ways – with a universal notion of strategically calculating and competing individuals (see e.g. Malinowski 1926; Barth 1966; Firth 1967; Bourdieu 1976, 1979 [1972]) that leaves little room for attending to the *cultural* fashioning of distance and separation. Societies and cultures may integrate through the imposition of specific values (in the last instance, however, themselves often a product of individual actions), but disintegration is always associated with a self-evident separation of self-interested and self-contained individuals that are everywhere thought to be of a similar pre-cultural kind. While it is beyond the scope of this book to review the immense literature on exchange within anthropology, it is fair to say, I believe, that there is a tendency, then, towards understanding reciprocity in either one of two directions. Either it has been seen as an integrative aspect of (often non-commodified) social and cultural worlds, or it has been conceptualised as self-interested economising transactions, even if masqueraded as gift-giving (cf. Graeber 2001: 23–47). One view concerns the importance of reciprocity as a social and cultural force that integrates ('substantivism'), even in markets and market-based societies (see e.g. Carrier 1995; Hart 2014), and the other proposes that exchanges happen between naturally separate individuals who are only serving their own interests ('formalism'). The fact that this opposition is so ingrained in much theorising, however, has made us less inclined to shed light on culturally specific ways of producing separation. So if, for anthropologists, "‘gift-reciprocity-Good/market-exchange-Bad’ is a simple, easy-to-memorize formula' (Gell 1992: 142), it seems fair to conclude that 'gift-reciprocity-bad' is not an equally catchy phrase when it comes to anthropological thinking. True, 'keeping-while-giving' has gained some interest (see e.g. Weiner 1992; Godelier 1999), but the same does not hold true of 'avoiding reciprocity' and the dangerous aspects of integration and communication in general. Mauss, in fact, was aware of the potential danger of the gift (Mauss 1990 [1950, 1925]: 59; see also Parry 1994; Laidlaw 2000) and does mention both the 'the fatal gift' and the fact that the word 'gift' has a double meaning in some Germanic languages, namely gift *and* poison (Mauss 1990 [1950]: 63), yet he never develops or explores the implications of this insight.

All this is important not just for the sake of theoretical speculation but because Mongolian ethnography challenges some of these often-held assumptions about exchange and relatedness. In Mongolia, for example, the exchange of 'active' objects – whether in the form of words or things – is often avoided and thought to be dangerous. On one occasion during my fieldwork, a driver suddenly demanded to leave a newly established camp on a riverbank, simply

because he had found an old knife on the ground. When rapidly driving away from the place, he anxiously explained that the knife could have had blood on it. While it is well known that sharp things (*mes*) may be particularly dangerous and protective, this applies to other things as well. Dūütsetseg, a young female teacher that we will meet again later, explained to me that ‘people say that it can be dangerous to receive something from others. Maybe you have an object, an earring, received from someone else and this object causes misfortune. People have taken a thing with misfortune. Because of this animals die, people fall ill, and you must either throw the thing away or pass it on to someone else.’ Dūütsetseg and the driver are, of course, only referring to ‘misfortunate objects’ (*gaitai yum*) here, and although other things such as gold are known to carry misfortune (see High 2017 for a discussion of the misfortune of gold (*altny gai*); see also Højer 2012), one could rightly argue that Mongolian life is ripe with exchanges and objects of a more mundane and unproblematic nature, such as the everyday exchange of goods in business or the exchange of animals, animals products, money and services between individuals and families. Yet, apart from the fact that such ordinary and everyday exchanges may be imbued with similar problems (see Chapter 1) and that even food may carry ‘dangerous things’ and ‘is the easiest medium for transporting pollution, attaching spirits, or simply having influence on a person’ (Buyandelger 2013: 128–129), it is a widespread assumption in Mongolia that the (bad) soul of a previous possessor (cf. Humphrey 2002c; Empson 2007: 114, 135 and 2011:109), or the (negative) feelings towards a future possessor, may stay in an object and, hence, that blending things – and thereby being influenced by other persons – may be inherently dangerous (see also Højer 2004, 2012).

More troublesome than alliance-producing, this suggests that objects – manufactured or utilised by other humans and belonging to other persons and agencies – may move dangerously between social units and cast misfortune on the receiver. Items are unsafe because they have been received from others, and it is the simultaneously alienable and inalienable character – the social, reciprocal or ‘abductive’ quality (Gell 1998), we might say – of the ‘things’ exchanged that makes them dangerous.¹⁶ So, if “‘hau’ sets in motion the spirit of reciprocity and obligation’, because it ‘is a spiritual element hearkening from the object’s place of origin, to which it always seeks to return’ (Peebles 2015: 477), and because ‘the power to circulate is a social force, an expression of society itself’ (Siegel 2006: 6), it may equally well be a dynamic that arrests communication, not only due to the importance of keeping-while-giving but also because ‘hau’ or the spirit of the object is thought to be a contaminating disease. The association of different persons through detachable objects that can move between – including words – thus poses a threat not unlike ‘contagious magic’ (Frazer 1980 [1911]; see also Laidlaw 2000: 629–30).¹⁷ Troubles emerge if the items of (unknown) others, invested with

their (unknown) acts, are appropriated or simply appear outside the sphere of such others, and in Mongolia, external agencies are often thought to be polluting or dangerous (Bawden 1963a: 220, 234; Bulag 1998: 263; Empson 2011: 245–49). Objects, in other words, are troublesome because they are too social in the Maussian sense and can ‘move between’ and make dangerous connections. While this, as we shall see later, may often be associated with particular kinds of objects, the same thing may apply to all objects and, maybe more importantly, even to words and thoughts. Rather than absorbing each other’s different parts, or getting involved with others, as in gift-giving, one should often, the Mongolian implication is, abstain from such a dangerous blending of souls through exchange.¹⁸

The Anti-Social Contract

While intimate and trust-based relations may prevail at the household level in Mongolia, this anti-social logic, characterised by a penchant for apprehension and suspicion when communicating and exchanging, may be generalised to much wider domains of Mongolian life.

If looking at settlement patterns, for example, Mongolia is time and again described as a land without fences and rural life is depicted as friendly and



Figure 0.3 Chandman'-Öndör District centre in winter, 2001. Photograph by the author.

peaceful by Mongolians and foreigners alike, non-academics as well as academics (see e.g. Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 132; Billé 2015: 54). In Mongolia ‘generalised hospitality without expectation of an immediate return (or any return) is ... the norm’ (Humphrey 2012: S65). However, it almost goes without saying that this widespread (and not incorrect) stereotype about Mongolian hospitality¹⁹ is only a part of the picture. High fences protect the suburban compounds in Ulaanbaatar, the Mongolian capital, and securely locked metal doors often safeguard flats in apartment blocks from criminals. Understandable as this may be in a city with relatively high crime rates, theft and protection against human dangers are also a genuine concern in the Mongolian countryside. In Chandman’-Öndör District centre, as in many other villages, most people live in ‘compounds’ (*hashaa*) surrounded by high fences and protected by vicious dogs awaiting unwelcome intruders. These intruders may of course include drunks, but they are also thought to be thieves and other ill-intentioned people. In fact, as settlements condense – as one moves closer to the centre of the village – fences tend to grow higher. Physical proximity, in other words, engenders more protection and separation of individual compounds. And while it is true that there are almost no fences in the Mongolian countryside, nor are there – with the possible exception of closely related people – many immediate neighbours in the least densely populated sovereign state in the world. Rather than being an indication of hospitality, the lack of fencing might then be due to the fact that fencing is unnecessary or simply less visible.²⁰ At least, it would be unwise when visiting a pastoral camp to step out of the vehicle before the fierce dogs of the host family – their most trusted animals – are brought under control. Visitors, especially unknown ones, are rarely met with an unconditional smile but rather with a reserved attitude. If invited into a home, it seems important not to mistake formal hospitality for straightforward cordiality, because people are often cautious and their hospitality is based on subscribing to a formal obligation of serving tea and some bread or dried curds (Højer 2003).²¹ As a matter of fact, beneath ‘the distancing set up by the performance of formal hospitality, there is unspoken piercing suspicion’ (Humphrey 2012: S71; see also Højer 2003), and the enactment of hospitality through a number of highly ritualised gestures may rightly be seen as adding up ‘to the craft of allaying suspicion; avoidance of giving the tiniest offence; self-control; and self-deprecation along with conscious respectfulness to the other; in sum to dampening or pausing whatever other intentions, suspicions, narratives, or emotions that might be present, and creating a (precariously) assembled sequence that conveys the affect of *measured reassurance*’ (Humphrey 2012: S67, my emphasis).

This description of settlements and ritualised hospitality, of course, needs to be supplemented by other observations also, such as the way people talk

about and enact relationships and the anthropologist's – my – 'sense' of people's relationships while in the field (this last part is often downplayed in favour of an anthropological focus on – and sometimes reading too much into – indigenous vocabulary). When I talked to people in Chandman-Öndör District, it was not unusual for them to describe other people in the village as unreliable (*naidvargüi*), sly (*zal'tai*) or simply bad (*muu*). People's appearances were considered deceptive, and it was frequently assumed that disingenuous motives were behind people's actions and words. At the same time, there was a serious concern at being 'damaged' by other people's talk and moods and, hence, a reluctance to engage with people in ways that would subject one to the injurious talk and thoughts of others (cf. Buyandelger 2013: 206). Less than a week after the incident with the lama diviner in Bulnai, I was interviewing another local lama, Harhüü, in his wooden house on the other side of the river, some distance from the village centre, when he warned that

many people are cursed (*haraal hiilgesen hün olon baidag*). You should not become involved (*orootsoldoh*) with those people. Some people have been keeping strong curses for a long time. Those people have to use a lot of energy (*enyergi*). We are afraid of that great energy. People have to protect themselves. Most of those people don't know that they are cursed.

In telling me that cursed people were everywhere to be found and yet invisible, Harhüü was implying that, potentially, any person and any relationship could have dangerous curse-like effects. Similar to 'magical fences', shamanic mirrors, protective 'force fields' and remedies that 'block hostile forces from the home' used in other Mongolian village environments where danger is seen to abound (see Empson 2011: 282; Swancutt 2012: 79–80, 131, 186–87, 196–205), Harhüü himself considered it critical to protect his family with a strong magic shield of mantras (*tarni*) – i.e. mystical formulae – working within two hundred metres of his home, and he would pray in front of his altar every morning and 'take measures' to protect himself whenever leaving his home, he informed me.

While I will develop this argument in more ethnographic detail in Chapter 2, the key claim for now is that inter-human relationships in Mongolia are often thought to be problematic, if not outright dangerous, and that we need to pay attention to cultural idioms that are not – as is often the implicit assumption in anthropological studies (also in Mongolia) – necessarily promoting fluidity and continuity between selves and others. The problem is that this self-other continuity is often built into the very edifice of the social and thus tends to be overstated and create blind spots with regard to anti-social relations. On the one hand, such an overemphasis on self-other



Figure 0.4 A home in the district centre. Photograph by the author.

integration is, as we have already seen, engineered through concepts such as reciprocity or – in the vein of ‘neo-Maussian’ approaches (Graeber 2001: 35) – ‘dividualism/animism/perspectivism’ (whether this is thought to be a metaphor for the social *per se* or a description of a specific societal form or ‘modality’ in Mongolia or elsewhere). If reciprocity stresses the integration of self and other, then perspectivism similarly assumes that ‘[b]eings can “become-other” ... because in a crucial sense they already “are other”’ (Holbraad and Willerslev 2007: 330), and animism, also in the North Asian context, presupposes that

[i]f people cannot perceive themselves as potentially being in the shoes of others, if people cannot imagine themselves as Others (whether human or non-human) and Others as themselves, then the very basis for animism is likely to break down because its ontological principle depends on an unbounded potential for identification ... There are no radical discontinuities here, only continuous substitutions of Same becoming Other, and vice versa. (Pedersen 2001: 416)

This potential for becoming other is similarly highlighted in recent ethnographies on Mongolia. Pedersen’s book on shamanism as transition/post-socialism (and vice versa) (2011; see also Pedersen 2007, 2014) describes shamanism as a ‘potential state of perpetual metamorphosis’ (2011: 40) and ‘the spirit of [post-socialist] transition’ as a ‘ceaseless jumping from one body

to the next' (2011: 79), and in Empson's work on Mongolian fortune 'people actively seek the perspective of someone else in order to constitute themselves as subjects' (2011: 322).²² The aim of the present book is to complement such studies by paying more attention to the often downplayed flipside of 'becoming other' and integration, as it were, by focusing on practices and discourses in which such integration and otherness is avoided.

On the other hand, the continuity of self and other may also be thought of in more classical hierarchical terms where social positions are integrated by virtue of their difference. In Mongolia, such differences would include, for example, men and women, elders and youngsters, Buddhist lamas and lay people and teachers and pupils, the assumption being that social positions are integrated – Dumont-style (Dumont 1972) – by virtue of their known difference in hierarchical, transcendent and systematic social 'wholes' that are organised by 'paramount values' (see e.g. Robbins 2004). Again, such relations do obviously exist, and I will attend to them in due course (see Chapter 3), but overlooking the prevalence of relations where the other is anticipated as not quite known – i.e. as a genuine and anxiety-provoking other; for example, not only known as an elder to a younger – would again mean ignoring a crucial element of anxiety in social relations in Chandman'-Öndör District and elsewhere in Mongolia.

This prominence and pervasiveness of suspense in relationships with others can, I argue, be thought of as 'generalised witchcraft', a term that, of course, needs a few words of explanation. I use the witchcraft term to stress the affinities of anti-social Mongolian cultural idioms – such as *hel am*, a key term in this book, meaning 'dispute', 'troubles' or 'injurious talk' (see Chapter 2) – with 'occult' notions elsewhere, such as 'witchcraft' and the 'evil eye', at least if we think of such phenomena as associated with 'deceit' (Ruel 1970) and 'the mysterious powers of humans' (Douglas 1970: xvi) to harm others. 'Generalised' witchcraft, however, refers, on the one hand, to an anticipated omnipresence of different and conflicting agencies, whether ordinary or extraordinary, and people's reactions to such anticipations of threatening others. Yet, apart from pointing to this contemporary *prevalence* of *hel am*, attested to by a range of other ethnographic studies in Mongolia (see Chapter 2), the adjective 'generalised' is also used to downplay the exoticism often associated with the 'witchcraft' term and to stress the fact that Mongolian anti-social idioms are also non-occult, widespread and indeed very 'ordinary'. As a matter of fact, Mongolian anti-social idioms are characterised by a peculiar inseparability of 'the natural' and 'the supernatural', ordinary quarrels and extra-ordinary powers, and while 'witchcraft' in Mongolia may be ordinary or 'natural', ordinary 'troubles' may easily turn extraordinary and come to involve 'occult' powers. Much like in the peculiar invocation of 'war' in the introductory story, everyday thoughts, words and conflicts easily slide back

and forth between ordinary understandings and occult dimensions, even to the extent where it is this very ambiguity and inseparability that seems the defining characteristic of a term such as *hel am*.

If generalised witchcraft concerns anticipations of, reactions to and the creation of anti-social relations, it implies a manner of relating where others are thought to be dangerous and where suspicion and anxiety prevails. On the one hand, then, it gives rise to a social anxiety that would appear to bear formal similarities to Taussig's idea of regressive sorcery, where

... sorcery invokes a mode of explanation that undermines its starting point, while the starting point ineluctably leads to its undermining. In posing this double-bind as to its own nature, sorcery de-realises reality as well. The formula "sorcery explains coincidence" prevents us from appreciating the extent to which coincidence and sorcery pose questions concerning one's life environment, opening out the world as much as closing it in. (Taussig 1987: 465)

In the Mongolian case, we may translate this insight into the claim that generalised witchcraft similarly de-realises social reality and promotes otherness as a result. As in the case study from the beginning of this introduction, it reproduces a 'double-bind' in the social domain so that the third party, the one evoking representations of witchcraft, could herself be a witch; somehow it is the famous Liar paradox made operational in the social realm. You are made to question relations while you engage in them. Who was the lama to make such allegations? And what to make of my host family? On the other hand, and as a corollary to this understanding, it also entails that relating to other people through exchange of objects or other forms of communication entails the risk of being influenced by others and/or caught in their dangerous gaze. My host family was caught in and affected by the words of the lama diviner and had potentially become a bad family, and the diviner came into being through the claims made by Ulaanhüü. While this will be ethnographically substantiated in Chapter 2, we can conclude, then, that being social, in this sense, amounts to a dangerous coming into being through (the perspective of) troublesome others. It amounts to being absorbed and affected by otherness – whether things or words – and being absorbed by otherness equals losing or becoming other to yourself through the perspective of others. As we shall see, withdrawal is a sensible reaction to this danger of a self becoming an other's perspective.

If becoming other to yourself seems to be celebrated in Melanesia, Amazonia and much anthropological theory (see, however, Macintyre 1995), then, this is not always so in Mongolia. In Mongolia, of course, 'each party' may be 'affected by the other' (Strathern 1988: 179), but when a certain qualitative distance, even opposition, is assumed between self and

other, one may also try to cancel precisely this interactive ‘affect’ through strategies of avoidance, formality and ignorance. People evade, one may say, getting in touch with the Other as truly other and to avoid becoming a ‘you’ to a compelling and dangerous Other other’s ‘I’ (cf. Viveiros de Castro 1998: 483). Some newer studies on otherness and enmity propose a perspective that is similar to the one presented here, yet they still tend to take an approach whereby otherness is considered mainly productive. In an intriguing book, Stasch, for example, shows how the social world of the Korowoi of West Papua, Indonesia, consists of strangers and heterogeneity. Otherness is thus an internal feature of local social relations (Stasch 2009). Yet, while the Korowoi, according to Stasch, poses otherness as a relation, this kind of relatedness is still rendered ‘a quality through and around which people are *mutually close*’ (Stasch 2009: 4, my emphasis) and a ‘*belonging* with strangers’ (Stasch 2009: 21, my emphasis). Likewise, for the Tupinamba in Amazonian Brazil, according to Viveiros de Castro, the enemy *was* the centre of a society in constant metamorphosis (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 301). Viveiros de Castro writes that their

relationship to the enemy is anterior and superior to society’s relationship to itself, rescuing it from an indifferent and natural self-identity – one where others would be mirrors and reflect back the image of a Subject posited in advance as telos. Every origin was an answer; every gesture, vengeance. Free and fierce, inconstant and indifferent, the Tupinamba were servants of warfare: this pushed them into the future. Inhabitants of a society without corporations – incorporal, so to speak – and cannibal (thus incorporating), its being was time. (Viveiros de Castro 1992: 301)

While the unknown enemy is certainly generated and can be imagined to be everywhere in Mongolia, the enemy is not, as in Viveiros de Castro’s case, the centre of society, and it should not be incorporated. Quite the contrary, the notion of the enemy – or the suspicious other – generates suspense and anxiety; the other is someone you should not get in touch with – i.e. begin exchanging perspectives with²³ – and it is avoided and kept at a distance. Engaging with others – i.e. taking their perspective – means that you may become unknown to yourself – i.e. to the one seeing in the first place. As such, the anti-social is a domain of avoidance and withdrawal – and, as we shall see, maybe even of physical dispersal.

Book Outline

Before we establish this point in more ethnographic detail in Chapter 2, I will introduce the Northern Mongolian setting, even if many of the claims

made in this book go beyond a specific village and district and concern modes of relatedness found all over Mongolia (and beyond). This will be the task of Chapter 1, where I will look at the forms that collectives and networks take in public rituals and everyday ordinary exchanges in the wake of the breakdown of the Mongolian socialist state and relate this to the organisation of actual movements in a district largely based on pastoral nomadism and an emerging market economy. On the one hand, the chapter identifies practices of unification and integration towards centres that are simultaneously based on indigenous understandings of collectives, a refurbishment of socialist forms and the effects of market economy while, on the other hand, it identifies 'nomadic' practices of movements and everyday exchanges that counter such spatially defined integration and the trouble-free creation of alliances. Delayed everyday exchanges, for example, are shown to imply mistrust and to fertilise a suspicious way of attending to others.

The task of ethnographically exploring a local world where suspicion and mistrust are prominent features of life is continued in Chapter 2. More specifically, this chapter looks at gossip and an indigenous belief in the enactment – i.e. dangerously creative capability – of language-like representation through an extended case study. I show that the Mongolian notion of *hel am* (curse-like talk and disputes) is not just a consequence of pre-existing social orders but also elicits a suspicious attention to others. Cultural idioms like *hel am*, then, induce distance in social relationships and serve to disintegrate social orders as much as they reflect them. While the 'social disintegration' that is often thought to characterise post-socialist transition may be encountered in the surrounding landscape of unemployment and shortage of resources, the chapter concludes that it is also fashioned and engendered by cultural idioms, which point to the danger of 'distributed personhood' – i.e. of becoming victim to the social environment and the talk, thoughts and gaze of others.

While Chapter 2 deals with dangerous communications, the safe relationships of established and well-defined ritual hierarchies are the concern of Chapter 3. The traditional Mongolian New Year (*Tsagaan Sar*) and the establishment of a new household at a Mongolian wedding provides the ethnographic lens for outlining social orders, where distance does not imply suspicion and dangerous others but is integrated into a transparent and conventionalised formal hierarchy of different yet safe and known social positions. While the gift exchanges and traditional rules pertaining to such social fields are embodied in individual persons' habitual gestures, it is demonstrated how the slowness and stiffness of ritualised actions also enhances the sense that such formalised actions are also not one's own. A bodily aesthetics of control, dignity and slowness, then, implies relational stability and a concern with upholding a transcendent socio-religious order.

The distinction between the dangerous and the safe, disintegration and order, is related more specifically to religious practices in Chapter 4. While the chapter presents a bewildering variety of sometimes contradictory practices and statements on religion and spirit powers by locals, it also shows how a distinction between the Yellow and the Red directions of Mongolian Buddhism is at play in the local world. After sketching the historical context for Buddhist practices in Northern Mongolia, the difference between these directions is illustrated ethnographically by attending to their divergent conceptions of knowledge, religious discipline and spirit powers in the landscape. It is argued that the two directions are concerned with morality and danger respectively, and if the production of compassion, commonality and centralisation can be associated with Yellow Buddhism, then suspicion, difference and enmity are prominent features of Red Buddhism.

In the final chapter, Red Buddhist magical practices are shown to merge with the modernity of socialism and post-socialism to promote 'relations in suspense'. Practices of divination and the making of powerful magical charms repeatedly allude to concealed, not quite known and anxiety-provoking agencies and as such generate social caution towards human and spirit agencies alike. Through specific ethnographic examples that relate religious practitioners to ordinary people and everyday life to extraordinary matters, the chapter thus highlights a present Mongolian disquiet with connection-making and a prominent concern with the upholding of distance, also to spirit powers. This generation of danger and caution in communication, it is argued, are brought about by a new constellation of transformed (post)socialist modernity and Red Buddhism.

Notes

1. Throughout this book, almost all personal names are pseudonyms.
2. Witchcraft is often associated with questions of deceit: '... to be other than one seems to be, to have in some way a "double" identity, always places one potentially in the position to deceive, and for Banyang [group of people living in Cameroon] the evil of witchcraft is above all the evil of deceit' (Ruel 1970).
3. This happened in DeFacto Review on 27 August 2017. See <http://jargaldefacto.com/article/defacto-review-2sh17-sh8-27>, accessed on 4 April 2018.
4. For much earlier versions of a similar argument, see Højer (2003 and 2004).
5. In celebrating Rousseau as the founder of ethnology, Lévi-Strauss stresses the human primacy of identification with others and compassion. He explains that, according to Rousseau, man's essential faculty 'is compassion, deriving from the identification with another who is not only a parent, a relative, a compatriot, but any man whatsoever, seeing that he is a man, and much more: any living being, seeing that it is living. Thus man begins by experiencing himself as identical to all his fellows' (Lévi-Strauss 1978a [1973]: 38).

6. There is a sense in which an area, so to speak, is its centre (*töv*); when Mongolians say that they are travelling to a province (*aimag*), for example, they imply that they are going to its centre.
7. It seems that the only earlier non-Mongolian accounts from the region are travel accounts by the Danish explorers Krebs and Haslund-Christensen, who travelled in the region in the early 1920s (see Krebs 1937; Haslund-Christensen 1946). The only Mongolian study is Čeveng's work from 1934 on the Darhad and Urianhai of Lake Hövsgöl, which has been translated into English (1991 [1934]) and which contains the most valuable, yet vague, information accessible to English readers on the people of the region east of Lake Hövsgöl. Recent works in English written about the Duha or Tsaatan of the western side of Lake Hövsgöl contain information specifically on the Turkic-speaking Urianhai west of the lake (see Farkas 1992; Wheeler 2000; Kristensen 2015), and Ewing, when writing about the Urianhai or Tuvan pre-revolutionary borderland in general, notes the lack of information on the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai people (Ewing 1981: 175), although it is not clear whether he is referring to people living east of the lake also. In Mongolian, the most valuable information that I have come across is Dorjgotov's distinctly socialist account of the development of Chandman'-Öndör District (1979) and Banzragch's book on the history of the Hövsgöl province (2001). It has proved impossible to get hold of a book on changes in Mongolian administration by Sonomdagva (1998), but it does – judging from the references of other works – contain valuable information too.
8. The region east of Lake Hövsgöl and north of the Manchu border watch-post area has – for all we know – for centuries been homeland to people who were closely related to the Turkic-speaking inhabitants of the Eastern Sayan regions, such as Tofalars, Oka Soyots, reindeer-herding Tuvans of eastern Tuva and Duha (Wheeler 2000), the latter of which now live in Mongolian territory west of Lake Hövsgöl. The subsistence of those people was based on hunting, gathering and reindeer herding in the sparsely populated taiga regions of the eastern Sayan Mountains. It is not entirely clear, however, how exactly the Turkic-speaking hunters and herdsman living on the eastern side of Lake Hövsgöl are affiliated to these people, nor to what extent they should be considered distinct from other eastern Sayan people. The present-day Turkic-speaking Duha from the western side of Lake Hövsgöl, for example, have been present at least in the Hanh District at the northern end of the lake in the middle of the twentieth century (Farkas 1992: 3) and have probably also lived on the eastern side of the lake at times, although this is not certain. Yet, most of the eastern Tuvan reindeer herders, and probably the ancestors of the present-day Duha, were part of the Toja banner in the Qing administration of Tannu-Urianhai (Farkas 1992: 6–7; see also Wheeler 2000: 36), and as it seems that the Urianhai on the eastern side of the lake belonged to – or indeed were – the Hasut banner (Čeveng 1991 [1934]: 73), it is indicated that they were at least relatively distinct from the Duha and eastern Tuvans (see, however, Potapov 1964: 252). When referring to population figures, Čeveng differentiates between the Hasut (banner) of the Urianhai of Lake Hövsgöl, 'the Northern Sirkid' (possibly the present-day Duha) and 'the Southern Sirkid' (Övör Shirhten or Arig Urianhai), and he writes that most of the Urianhai of Lake Hövsgöl live around the Üür river and others around the Hanh and the Arig river (1991 [1934]: 74). All this indicates that the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai, the Üüriin Urianhai and possibly the Hasut banner were referring to Turkic-speaking people east of Lake Hövsgöl and that those people were considered a relatively distinct group of Urianhai people – the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai – who even had a distinct dialect. Čeveng, referring to Sanžeev, writes about their language that 'although it is identical with the language of the Uriyangqai [Urianhai] people of Tangnu Tüva [Tannu-Urianhai] and the Altai, they

say that they and the people of Tängnu Tüva do not understand each other's language' (Čeveng 1991 [1934]: 73). Recordings made by Alan Wheeler and myself during a field trip along the Üür river to the Üüriin Urianhai in 2002, and subsequently played to the Duha people by Wheeler, reveal, however, that contemporary Tuvan-speaking Duha easily understand the dialect of the Üüriin Urianhai, even if the Duha – thought-provokingly – were not aware of the existence of this other Tuvan-speaking group in the Hövsgöl province. Further indicating their affiliation to the eastern Tuvans was the fact that the Üüriin Urianhai rather surprisingly used the word Duha when referring to themselves in Tuvan when we visited them in 2002. The dialect, however, does appear to be slightly different, and they do use more Mongolian words when speaking Tuvan than do the Duha (Wheeler, personal communication). While they may thus be considered closely affiliated with Tuva in terms of language and culture, the following rough historical survey of the prehistory of the region, based on the limited available literature, paints a more complex and uncertain picture in terms of administrative borders.

Only little is known about the early history of the people and the area in question (see Vainshtein 1980 for an introduction to the very early history of Tuva), but after the fall of the Yuan dynasty in 1368 the region of Tannu-Urianhai (Tuva) came under the rule of Oirats (Western Mongols) until the early seventeenth century (Ewing 1981: 177), although the area east of Lake Hövsgöl might just have escaped the Oirat field of power (see e.g. Rinchen 1979: 15). At the turn of the seventeenth century, military defeats and pressure from the Hotgoid people of northwest Mongolia led to a rapid decline in Oirat power (Ewing 1981: 177–78). The Oirats had to return to Jungaria in present-day northwest China, and the region was seized by the Hotgoids led by the so-called Altan Khans, the last of whom, Luvsan, managed to gain *de facto* independence in return for submitting to the Manchu Qing dynasty (Ewing 1981: 178). Yet once again, it is most likely that the Hotgoid rule in this region did not include the Tuvan-speaking Urianhai around Lake Hövsgöl. Potapov writes, for example, that the eastern boundary of the Hotgoids was the Delger Muren river, located to the south and west of Lake Hövsgöl (1964: 383), and as such it did not include the lake region. Also, Russians made their presence felt in the area alongside the Hotgoids. In 1661, for example, Russians subjugated some Tuvans living at Lake Hövsgöl (Potapov 1964: 209; Forsyth 1992: 95), and in 1628 'the Turkic-speaking Hasut Tuvans (near Lake Kosogol [Hövsgöl])' (this seems to be the earliest mentioning of the Tuvans at Lake Hövsgöl) became part of a Russian administrative region centred at the Krasnoyarsk fort (Potapov 1964: 112, 350). Until the 1650s, relations between Hotgoid and Russians were supportive, but relations deteriorated when Luvsan began raiding Tomsk and Yeniseisk (Ewing 1981: 179) in southern Siberia.

Luvsan, the last Altan Khan, was – after a series of disruptive interventions and a period of imprisonment – eventually deprived of his right to rule the Hotgoids in 1686, when his first cousin, Genden, replaced him (Potapov 1964: 210; Ewing 1981: 180). Genden's rule covered the territory from Lake Uvs in northwest Mongolia to the Selenge and Orhon rivers and significantly included the area around Lake Hövsgöl (Potapov 1964: 211). In 1688, Genden was forced to flee to the Selenge river region when the Oirat confederation ruled by Galdan invaded Mongolia, and this probably led to renewed Oirat rule over at least some of the Urianhai territory at the turn of the eighteenth century (Ewing 1981: 180). As a result of the Oirat invasion, the Halh Mongolian nobility turned to the Manchus, and they were incorporated into the Manchu Qing empire at the Convention at Dolonnor, Inner Mongolia, in 1691. This resulted in the incorporation of Mongolia into the Manchu Qing empire for more than two hundred years to come. Although much of Tannu-Urianhai and northwest Mongolia was still

under Oirat control, the Hotgoids ruled from this time onwards the Urianhai around Lake Hövsgöl (Banragch 2001: 56). Their status as subjects, however, is still unclear. On a map of the administration of the early Qing rule (1691–1724), the area east of Lake Hövsgöl is a separate area outside the larger provinces and simply marked as ‘all the Urianhai’ (*Urianhai bügd*) (Rinchen 1979: 16).

Genden, the Hotgoid ruler, died around the turn of the eighteenth century and was followed by Sünjeesenge, who died without issue and was succeeded by Büüvei, Genden’s second son (Ewing 1981: 180) and the first real subjugator of Tannu-Urianhai. Büüvei was close to the Oirats, and it was feared that he could not stand the pressure from them. Therefore another Hotgoid noble was allocated pastures on the Tes river alongside Büüvei to help him ward off the Oirats (Ewing 1981: 180–81). But renewed pressure from the Oirats led Büüvei to ask the Qing for a more aggressive strategy ‘... and [he] suggested that the Tannu-Urjankhai should be secured as a prop against the Oirats’ and ‘asked permission to “summon” the Urjankhai to submit; if they refused, he warned darkly, they would be subjugated by force’ (Ewing 1981: 181). Büüvei did manage to subjugate the Urianhai, who were finally secured in 1726, before Bandi succeeded him in 1730. In 1737, Bandi was followed by Chingunjav (Yanjmaa 2000: 6–7), who instigated the famous rebellion against the Qing in 1756 (for further details, see Bawden 1989; Kaplonski 1993). The Chingunjav-led rebellion failed, however, and Chingunjav was arrested and executed in 1757.

Just after Büüvei’s pacification of Tannu-Urianhai in 1726, a few districts (*sum*) were formed on the basis of the existing tribal-kinship unit, the *otog*. While the sources on the late eighteenth century are incomplete and the organisation of Tannu-Urianhai quite complex (Ewing 1981: 185), it appears that in the period from Chingunjav’s execution to 1805, the rule over Tannu-Urianhai was divided between a number of Halh princes and Tannu-Urianhai nobles (Banragch 2001: 56), the latter of which seems to have governed the area around Lake Hövsgöl. By the early nineteenth century, the number of districts in Tannu-Urianhai, including the regions around Lake Hövsgöl, had reached 46 or 47 (Ewing 1981: 185). The ‘banner’ (*hoshuu*) administrative unit was not applied to Tannu-Urianhai from the beginning, but by 1818 more than half of those districts belonged to one of five banners (if excluding the banners and districts in Tannu-Urianhai ruled by Mongolian princes (see Potapov 1964: 252; Vainshtein 1980: 234; Ewing 1981: 187; Atwood claims, however, that all five banners were established in 1755)). One of these was the Lake Hövsgöl banner (Potanin 1883: 10–13; Ewing 1981: 186), the extent of which is unknown but to whom the Urianhai around Lake Hövsgöl belonged. At the head of each banner was an *üherda* (‘everyone’s chief’ (Yanjmaa 2000: 7)), appointed by the Military Governor of Uliastai, the head of the Qing administration in Mongolia. According to Ewing, the position of *üherda* was not hereditary in theory, although in practice it was, but according to Yanjmaa, the position was an appointed one between 1805 and 1886/1913 (the years in which one *üherda* succeeded another one is not clear from her work) and hereditary from 1886/1913 to 1923 (2000: 7). Below, the *üherda* was the *zangi*, the head of each district. The *üherda* was also the head of one of the banner districts. In 1786 (Potapov 1964: 243), the *üherda* of one of the five banners, Daś of the Oyunnar banner, was put in charge of the other five Tannu-Urianhai banners as governor (or *amban-noyon*), but around 1880 (sources are widely divergent on this issue and range from 1787 (Vainshtein 1980: 235) and 1805 (Yanjmaa 2000: 7; Banragch 2001: 56) to 1878 (Potapov 1964: 243) and 1880s (Ewing 1981: 187)) the *üherda* of the Lake Hövsgöl banner appealed successfully to be a direct subordinate to the military governor of Uliastai and not to the *amban-noyon* (Ewing 1981: 187), and the Lake Hövsgöl

banner was renamed the Hasut banner (Potapov 1964: 243). What was behind this appeal is unknown, but at the end of the nineteenth century the *überda* of another of the five banners did the same before the Qing.

The overall picture that emerges from all this is that the Qing administrative intervention in Tannu-Urianhai – to which the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai belonged – was much looser than was the case in Mongolia, and it was mostly organised around already existing systems of organisation (Ewing 1981), such as the *otog* (a tribal-kinship unit). In fact, the Qing seemed rather indifferent to the administration of Tannu-Urianhai, and one can probably conclude in line with Ewing that Tannu-Urianhai, although part of the ‘outer dependency’ of the Qing, was never fully part of the Qing political system. The Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai outside the border watch-posts were in a kind of no man’s land, not allowed to cross the border to the south, and the various banner heads (*überda*) of Tannu-Urianhai did not participate in the annual trips to Beijing to swear allegiance to the Qing emperor. Moreover, they received less generous stipends from the Qing than did other rulers (Ewing 1981: 190–91). However, new administrative units (banners) and systems of government (bureaucracy, various official positions etc.) were introduced – although later than in Mongolia – and participation in the imperial hunt in Jehol and the rendering of an annual sable tribute in Uliastai, the capital of Qing administration in Outer Mongolia, was demanded (Ewing 1981: 191).

The Qing administrative dispositions, though, were not the only way in which the Urianhai people east of Lake Hövsgöl were connected to the world at large. In Tannu-Urianhai, trading between Cossacks and Urianhai was taking place back in the eighteenth century, and in the nineteenth century this trade was intensified when the Qing empire was opened to foreign trade in 1860 (Ewing 1981: 192–96). Although it might not have affected the area east of Lake Hövsgöl, which was enclosed by the high Sayan mountains to the north, it is certain that the Halh people of the frontier posts in the south, meant to inhibit trade with Russians, were themselves engaged in trade with the Urianhai north of the border, buying ‘leather, hides and fur’ and selling Chinese goods such as ‘brick tea, tobacco and cloth’ (Sanjdorj 1980: 101–2; Yanjmaa 2000: 12; Banzragch 2001: 31). Also, according to one local, Chinese merchants were – as opposed to the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai living north of the border – allowed to cross the border from the south. This crossing probably took place only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, as the Manchus – prior to that – were successful in keeping Chinese traders out of Urianhai territory (Ewing 1981: 190; Bawden 1989: 82). Some trade was also taking place across the more porous northern border to Russia.

According to Banzragch (2001) and Yanjmaa (2000), the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai was divided into four districts just prior to the revolution. These were the *Ar züün* (northeast) district, inhabited by native Uighurs or ‘Soyod Urianhai’ (Banzragch 2001: 56), the *Ar baruun* (northwest) district, also inhabited by native Uighurs or ‘Soyod Urianhai’ (Banzragch 2001: 56), the *Övör züün* (southeast) district (located south of the Övör Shirhten), inhabited by people from present-day Tuva who came to the area in 1772, and the *Baruun züün* (southwest) district (likewise located south of the Övör Shirhten), inhabited by people coming from present-day Tuva in 1773 (see Figure 0.2). The boundary between the two northern districts, and between the two southern districts, is not identified, and the groups might not have been clearly associated with a definite territory. Yet, part of the *Ar züün* District is identified by local historians as the Soyod Urianhai territory covering the northern part of present-day Chandman’-Öndör District. These divisions may have been a continuation of the four districts of the so-called Hasut banner, although Yanjmaa never mentions the term Hasut, and Banzragch only refers to it as a clan name (Banzragch 2001: 57).

After the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911 until 1921 – the period of Mongolian independence under the political leadership of the Bogd Khan or the Javzandamba Hutagt, the reincarnated head of the Buddhist church in Mongolia – at least some of the districts of the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai people became lay subjects (*shav'*) of the Javzandamba Hutagt (Čeveng 1991 [1934]: 74; Yanjmaa 2000: 8; Banzragch 2001: 56). During his reign, the tax obligations stayed at around an annual provision of three sable pelts per tax-paying family (Yanjmaa 2000: 8; Banzragch 2001: 56). This seems to be confirmed by Haslund-Christensen, a Danish explorer who travelled the area in the early 1920s and who mentions a valley called 'Kiækt' (transliterated into Danish), located somewhere in the northern part of present-day Tsagaan-Üür District (it has proved impossible to identify the exact location) that was administered by the Javzandamba Hutagt (1946: 141). However, in the 1920s the region east of lake Hövsgöl also seemed to 'enjoy an unoccupied independence, and was a place where a certain "plasticity" reigned, as in many other areas during the days of the revolution' (Krebs 1937: 106, cited in Braae 2017).

The presence of Turkic-speaking Soyod or Üürin Urianhai in the area east of Lake Hövsgöl was documented well into the twentieth century. In the 1920s, Haslund-Christensen travelled widely in the region, and he passed Soyod camps of small Mongolian felt tents of poor quality and noted that they spoke a non-Mongolian language reminding him of Kirghiz (Haslund-Christensen 1946: 197) but that some of them were able to communicate in Mongolian (1946: 136). The descriptions of Haslund-Christensen makes it clear that by the early 1920s some of the Lake Hövsgöl Urianhai lived in Mongolian felt tents in the winter and tepee-like tents made of branches and bark during the summer (1946: 197). Haslund-Christensen also describes them as gifted hunters and hospitable people but as 'appearing dirty' as compared to the Mongols (1946: 197), and he documents the continued activity of Soyod shamans in the area, in particular his meeting with a powerful young female shaman who performed a ceremony to save the life of a Soyod man (Haslund-Christensen 1946: 198–205). Haslund-Christensen's account from the early 1920s also includes descriptions of Mongols having settled down as traders among 'the Soyod Urianhai' to exchange barley for pelts (1946: 197). There were Buryats, some Chinese merchants and a few Russian colonists in the area too. The Chinese merchants probably entered the area in 1902 when the military governor of Uliastai proposed that this was the only way in which to counter Russian economic dominance over Tannu-Urianhai (Ewing 1981: 209). The penetration of Tannu-Urianhai by Russian colonists and traders had increased strongly in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, and Haslund-Christensen writes about a Russian settlement as far southeast as present-day Erdenebulgan District in the early 1920s. But when Tannu-Urianhai finally became a Russian protectorate in 1914 – after some years of uncertainty (see Ewing 1981: 207–12) – it did not include the areas around Lake Hövsgöl (see Shirendev et al. 1976 [1969]: 805; Wheeler 2000: 38–44).

Nowadays the Turkic-speaking Urianhai traditionally inhabiting the Northern part of present-day Chandman'-Öndör District are believed – by local 'experts' – to be related to the Duha or Tsaatan (as they are often called by Mongolians) living in Tsagaannuur District in the regions west of Lake Hövsgöl, close to the Tuvan border. Locals prefer to use the term Soyod Urianhai about these people, who nowadays only speak Mongolian (although some Tuvan words are remembered by some), and Üürin Urianhai, or just Urianhai or Uighur, about the Turkic and Mongolian-speaking people living around the Üür river in the northern part of the neighbouring Tsagaan-Üür District.

9. Övör Shirhten is used to distinguish them from the Ar Shirhten (see Figure 0.2), another group of Urianhai who were also the satellite subjects of prince Dүүregch's banner (Pürev 1980: 18; see also Wheeler 1999).
10. The first of these claims concerns the fact that the famous female ancestor of the Mongols, Alungua, was, according to the Secret History of the Mongols (the oldest surviving account of Chinggis Khan and the early Mongol empire (see Cleaves 1982; Onon 1990)), born at the Arig Usun ('clean river') in the land of the Qori-Tümed (Onon 1990: 3). Her father, Qorilartai-mergen, moved with her to Burkhan Haldun, the holy mountain of Chinggis Khan and the Mongols. The Arig river in Chandman-Öndör is the only river thus named in contemporary Mongolia, and a link is established between the Arig river, Alungua, the Qori-Tümed and the Hentii mountains, where Burkhan Haldun is thought to have been located (Onon 1990: 1). This is probably why some locals nowadays mention the Qori-Tümed and refer to the Secret History of the Mongols when talking about the origin of the Arig Urianhai. The Arig Urianhai even at times suggest that they are direct descendants of Alungua (also see Pegg 2001: 25–26). It is unclear how this would relate to Banzragch's historical outline of their western Mongolian origin, and making these claims even less likely is the fact that there could easily have been other Arig rivers back then, as duplication of place names is very common in Mongolia. The Buryats in Russia, for example, make similar claims about descending from Alungua.

A second claim concerns the role played by the Adangqan Urianhai of the Jarchi'ut, who supposedly originated from Mongol (and not Turkish) tribes (Gongor 1970: 48) in the foundation of the Mongol empire. According to the Secret History, those Urianhai were subjugated by the five sons of Alungua, one of whom was Bodonchar, the originator of the noble Borjigin clan who was to foster Chinggis Khan and his successors. Bodonchar seized a woman from the Adangqan Urianhai of the Jarchi'ut and she bore him two sons. Later on, Jelme and Sübe'etei, also both Urianhai, played a significant role in Chinggis Khan's unification of the Mongol tribes, and during the Yuan dynasty (thirteenth century), the Urianhai people are said to have guarded Ikh Khorig of the Burkhan Khaldun mountain, where Chinggis Khan is thought to have been buried (Gongor 1970: 49; Ratchnevsky 1983: 128–29). After the fall of the Yuan dynasty, the Urianhai became one of the six 'tümens' (nominally a military unit of 10,000 men but should rather be seen as a khanate, the jurisdiction of a khan) of the eastern Mongols and later were subordinated to the Zasagt Khan province (Gongor 1970: 49). In short, the Arig Urianhai are thought to be a branch of the Adangqan Urianhai (Gongor 1970: 49). Further proof of this is thought to be found in the fact that the Arig Urianhai used to have – i.e. prior to the revolution – old Mongolian clan names such as Argamuud, Zelme (referring to Jelme from the Secret History), Shavarchuud, Onhod and Engi (or Yangi) (also see Nyambuu 1992: 74). Herdeg is often mentioned as a pre-revolutionary clan name from this area also (see e.g. Dorjgotov 1979: 6).

11. There was also a fourth lamasery in the Halh Höhöö area (*Höhöögin хүree*) but it has not been possible to find out when it was built.
12. While Pedersen (and many others) does highlight 'conflict and uneasy coexistence' between Buddhism and shamanism in the Darhad area (2011: 138), he also indicates that cooperation was taking place (2011: 13) and paints a more complex picture of Darhad identity as an 'unstable mixture' of shamanism and Buddhism (2011: 147).
13. Some locals, however, stressed the atrocities of the yellow (Buddhist) counter-revolutionaries and their destruction of the first small collectives. In their narratives, the revolutionaries were liberators who spared the lives of innocent people.

14. Hangartner even relates how shamanic practices among the Darhad Mongols were allowed to continue in socialist times (Hangartner 2011: 6–7).
15. Swancutt makes a similar point when she argues that increased religious activities and conflict, while certainly influenced by the difficulties of recent history, cannot be reduced to economic crisis (2012: 24–25).
16. When Sneath discusses the Mongolian notion of *ed* (things, belongings) – one of the words used by Dūütsetseg above when referring to the dangerous items – he stresses significantly that *ed* needs to be governed and apportioned within a social and moral order and that simply to take *ed* is illicit (2002: 202–3). In line with Dūütsetseg’s ‘counter-connective’ claim, *ed* is not supposed to move freely between ‘orders’.
17. Albeit not working back on the person from whom the object is detached but rather working on the person appropriating the detached object from another person.
18. If Empson, in her work on Mongolian conceptions of fortune (*bishig*) and relatedness (Empson 2011), shows that it is important to hold on to ‘parts’, whether things, animals or people, that are ‘escaping’ or separated from households in order to harness fortune (Empson 2007), one may possibly see this avoidance of the dangerous interference of others as a logical corollary to this part of her argument.
19. A concept always used rather imprecisely to describe Mongolians as friendly and open.
20. Sneath writes: ‘... Mongolian culture has, for long periods of time, associated land with agencies, both spiritual and temporal, who have been considered the “owners” or “stewards” of it’ (1997: 8). And in a note he adds: ‘This is in contrast to the romantic notion of pastoral nomads who consider the unfenced land they move upon to belong to all’ (1997: 14).
21. We should, however, keep the following observation in mind:

Still, a stranger who approaches a yurt on the steppe often gets the impression that a Mongol host is quite cool or reserved compared with people in other parts of the world. For example, as a stranger approaches, the head of the yurt does not make an effort to stand or to smile, but maintains his position, hears what the stranger’s business may be, and then with hardly a motion or gesture of cordiality, but a mere motion of the head with chin extended outward or upward, says ‘suu’ (‘sit’). Cordiality or hospitality develops very soon as the conversation begins, and the host spontaneously offers tea, other refreshments, or food and would never ask a guest to pay for the hospitality. (Jagchid and Hyer 1979: 131–32; see also Humphrey 2012).
22. Likewise, Willerslev describes the relational identity of the Yukaghir as one where there are ‘no fixed identities ... only continuous transformations of one class of beings into another’ (2007: 6) and where ‘in-betweenness seems to have no ending’ (2207: 12).
23. Cf. the danger of becoming infected with non-human otherness among the Darhad people living west of Lake Hövsgöl (Pedersen 2001: 422–23).