Urban Life in Post-Soviet Asia

Edited by
Catherine Alexander, Victor Buchli and Caroline Humphrey
Capturing a unique historical moment, this book examines the changes in urban life since the collapse of the Soviet Union from an ethnographic perspective, thus addressing significant gaps in the literature on cities, Central Asia and post-socialism. The book encompasses Tashkent, Almaty, Astana and Ulan-Ude: four cities with quite different responses to the fall of the Soviet Union. Each chapter takes a theme of central significance across this huge geographical terrain, addresses it through one city and contextualises it by reference to the other sites in this volume. The structure of the book moves from nostalgia and memories of the Soviet past to examine how current changes are being experienced and imagined through the shifting materialities, temporalities and political economies of urban life. Privatisation is giving rise to new social geographies, while ethnic and religious sensibilities are creating emergent networks of sacred sites. But, however much ideologies are changing, cities also provide a constant lived mnemonic of lost configurations of ideology and practice, acting as signposts to bankrupted futures. Overall, this book provides a detailed account of the changing nature of urban life in post-Soviet Asia, clearly elucidating the centrality of these urban transformations to citizens’ understandings of their own socio-economic condition.

**Catherine Alexander** is Reader in Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London. She has carried out fieldwork in Turkey, Britain and Kazakhstan, and has published on domestic space and cities. Most of her research has been engaged with changing relationships between state, society and market including privatisation, property relations and welfare and the third sector.

**Victor Buchli** is Reader in Material Culture in the Department of Anthropology, University College London. His research interests focus on the material culture of socialism and post-socialism, modernist architecture and urbanism in Russia and Kazakhstan, the archaeology of the recent past, and theoretical understandings of material culture and materiality.

**Caroline Humphrey** is Professor of Collaborative Anthropology at the University of Cambridge. She has worked extensively in Russia, Mongolia and North-West China, and also more briefly in Nepal and India. She has published on economic change, ritual and religion, and her current interests concern socialist and post-socialist urban cultures in China and Russia.
URBAN LIFE
IN POST-SOVIET ASIA

Edited by
Catherine Alexander;
Victor Buchli
and Caroline Humphrey
CONTENTS

List of figures vii
List of tables viii
Notes on contributors ix
Preface xi

1 Introduction 1
CATHERINE ALEXANDER AND VICTOR BUCHLI

2 Astana: materiality and the city 40
VICTOR BUCHLI

3 Almaty: rethinking the public sector 70
CATHERINE ALEXANDER

4 Tashkent: three capitals, three worlds 102
MARFUA TOKHTAKHODZHAeva

5 City of migrants: contemporary Ulan-Ude in the context of Russian migration 125
GALINA MANZANOVA

6 The creation and revitalisation of ethnic sacred sites in Ulan-Ude since the 1990s 136
ALTANHUU HÜRELBAATAR

7 The homeless of Ulan-Ude 157
IRINA BALDAYEVA

8 New subjects and situated interdependence: after privatisation in Ulan-Ude 175
CAROLINE HUMPHREY

Index 208
**LIST OF FIGURES**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>Map of Central Asia</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>New housing for state bureaucrats</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>Astana cityscape along the river Ishym</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>Weekend promenade along the Ishym embankment</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>Population of Astana, 1869–2003</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>Traditional samannyi dwelling</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>The ‘Prestizh’ housing block locally known as the ‘Kursk’</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>Detail of a shanyrak</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.8</td>
<td><em>Shanyrak</em> as decorative element in street railing</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.9</td>
<td><em>Shanyrak</em> as neo-classical <em>trompe l’oeil</em> ceiling decoration</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>New samannyi addition</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>Russian colonial-era wooden <em>izba</em></td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Almaty’s outskirts (new villas)</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>Almaty’s outskirts (temporary shacks)</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>Almaty’s population, 1926–2003</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>State apartment block in micro-region (Almaty)</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>Ethnic composition of Almaty by three largest groups, 1939–1995</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>Tashkent’s old city walls</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2</td>
<td>Soviet Tashkent</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>New Russian Orthodox church</td>
<td>115</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>The Lenin Monument, Square of the Soviets, Ulan-Ude, 1988</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>Shamans’ association conducting a ritual in public</td>
<td>139</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>Buddhist monks conducting a purification ritual</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>Duinker <em>datsan</em> (new Buddhist monastery)</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>Map of the camp of Geser</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>Dwelling at the rubbish dump of Soviet District, Ulan-Ude, 2001</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## LIST OF TABLES

| 3.1 | Almaty’s population, 1926–2003 | 80 |
| 3.2 | Total population movement by ethnicity in Almaty, 2002 | 86 |
| 3.3 | Migration source and destination by ethnic group, 2002 (Almaty) | 87 |
| 3.4 | Department of Social Administration employees (Almaty), 1998–2003 | 95 |
| 3.5 | State administration employees (Almaty), 1998–2003 | 95 |
| 4.1 | Tashkent’s size and population, 1877–2015 | 103 |
| 6.1 | Lamas’ Buddhist centres in Ulan-Ude | 141 |
| 8.1 | Inhabitants of Verkhneudinsk in 1880 | 181 |
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Catherine Alexander is Reader in Social Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London.

Irina Baldayeva is a Kandidat of Sciences in Ulan-Ude.

Victor Buchli is a Reader in Material Culture at University College London.

Caroline Humphrey is Professor of Collaborative Anthropology at the University of Cambridge.

Altanhuu Hürelbaatar is a Research Associate in the Department of Anthropology, the University of Cambridge.

Galina Manzanova is a Researcher at the Russian Academy of Sciences (Ulan-Ude).

Marfua Tokhtakhodzhaeva practises as both an architect and an ethnographer in Tashkent.
The seeds of this book lie in the Leverhulme Trust funded project ‘Reconstructing Urban Life in the Cities of Post-Soviet Asia’ awarded to Caroline Humphrey, Catherine Alexander and Victor Buchli. In terms of gathering data and carrying out fieldwork, the project itself ran from 2000 to 2003. However, all the contributors have drawn on previous and subsequent experience in Central Asia for their chapters here. Catherine Alexander is particularly grateful to St John’s College, Cambridge and the John and Catherine MacArthur Foundation for their support for extended periods of research and fieldwork in and around Almaty. Victor Buchli is also grateful for support from Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge and University College London. Caroline Humphrey has been working in Ulan-Ude since the 1970s.

The three chapters written by Humphrey, Alexander and Buchli include material from interviews and conversations with senior bureaucrats, academics and architects. As Luong-Jones (2002) describes, it can be hard to be confident about the data received in formal interviews with such informants – especially in an environment where the political situation is volatile, the media are highly controlled and secrecy is the norm. In effect, we all used similar approaches: repeating as many conversations as we could with the same informants in different settings and trying to validate information from as many sources as possible. The long relationship Caroline Humphrey has been able to develop over the years with her informants produces another kind of confidence. In addition, Victor Buchli and Catherine Alexander were able to draw on their previous experience, working as an architect and a government consultant respectively, to engage with such informants in broader discussions of themes of mutual interest.

While all these informants were happy to be quoted, they were particularly anxious that their information should not be attributable; the combination of having been socialised into an environment where official information was not freely given to strangers together with the current rapid shuffling of appointments according to political whim made this concern wholly understandable. However, whereas it is relatively straightforward to anonymise a householder or market trader, it is rather more difficult to disguise an official in the public eye with a relatively easily identifiable job. Since the anonymity and security of our informants obviously
came first, we decided to restrict distinguishing features to saying roughly what their profession was and whether they were senior or junior. Although this has glossed over certain nuances, it has made it possible to discriminate between those familiar with the Soviet system and those who would have entered the bureaucracies since 1991. Retired officials had much to say about the workings of the Soviet system, but few had any interest in what had happened since their retirement.

Hürelbaatar’s chapter derives from fieldwork he undertook as part of his doctoral programme at the University of Cambridge, as he notes. He carried out a number of interviews with local lamas and religious figures in Ulan-Ude as well as citizens there. The problem of anonymity was less marked: many of the lamas are in fact public figures and agreed to be referred to by name. Irina Baldayeva’s chapter, concerned with the homeless of Ulan-Ude, deals with perhaps the most vulnerable group in the city, frequently subjected to assaults by police and citizens. We have therefore tried to be especially careful about obscuring the identity of these individuals while preserving those characteristics that illustrate changes in their living conditions over the last five years. The location of the city dump where many live is so well-known that nothing would have been served by changing the name.

Our last two contributors, Marlfaa Tokhtakhodzhaeva and Galina Manzanova, have written from a different perspective again. Both have always lived in the cities that they describe, Tashkent and Ulan-Ude and therefore write from long personal knowledge as well as professional academic expertise. The unmediated tone of these chapters gives some sense of the anxieties felt by some long-standing citizens of cities in Central Asia about the rapid changes that have been occurring since the end of the Soviet period.

Several people helped with the formation and development of this project. We are particularly grateful to the exemplary figure of Catherine Cooke whose scholarship, deep knowledge of this area and enthusiasm helped us all individually and collectively to stay on the right track. We are also grateful to Deniz Kandiyoti, Ruth Mandel, Daniel Miller, Scott Newton, Frances Pine and Balzhan Zhimbiev for their contributions to this project.

Reference

INTRODUCTION

Catherine Alexander and Victor Buchli

The four cities in our study were chosen to represent contrasting aspects of urban life in the former USSR. Our research focused on the wider results of the overarching socialist system’s collapse by considering not the metropolitan centre (Moscow), but pivotal points of the provincial structure. For this reason, we chose cities in the Central Asian provinces in order to examine the links between the engine of modernisation, ‘the city’, and the diverse cultures, societies and religions of these former socialist spaces. As a comparative project, our studies aimed to contrast cities of different scale and economic prosperity, from the flourishing cities of Almaty and Astana to the socially and economically depressed Buryat city of Ulan-Ude, and to encompass cities of varied political status. One further key point of contrast is the juxtaposition of cities located in Islamic (Tashkent, Almaty and Astana) and Buddhist (Ulan-Ude) regions. Similarly, as this was a collaborative project involving researchers from the Anglo-American, Soviet and post-Soviet traditions, the range of concerns is varied, as well as the analytical styles. It is hoped that this eclectic approach will convey to the reader the broad range of approaches that have been brought to bear on these post-Soviet Asian cities and thereby provide the possibility to begin to establish a common horizon of research topics and approaches.

In our cities, as elsewhere in the former Soviet Union, a multitude of alternative practices and second economies supported the failing Soviet system. Nevertheless, there was at least a broad consensus as to what a city should be – even if only as an aspiration. By the same token, it was clear what it meant to be an urban citizen and thereby located in the very engine of social progress, which was especially potent for the discourse of Soviet regional development. However, conditions have now changed considerably. Thus, Ulan-Ude in Buryatia is largely poor and undergoing great hardship with the end of its connection with Moscow. Tashkent, once the principal city of Central Asia and a thriving cultural centre, has given economic primacy to Almaty and Astana in Kazakhstan and, though undeniably still a prosperous city, reflects the government’s inward turn. Almaty and Astana are, in many ways, unrepresentative of the plethora of collapsed cities in Kazakhstan, yet vividly illustrate the symbolic as well as economic and social importance of cities in the post-socialist era. The political capital has moved from Almaty to
Astana where an elite vision of a contemporary Eurasian future is being played out through the creation of a new capital, bright with shimmering buildings designed by foreign architects.

These four cities demonstrate markedly different responses to the end of the Soviet Union. As Soviet understandings of the relationship between the state and citizenry unravelled, so the gaps, cracks and disjunctions between the planned system and the lived experience began to dominate, both in terms of economic collapse and also as regards how cities and what they stood for could be imagined. The initial, common response was simply to declare a state of chaos (see Nazpary 2001). The 14 years that have elapsed since the end of the Soviet Union now afford a perspective that has allowed us to analyse how other urban practices, orders and materialities have begun to appear alongside new ways of imagining the city. Apart from anything else, we have tried to combine in this volume a range of perspectives on the city that has not previously been attempted: from imaginative and cosmological landscapes through shifting political economies and administrative viewpoints to changing architectural forms and the homeless who have most clearly suffered most in the post-socialist regimes. Taken as a whole, these perspectives suggest the complexity of city living at a time of crisis.

In the rest of this introductory chapter we provide an overview of the relationship between anthropology, and theories and practices of the city and planning, especially in the context of socialist cities. Then, after a broad background to the region, we examine the core questions and themes that wind through the book from the vexed issues of ever-changing legitimate orders to social and material transformations in the cities’ geographies as privatisation of public space and the influx of rural migrants radically change the experience of the city. We end with an exploration of the symbolic potency of cities as they serve to express emerging elite views of national futures.

**Anthropology and the city**

Despite the constant need to shore up the unwieldy structure of the Soviet Union, its collapse nevertheless shattered an overarching ideological framework, an economic structure and a system of relations between people, their natural and built environment and nations. The effect was profound ontological and epistemological uncertainty which, to some extent, still continues. Without a clear, common understanding of how connections are achieved, the possibility of social reproduction is curtailed; this encompasses those connections which range from temporal and spatial orientation, through kin relations to political, economic and cosmological affiliation. Since 1991, the painful and uncertain process, in part documented here, of (re)forging links and trying to create a new social consensus, has been unfolding.

The role of cities in this process of material, systemic and cognitive coming apart and then re-connecting is vital. In the Soviet Union, cities were the cradle of progress, the place of modernity and, after the 1930s, quite distinct from a rural way
of life. In previously largely un-urbanised Kazakhstan and Siberia, the contrast between the promise of urban life and ‘traditional’ ways was even more pronounced. Though major cities had existed in Uzbekistan for several centuries, it was their Sovietisation that transformed them into generative nodes of transformative modernity. The ultimate failure of the underlying system thus provoked a crisis of knowing that played back directly into understandings of the self. Changed property relations and newly restricted spaces after privatisation, visible social and ethnic segregation, the ‘blurring’ of urban and rural, the emergence of sacred urban topologies, and the physical crumbling of both old and contemporary buildings – all of these social, material and cognitive transformations after 1991 raised the question of how to recognise ‘a city’ and, along with that, what it meant to be an urban citizen and modern.

The following brief overview of developments in the ideas and practices of the socialist city – and subsequently the post-socialist city – shows (perhaps unexpected) parallels with the methods and theoretical developments in urban sociology and anthropology. In the first place, both socialist planning (inspired by Marx and Engels’ privileging of daily economic life) and anthropology have a commitment to the small-scale, perceiving, in the minutiae of the everyday, the seed of the macro-scale and the extended system: the kitchen was just one end of a continuum that extended to the city and the nation (see for example Buchli 1999). The differences should be emphasised too. Socialist planning was also by its nature interventionist and instrumental in seeking to extend this understanding to implement broader social reforms and a degree of rationalised uniformity. These beliefs were given full expression in the planning manifestos of Modern Movement theoreticians, most completely in works dedicated to the creation of the socialist city such as Nikolai Miliutin’s Sotsgorod (Socialist City). Significantly, figures such as Miliutin were also in touch with key proponents of the Garden City Movement.

Twisting through the trajectories of urban anthropology and socialist planning alike are the influential and pervasive effects of Ebenezer Howard’s Garden City Movement. Established at the turn of the twentieth century and inspired by Howard’s seminal writings (1946), the movement aimed to address the worst evils of rapid urbanisation and industrialisation through a network of small conurbations that combined the best that the city and the country had to offer. His ideas on social organisation (and their materialisation) inspired early socialist planners and architects, but also indirectly fed into a strand of ethnographic enquiry that valorised the small community over the centrally planned and sought to find and explain systems of local order amid apparent chaos. The irony perhaps is that, according to some accounts, Howard was at best a synthesiser of other people’s ideas, at worst just a hard-headed Victorian businessman with an eye to making a sound investment in undervalued rural land. Whatever the final judgement of Howard’s originality, his genius undoubtedly lay in linking earlier utopian socialist writings with his experience of a recently rebuilt Chicago City Beautiful and contemporary social concerns.
The problems and challenges encountered by planners in realising a city that matched socialist expectations of social and industrial harmony in toto have been mirrored in theoretical attempts to gauge ‘the city’ in all its complex diversity. Just as socialist cities in practice usually lagged far behind their plans, so different theoretical approaches have tended to foreground one aspect of the city at the cost of others. Anthropology, as discussed below, has only recently moved to consider the full intricacy and experience of the city as something to be studied sui generis, as well as a framing for social fields or communities within it.

The four cities of the book

In this section we give a brief background to each city together with an overview of how each one is attempting to re-connect itself temporally and spatially both to the new state and to the wider world. Of the four cities, Almaty and Astana can broadly be said to have been founded in the nineteenth century as Russian trading and militarised outposts. By contrast, Ulan-Ude dates back to the late seventeenth century and, although Tokhtakhodzhaeva’s chapter largely deals with Tashkent from the Russian Tsarist presence onwards, the city had in fact registered its urban presence several centuries earlier. As one of the great trading cities of the Silk Road linking China and Europe, there are claims that Tashkent’s origins go back as far as the second century BC. With more confidence, Tashkent’s presence can be identified from the ninth century onwards as a hub of commerce and government. In terms of more recent status, all four cities either are, or have recently been, Republican capitals. Tashkent and Ulan-Ude were the capitals of Uzbekistan and Buryatia during the Soviet Union – and continued as such afterwards, Tashkent as the capital of the independent Republic of Uzbekistan and Ulan-Ude the capital of the Buryat Republic within Russia. Soviet Alma-Ata was made the capital of the Socialist Kazakh Republic in 1929, and continued as the main city of Kazakhstan after 1991 with its name changed to Almaty until, in 1997, the government moved the capital to a small town, Tselinograd, in the middle of the steppe, renaming it first Akmola, after an earlier name of the town, and then changing it to the current name: Astana. Of all the cities considered here, therefore, Astana is the only one that was not a capital city during the Soviet Union.

Despite the broadest of common histories, however, the contemporary directions being taken by each city are dramatically different, both in terms of how politicians, administrations and citizens are variously choosing to ally and align themselves geographically, and also in relation to the particular temporal narratives that are being drawn upon to explain, legitimate and direct national and metropolitan policies. This section focuses on how and where these cities are choosing to make affiliations following the collapse of the Soviet Union with all the relational systems that had been so entailed. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that these new strategies for connection and thus social reproduction differ between urban constituencies and are still shifting. Kazakhstan’s relationship with Russia, for example, over the last decade has been decidedly coy from early assertions of
independence, to celebrating the year of Russian and Kazakh friendship in 2004 – both of which occurred alongside a distinct process of Kazakhification: encouraging the placing of Kazakh nationals in prominent positions and using the Kazakh language in place of Russian.

Ulan-Ude is the capital of the Republic of Buryatia in Russia, a region with an indigenous Buryat-Mongolian population but dominated numerically by Russians. Located in an area with few resources, it does not attract foreign interest or investment. Ulan-Ude, the city studied from most directions in this book, is by far the most impoverished, isolated and backward-looking city. Here, the collapse of Soviet central planning and new uncertainties in relations with Moscow have not resulted in many links being made elsewhere. Despite being a formerly important commercial and industrial region of eastern Siberia, there is little foreign investment and almost no open foreign presence other than curious tourists. The politics and social realignments that are played out in the city are more concerned with re-configuring internal roles and struggles for access to scarce resources (see Humphrey, this volume). The conservative, backward-looking ethos of the city is epitomised by the giant statue of the Head of Lenin that still dominates the physically unchanged main square. Meanwhile, the drab industrial townships on the outskirts, clustered around mostly defunct factories, continue to maintain highly localised subcultures. At the same time, the city is experiencing an efflorescence of varied religions. Here, unlike Kazakhstan where overseas interest is evident, the new shamanic, Buddhist and Russian Orthodox sacred sites are local creations with only tentative links to the wider world. As with all the cities written about in this book, social distinctions have become much sharper – gulfs that are physically mirrored by the separate locations of rich and poor, Buryat and Russian, rural migrants and established city-dwellers.

In some ways Tashkent could be categorised as being between Ulan-Ude and the old and new capitals of Kazakhstan. The old part of the city with its rabbit warren of tiny streets, enclosed dwellings and largely self-contained quarters could be described as being resistant to new forms of social and economic organisation. Certainly, there is little in the external appearance of the old city’s mahallas (neighbourhood quarters) to suggest an enthusiastic embrace of new modes of relating to the wider world. Tashkent’s citizens from the more open, grander New City explicitly play up the difference, pointing to the old city as ‘another world’, ‘dangerous’ and shut-off. The irony is that, in another aesthetic, the old quarters are also seen as picturesque and, as a consequence, some eighteenth-century dwellings have been sold off to make way for the gleamingly new houses of the rich who wish to enjoy the ‘setting’ of the old city: effectively orientalising their environment into a timeless, static other. Charming or no, such new houses are invariably ringed by high spiked iron railings.

Otherwise, temporally, Tashkent, as Uzbekistan’s capital is playing a similar game to Kazakhstan’s cities. The Uzbek presence has been increasingly emphasised: Timurlane, as heroic founder of the nation, is literally given central place in Tashkent’s main park; museums celebrating Uzbek heritage are given state
sanction, funding and prime locations. The past, in other words, is being manipulated to suggest a single genealogy of Uzbek glory that was temporarily overshadowed by the Soviet regime. As Tokhtakhodzhaeva suggests in her chapter, however, there are conflicting views about temporal affiliations. While nationalist planners and architects downplay the Soviet period, others (as in Ulan-Ude) mourn the loss of Socialist enlightenment, the effects on the city of migration from rural areas and the brasher manifestations of new wealth in the city. Despite potential wealth in the energy and other sectors, slow development in implementing market reforms, together with a reluctance to privatise the more lucrative state assets, means that external involvement in Uzbekistan is limited, and this is reflected in Tashkent. Significantly larger and more imposing in sheer scale than any other city in Central Asia, as well as having a past as the Soviet Central Asian centre for the highest excellence in culture and education, there is none the less a sense in Tashkent of carefully moderated engagement with the external world.

Kazakhstan’s old and new capitals, Almaty and Astana, are markedly different again in terms of their orientation to global markets and influence. One brief explanation is the huge mineral and energy resources of the country that have acted as magnets to major foreign investors. Of equal importance, however, was the government’s early decision to adopt the ‘shock therapy’ approach to implementing wholesale market reforms, restructuring and privatisation. This included allowing foreign nationals to buy enterprises foundering through lack of subsidies. One result is that while the distinctions between social classes again became sharpened and identifiable through new spatial patterns, the urban landscape of both cities has changed dramatically in the last decade. Both cities are spiked with new residential and office buildings and with religious buildings, many of which have been sponsored from abroad. Middle Eastern and Saudi funding of new mosques has been a highly visible feature of the cities from the mid-1990s onwards. Less prominent but equally plentiful are new Christian churches, from American Baptist funded churches to Russian Orthodox.

No longer the political capital, but still the financial, cultural, commercial and educational centre of Kazakhstan, Almaty’s centre bristles with shiny new casinos and offices (often re-clad Soviet buildings or unfinished constructions), while most available patches of space have been sold to private developers for luxury, expensive, high-rise apartments. Despite the slight of losing the symbolic centre of the country, Almaty’s administration is attempting to restyle itself the ‘capital of the south’ or the ‘leisure capital’ of Kazakhstan. Meanwhile, the rate of construction and bustling commercial activity of Almaty also attract a sizeable official and unofficial migrant population both from elsewhere in the country and from other Central Asian states (see Tables 3.2 and 3.3 in Alexander’s chapter). One such migrant worker observed that Tashkent used to be known as the ‘Bread City’ but this name has now moved to Almaty. Another migrant from Uzbekistan commented that despite having no papers she knew that she would always get by and be able to eat in Almaty. This large floating population mainly resides on the edges of the city in the new regions that are springing up.
Astana, the new capital of Kazakhstan funded both by the national budget and by foreign investors, is again clearly orientated towards a distinct Eurasian future. The extensive use of Kazakhstan’s new emblem of the snow leopard is deliberately intended to set off resonances with the ‘Asian tiger’; both the master city plan from a famous Japanese architect and modern buildings designed by leading European architects clearly indicate that, through its new capital, Kazakhstan is positioning itself in the global market. At the same time, motifs (also found in other cities in Kazakhstan) point to a pre-Soviet, if not pre-Russian, nomadic past while archaeological finds, as in Almaty, are being used to affirm an ancient Kazakh presence – and hence the right to the land. Despite the grand plans that are being unfurled in the centre, however, a short walk reveals that Astana is very much being built over an existing Soviet and colonial town. As in Almaty and Ulan-Ude, labour migrants are drawn to Astana for work, forming a second shadow city.

The socialist city

Early nineteenth-century industrialising cities grew on the back of large-scale transferences of labour from agriculture to the factory with scant regard for the welfare of the humans shunted into slums and crippling working conditions. Events of the latter half of the century provoked widespread anxiety as to how to modify the worst social effects of the great transformation. Such concern was not entirely philanthropic: the 1871 Paris Commune had chillingly demonstrated the power of a discontented mob to the landed classes. Similarly fired up, though for different reasons, Marx predicted that the combination of brutalising work and living conditions and being crushed together in the limited space afforded by slum and workplace would lead workers to unite in resisting oppression and to overthrow the exploitative capitalist system. Thus, the city, for Marx, was the site of revolution, the locus and laboratory for the progression of history. Dehumanising on the one hand, it also provided the means for people to transcend those abusive conditions and realise their full potential. The very idea of a ‘socialist city’ was another response to these common problems of an urban workforce living and working in appalling conditions. In this case, it would be the principles of socialist organisation that would produce an urban form conducive to both high productivity and human well-being.

Belief that such a socialist city could be created was fuelled from a variety of sources. A long concern with improving social conditions might be said to have started broadly with the Romantic philosophers. Following them, the writings of Henri Saint-Simon (1760–1825),¹⁰ and Charles Fourier (1772–1837), paid limited attention to industrialised working practice but advocated egalitarian, communal living arrangements – with a rather hazy industrial backdrop (1808).¹¹ Robert Owen (1771–1858), though less of a writer, by contrast, actually implemented improvements in the working and living conditions of employees in his textile factory in New Lanark. As inspirational prophets of a new socialist order they were deeply influential, even if slightly disparagingly referred to as Utopian Socialists by Marx.
and Engels (1992). As a practical blueprint for large-scale industrial and urban restructuring, both writings and examples fell somewhat short.

Drawing on firsthand experience and scholarly research, Engels (1844) wrote an account of life in contemporary Manchester which came to be almost a handbook on the evils of the capitalist city, and thus the paradigmatic co-relative against which socialist cities were to be created (Kotkin 1995). If, as Kotkin observes in Magnetic Mountain (1995), it was hard to say exactly what made a city socialist rather than capitalist, at least socialist urban engineers could point to what they rather hoped it was not, by citing the iniquities of European industrial cities so graphically illustrated by Dickens.

The best worked out, even if utopian, example of a socialist city is Edward Bellamy’s novel Looking Backward published in 1881. This describes a Boston transfigured into a twentieth-century workers’ paradise where equality and harmony reign, education and culture are open to all, the industrial army works for honour, not profit – and such spiritual illumination is materially reflected in the wide, open streets and splendid buildings accessible to one and all. The success and influence of the novel was tremendous. In Britain, Ebenezer Howard was enraptured, describing it as a direct inspiration for his Garden City idea (Macfadyen 1970). His own publication in turn, in 1902, Garden Cities of Tomorrow, together with the creation of Letchworth Garden City and the subsequent spin-off garden suburbs, was of enormous significance for socialist planners in the 1920s, concerned as they were with addressing disparities between city and country (Pallot and Shaw 1981; see also French 1995; Cooke 1974, 1978; Starr 1976). Cities embodied progress and culture – but at the cost of health and equity, and the country provided health but little in the way of livelihood.

The point was not lost on the socialist philosophers: Marx and Engels, in The Communist Manifesto, spoke of the city as rescuing the people from the idiocy of rural life, which might perhaps account for the anxiety felt by some contemporary local scholars (see Manzanova’s discussion of Ulan-Ude in this volume) who point to the steady ruralisation of many Soviet cities after the collapse of the Soviet Union. From their perspective, in some places, urban transformations appear to be going backwards (see also Seniavskii 2003).

The 1920s saw radical experiments of socialist planners in changing the nature of the city – particularly relations between city and country. For the more extreme ‘disurbanists’ this went so far as to consider the possibility of making the capitalist city completely redundant (see Cooke 1974; French 1995; Miliutin 1930). From the early 1930s onwards, however, such ideas were firmly halted. Quite simply the infrastructural provision and priorities for rapid industrialisation were inadequate to support the more extravagant plans for urban development. Cities on the territory of the Soviet Union were declared de facto socialist, thus ending the public debate over what constituted a ‘socialist city’, and along with this came a clear valorisation of the city over the countryside. Despite proclamations that life on collective farms should equal that in cities in terms of access to high living standards, culture and educational facilities, things were quite different in practice (see Seniavskii
2003: 110; Morton and Stuart 1984: 35). In terms of access to good education and the potential to improve one’s lot, the urban:rural seesaw was clearly tipped in favour of cities which rapidly came to be seen as cultural centres drawing to them intellectuals, professionals and the great industrial plants that symbolised modernist progress (see Marx and Engels 1941). Certain key factories were supplied with spectacular sotsgorodi (socialist townships): planned dwelling complexes with all amenities.13

Along with the triumphalist side of city development, however, urban housing crises were an ongoing fact of life as Soviet cities grew at alarming rates constantly outstripping demographic projections and residential provision (see Seniavskii 2003; Pallot and Shaw 1981; Morton and Stuart 1984; Chauncey 1970; Demidenko 1980; Khorev 1975). The constant flood of workers off the land, particularly from Russian European territories to Central Asia and Siberia, meant that the resulting chronic housing shortages were particularly acute in those regions. A study of population growth in major cities of the Soviet Union between 1959 and 1980 puts the cities of Frunze (contemporary Bishkek), Alma Ata (Almaty) and Tashkent in the top quarter of urban expansion with average percentage annual increases of 13.37, 9.47 and 8.77 respectively (Stuart 1984: 28).

The problem of housing shortages was particularly exacerbated in the ‘new cities’ of Central Asia and Kazakhstan, which had virtually no housing stock to fall back on when the number of incomers exceeded newly built available residences. It is this that perhaps calls for particular sensitivity to regional variation when considering the ‘socialist city’ (see Stenning 2004). East European socialist cities usually developed from pre-existing conurbations: patterns here were those of adaptation of the infrastructure and housing stock, territorial extension and a shift in allocation mechanisms. By contrast, Almaty, Astana and Ulan-Ude were small colonial towns in the early 1920s. Their dramatic growth occurred as a result of Soviet industrialisation and intensive agricultural programmes. Tashkent, with a longer, more established history, follows a distinctly colonial pattern of separating the old city in its entirety from the new (see for example Rabinow 1989; Wright 1991), a pattern which is not to be found so clearly in central European cities that came under socialist management after the Second World War.14 The medieval part of Tashkent has a quite distinct urban structure (see Lapidus 1967 for close parallels with late medieval Muslim cities in the Middle East).

Quite apart from the capital cities we have chosen for this study, distinct urban forms during the Soviet period arose in Kazakhstan and Siberia, in particular, both of which are extremely rich in mineral resources. A new phenomenon, the monogorod or single company city, arose whereby an entire city – its infrastructure and services, its educational and health system, its cultural and housing provision – was structured around and wholly dependent on a single extractive or refining plant: Magnitogorsk, the giant steel city in the Urals documented by Stephen Kotkin (1995), being the most celebrated prototype. One of the most remarkable features of these cities is that all the necessities for life – food, fuel, water, at a minimum – were transported sometimes thousands of kilometres from...
the nearest source to these outposts in the steppe. The consequences for these cities of the end of the Soviet Union, with its elaborate supply and distribution network, were nothing short of catastrophic. Few such single-company cities generated enough revenue to make them attractive to private companies which would have to bear the burden of supplying such places. Without the constant injection of subsidies from Moscow, many of these cities imploded after 1991. In 1998, the World Bank listed 57 such ‘dead’ cities in Kazakhstan (see also Gentile 2004a). With a revitalising economy and the new wealth around the north-western oil fields of the Caspian Sea some cities in these areas are slowly regenerating. The rest, however, remain desolate monuments to Soviet engineering feats in establishing such outposts.

Approaching ‘the city’ from an anthropological perspective

Traditional anthropology, as formalised under Bronislaw Malinowski, was characterised by long periods of fieldwork undertaken in locations that were both exotic and clearly physically bounded. Thus the village, or sequence of villages, on an island came to be the kind of place associated with the work of anthropology. In this academic division of labour in the early to mid-twentieth century, sociologists kept their attention on industrialised countries where cities were so intimately associated with mass production and service provision that it was only natural that they should come to be considered as phenomena worthy of study in themselves.

The urban turn in sociology, characterised by the still influential urban ecology models of the Chicago School of sociologists (Park et al. 1925), was also driven by late nineteenth-century anxieties about the effects of crowded slums, fears which were given more impetus by the devastation wrought by the First World War and the resulting shattering of a familiar social order. Though largely descriptive rather than prescriptive, the emphasis of the Chicago sociologists was on the containment of different communities (broadly distinguished along class lines) within concentric rings. The idea of ecological niches proved fruitful, generating many variations on this theme, from zones to sectors (Hoyt 1939) and multi-nuclei developments (Harris and Ullman 1945). Although there is no evidence to suggest that such analytical frameworks had a direct influence on Soviet planners, zoning cities into separate residential, administrative and industrial areas became familiar features of the long-term General Plans of Soviet cities – even if these plans were rarely fully implemented and what actually emerged in fact blurred such nice distinctions.

Anthropologists appeared upon the urban scene in the 1950s, almost in the wake of their informants migrating into the city. The emphasis was again on local, bounded communities, typically the slums that were constructed as breeding places of social deviance in standard official plans. In a sense, the ethnographies that ensued were following those architects and urban planners who had been trained in the traditions of the Garden City Movement with its emphasis on recognising local social orders rather than systems more visible and amenable to centralised control.
Thus a series of highly influential monographs began to appear in the 1960s ranging from Lewis’s (1961) work on Mexico City to Lomnitz (1977) again on Mexico City and Perlman (1976) on Rio de Janeiro, all challenging the myths of chaos and marginality. Geographically, South American cities were the main focus of this wave of ethnographies with a few south European cities being marshalled in support. The Chicago tradition continued and was extended to examine the densely populated ethnic ghettos of North American cities. Once again these case studies revealed a tightly ordered social system beneath what Whyte (1993) calls ‘the sensational moment’ 16: media-driven, suggestive of apocalyptic cataclysm and obscuring the more mundane regularities of organisation. One consistent trend in the anthropology of the city has thus been new ways of seeing the familiar, quite literally of re-cognition – a theme that is picked up again in this volume from a different perspective.

Without wishing to downplay the extraordinary privations suffered by urban citizens in Central Asia in the early 1990s, there has been a tendency for external commentators to focus either on social cataclysm or on macro-regeneration without considering how new and different orders have begun to emerge from and through the cracks of the former system. In some part, we hope to have addressed this want in this volume by detailing, from the viewpoints of various urban constituencies, the cognitive, socio-economic and material restructurings of the city and its inhabitants.

Meanwhile, during the last decades, there have been new currents in the anthropological analysis of interactions with, and within, the space of the city. Perhaps the first significant move (Low 1999: 3) was to consider the structural forces that operate on the political economy of the city (e.g. Susser 1982; Hannerz 1980), thus opening up ‘community’ studies to engagement with broader socio-economic fields. Moving away from localised case studies in another direction, anthropological studies have been increasingly combining the detailed empirical methods of the discipline with the emphasis of geographers (e.g. Amin and Thrift 2002) on movement, routes and flows within the city, thus seeing the urban citizen as a practitioner of the city rather than just a passive occupant (de Certeau 1984; Clifford 1997; Reed 2005). Following social geographers such as Soja (2000, 1989), other anthropological studies (e.g. Rabinow 1995; Holsten 1989) consider the materiality of buildings and the cityscape as something more than a backdrop but a concretisation of shifting power relations. Reed (2002) analyses how the city, as orchestration of memory and layered times (Boyer 1996), is variously experienced by citizens. Thus the experiential side of city living has caught the anthropological imagination and, with that, an increasing appreciation of the symbolic importance of the city as a whole, as well as the more traditional studies and scales of social and economic access.

Building on this, Low (1999: 5–21) suggests a rough typology of recent anthropological studies of the city, specifically with regard to the metaphors and images through which cities have been theoretically framed and presented both by external researchers such as ourselves and by local constituencies and groups. These images broadly fall into processes of social relations or economies, or religious and cultural
aspects of urban life. Here, a series of chapters on Ulan-Ude examine it from all these perspectives. Comparative chapters on other cities serve both to frame Ulan-Ude and suggest additional ways of imagining, theorising and experiencing the city.

Anthropological studies of specifically Soviet cities never quite got off the ground for purely practical reasons: the problems of access during the Soviet era meant that detailed ethnographic studies of social conditions were simply unattainable (see Ruble 1990). As a consequence, the studies that emerged, from the West, of socialist cities were based on officially released statistics and documents, limited first-hand access and tended to focus on planning and urban growth (e.g. Morton and Stuart 1984; Lewis and Rowland 1976; Chauncey 1970), with some emphasis on the role of elites (Bater 1984). The disciplinary context has thus largely been international relations, geography (Pallot and Shaw 1981) and politics. Studies of socialist cities from within, so to speak, were ideologically constrained in the Soviet Union to theoretical discussions of urban development within a Marxist-Leninist frame (Gradov 1968; Khorev 1975) or were concerned with tracking down folkloric vestiges in an urban context (Budina and Shmeleva 1989). In Eastern and Central Europe Ivan Szelenyi (1983) brought both a rigorous sociological approach to analysis of urban social inequities – and firsthand experience.

With the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 restrictions on research were lifted. One main focus from then onwards has been the effects of privatisation: the wholesale shift of the urban landscape from public to private ownership (Ruble 1995; Collier forthcoming; Alexander 2004). Bruce Grant (2001) has written on the changes in the symbolic landscape of Moscow, specifically the ‘re-orchestration’ of official memory through newly commissioned sculptures. Then there has been an interest in collapsing urban infrastructure on living conditions (Humphrey 2003; Collier in preparation): a theme reprised in this volume. But otherwise, in post-socialist anthropological studies based in urban settings, the ‘city’ has tended to provide the background for other concerns – such as Alaina Lemon’s account of gypsies in Moscow (2000), Svetlana Stephenson (2001) on Moscow’s street children, or crime (e.g. Volkov 2002; Varese 2005; Humphrey 2003).

The other point to note is the paucity of research in post-socialist Central Asia rather than Russia, that is also specifically in and of the city. Political scientists such as Dave (2003), Akiner (2000, 2004), Sally Cummings (2005), Schatz (2004), Alaolmolki (2001), Poujol (2000) have all written extensively on political elites whose context is urban but the city itself is not the primary object of their concern. One notable exception is Gentile (2003a, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b and 2004c).

Those anthropologists who have worked in Central Asian cities have tended to choose communities within the city (Petric (2002) and Rasanayagam (2002) on Tashkent’s mahallas, or Beller-Hann (2001) on Uighur healers in Almaty) rather than focus directly on the city itself. Unusually, Joma Nazpary (2001) does take on Almaty as a whole, catching his informants’ sense of the fragmentation of old orders and the inability to conceive of what might emerge in their place. The picture
here is of day-to-day survival, with a particular emphasis on young women turning
to sex work as a means of getting by. As a consequence, however, of foregrounding
the nightmare of present apparent chaos, bardak, the slow emergence of different
ways of seeing and living in the city is less explored. Overall, there has been a
tendency to engage less with either the theoretical imaginings suggested by Low,
or indeed how urban citizens are trying to re-position and re-conceive themselves
and the urban space in the cognitive void left after the Soviet Union.

The focus in this volume is on cities that are, or have recently been, capital cities
of their respective Republics; the data and observations are not necessarily repre-
sentative of all post-Soviet Asian cities. However, the advantage of dwelling on
major conurbations is that these are places where first, rural–urban tensions were
most acute with migration from collapsing collective farms and second, ideas about
the symbolic, economic and social place of cities after the Soviet Union were being
fought out most publicly. Even in the ten years after 1991, the four cities already
showed markedly different trajectories, as the rest of this chapter outlines and the
other chapters discuss in more detail.

With respect to Szelenyi’s point about socialist under-urbanisation (1996), the
cities demonstrated geographies quite at variance with the Central European
socialist city, and indeed with each other. Ulan-Ude was (and still is) extended
over a large territory of industrial complexes interspersed with large areas of scrub
and floodland; various aspects of its sociality, as Manzanova argues, are corre-
spondingly rural in character. However, the remaining three cities we examine
were always densely populated and fairly built-up. The reasons are specific for
each city. Almaty’s expansion is curtailed by its geography: mountains to the south
and unstable geological foundations inhibit growth. As discussed above, the cities
of Central Asia were always straining to accommodate the workers pouring in from
the rest of the Soviet Union. The interstices of planned areas were always rapidly
stuffed with small makeshift dwellings. Despite this, factories were re-located
here during the war with their attendant staff, and attention was lavished on making
Alma-Ata into a grand Republican capital in the 1970s and 1980s under the First
Secretary of the Kazakh Socialist Party, Dinmukhammed Kunaev.

Tselinograd, the city of the 1950s Virgin Lands Campaign that Khrushchev
planned to plough up the Kazakh steppe and provide a second grain bowl for the
Soviet Union, was based on the former small town of Akmolinsk. Workers, pouring
in to man the campaign from all over the Union, ended up sleeping in a
city of tents – so inadequate was the provision of housing (Pohl 1999). Many later
travelled south to Almaty for other work and a more clement climate but both
Almaty and Astana (as Tselinograd was to become) are the result of decades of
hasty temporary building to house the indigent.

Again, Tashkent’s distinct history provides a range of spatial orderings, from
the densely packed old city to the open spaces of the Soviet part where capitalist
land values were clearly at less of a premium than the theatricality of space
dedicated to celebrating and showcasing a particular regime.
The region: history and geography

Geography and history are crucial for understanding the current development of the cities of our study (Figure 1.1). The very nomenclature which distinguishes Central Asia from Kazakhstan reflects the particularities of the region’s history and geography. From the Russian perspective, Kazakhstan was the nomadic border of what was known as the steppic region: a part of southern Siberia that, for reasons of geography, economy and culture, was treated by the administrators as being distinct from the rest of Central Asia (see Khalid 1998: 54–5). Kazakhs were seen as ‘noble savages’ untainted by southern urban Muslim traditions and more amenable to the Russia ‘civilising mission’ (Khalid 1998: 55). Thus, the nineteenth-century Tsarist administration divided the area between the gubernia (Russian province) of the Steppe (which became Soviet Kazakhstan) and the gubernia of Turkestan, which became the four central Asian republics of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan (Matley 1994: 266). Similarly, colonial expansion and Russian peasant migration into eastern Siberia came with the establishment of the Cossack settlement of Verkheneudinsk and the incorporation of Buryat groups into the Russian Empire, the city eventually becoming Ulan-Ude, the Soviet Buryat capital of Buryatia. The consequences of these encounters and the differences between north and south have had long-term implications for the region’s economic and administrative development which extend into the present and have shaped the urban experience in the region.

Tsarist control of Central Asia

It was not until after the Crimean War that Russia really began to intensify its interests in the Central Asian regions, which were becoming more promising for Russian Imperial expansion. Furthermore, in the wake of the American Civil War, which had deprived Europe of cotton, new economic opportunities for cotton production in the region emerged to capitalise on this gap in the market. The expanding, industrialising capitalist economy of the Russian Empire in the wake of the abolition of serfdom in 186117 again prompted more consideration of the region’s economic potential (Kappeler 2001: 193).

Until Tashkent fell to Russian forces in 1865, most local trade was controlled within the region. Although Russia’s burgeoning commercial classes began to see the benefit from increasing Russian domination (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 141; see also Khalid 1998), colonial control was generally limited to the political and military sphere. The conquered people were not considered Russian subjects but aliens (inorodtsy) exempt from military service and administered at the local level by native authorities (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 159 and Kappeler 2001: 197–8). Nevertheless, Tsarist administration effectively destroyed the Kazakhs’ nomadic economy while, in the gubernia of Turkestan, Russian administration bypassed the authority of native elites and created a landed peasantry (Geiss 2003: 213). With Tashkent’s fall, Russian dominance was assured (Carrère d’Encausse...
Figure 1.1 Map of Central Asia
1994: 135; see Brower 2003 and Khalid 1998). Under Russian Imperial administration, a parallel European city was built (Geiss 2003) which established a pattern of European districts in other towns in Turkestan as well (see Tokhtakhodzhaeva, this volume and Brower 2003). In these areas, though districts were distinct, Europeans lived alongside native dwellers. In the steppic regions, the intensification of Russian peasant settlement on Kazakh grazing lands was promoted together with a clear separation of European and native populations, which continued well into Soviet times (Geiss 2003). Cossacks had their own local administration based on stanitساs (Cossack villages) and peasants on village communes (Geiss 2003). Similarly, in southern Siberia, the cities were essentially Russian mercantile and administrative redoubts, while the Buryats and Cossacks lived scattered and at a distance in the steppe.

The Russian presence changed the role of Islam in local politics. In the south, Russian usurpation of native administration in Turkestan created a political space into which Islamic influence could spread, especially as the Russian presence was often countered by traditional political elites. In the north, meanwhile, enforced sedentarisation of nomads, and their impoverishment in the wake of intensified peasant settlement after 1861, made the indigenous population more susceptible to Muslim missionary work (Geiss 2003: 188, 211; Martin 2001).

**Local resistance**

With Russia defeated by a non-European power during the Russo-Japanese war and the first revolution in the Russian Empire in 1905, reformist (Jadid) native intellectuals could begin to imagine the end of Russian colonial domination (Khalid 1998: 229; Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 179; Olcott 1995: 111). For the next two years, however, revolutionary activity in the region was mostly restricted to ethnic Russians. Until 1907, Muslim authority in the губерния of Turkestan ensured a certain hostility to a workers’ movement linked with the Christian colonisers (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 184–5; Khalid 1998: 220–1). It is at this time that Jadid reformers, open to Russian liberal ideas, Russian (Western) schooling and modernisation as well as being pan-Turkic in their allegiance, began to enjoy increased support among mercantile interests in opposition to the conservative Muslim hierarchy (see Khalid 1998 for a full account of Jadidism in Central Asia). By contrast, Russian colonial interests supported Muslim conservatism that served as a bulwark against these native reformist movements (Wolfel 2002: 493).

Already by 1916 there had been significant rebellions by local Central Asians against Russian officials and settlers (Wolfel 2002: 493; Khalid 1998: 240). With the revolution, however, the provisional government prevaricated and did not take a consistent position on the empire’s various national groups. Only with the Bolshevik takeover was the right to limited self-determinacy upheld. With the revolution and civil war, Central Asian political sentiments moved towards more radical nationalism in the Islamicised and sedentary south. The situation in the north was usually ignored by southern reformers (Khalid 1998: 221). Instead there,
autonomy within a federated Russian state was favoured, a tendency which had its origins in the intellectual traditions of nineteenth-century Kazakh enlighteners (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 222–3) and their historical integration into Imperial Russian political and intellectual life (Khalid 1998: 105–7; see Rottier 2003: 72–3 for an extensive discussion). In the Buryat region, certain indigenous intellectuals were engaged in a reform of the Buddhist church to align it with socialist ideas and engage with the broader society of Mongols living in Mongolia and China (‘Pan-Mongolism’), while others, loyal to Russia, tried to design a policy of autonomy within a Russian federated state.

By 1922, the ‘new’ Soviet regional political subdivisions reflected the old steppe/oasis town division of governance with Kyrgyzstan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic comprising the southern Siberian cities of Uralsk, Orenburg, Petropavlosk, Akmolinsk and Semipalatinsk, while Turkestan Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic along with Khwarazmian People’s Republic and Bukharan People’s Republic to the south comprised Alma Ata, Chimkent, Tashkent, Samarkand, Bukhara, Dushanbe and Ashkabad (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 240).

**Soviet Central Asia**

By 1936, however, the various movements for local independence (such as Pan-Turkism and Pan-Mongolism) and the concurrent movement for a greater unified Turkestan had been repressed. They gave way to the boundaries more familiar today of the Soviet and post-Soviet Central Asian States concretised by Stalinist policy. However, with the incorporation within the Soviet Union, earlier problems remained or were only transformed. The Tsarist government’s support of Islamic and Buddhist institutions gave way to enforced state atheism while, in Central Asia, the Imperial government’s development of monoculture, namely cotton, continued under the Soviets – much to the dismay of local reformists who supported Soviet power. The support of local authorities which had been fostered during the 1920s began to unravel during the first Five-Year Plan with the assertion of centralised Soviet authority and the purges of indigenous Soviet cadres in the 1930s. In the same period, famine and collectivisation devastated the Kazakh steppe and this process, along with the purges, created a profound and tragic break in both human and cultural terms with the past (Wolfel 2002: 493 and Akiner 1995). According to some estimates, well over a million Kazakh deaths were caused by collectivisation (Matley 1994: 302; and see Wolfel 2002: 493; Olcott 1995 184–5). Akiner (1995) estimates that 40 per cent of the population perished.) The Buryats suffered greatly from the complete destruction of the Buddhist church and the purge of the party leadership in the 1930s. In southern Central Asia, which was less heavily colonised and more vigorously Islamic, the populations weathered the effects of collectivisation and the purges with only comparatively greater success and with a certain degree of political and cultural continuity compared with the calamitous conditions in the steppes (Carrère d’Encausse 1994: 265).
Industry and commerce

Until the latter half of the nineteenth century, Russian merchant activity was not as important for the region’s economic life as the complementary economy of oasis townspeople and nomadic herders (Matley 1994: 323) which was well developed before the arrival of Imperial authority. With the building of a rail network replacing overland caravans and limited water routes, the Central Asian region effectively became a cotton-growing colony in the years after the American Civil War, dependent on Russia for manufactured goods and with limited effect on local industrial production (Matley 1994: 330).

Russian and Soviet industrialisation had a profound effect on the region from nineteenth-century industrial activities such as cotton production and limited local textile production (predominantly in the south). The steppic regions were characterised by Russian mining activities, mainly funded by American and British investment (Matley 1994: 315; see also Nelson Fell 1916) which helped to stimulate urban development.

Rapid industrialisation did not really take place until the 1930s, following the economic decline of the 1920s and the expansion of electric power production and large-scale textile production (Matley 1994: 332). In later years, steel figured prominently (particularly during the Second World War), along with the exploitation of the mineral resources of the plains regions in Kazakhstan and the evacuation there of industrial enterprises from western Russia. Infrastructure and production in northern Kazakhstan was more integrated into Russia (Siberia and the Urals) than it was in the south. Oil production in the region was limited and took a back seat to Baku. It is only in the post-independence period that oil resources have assumed economic and strategic importance, especially in Kazakhstan and with the recent opening of an overland pipeline. A consequence of this has been the semi-regeneration of some regional centres such as Aktau (formerly Shevchenko), now a staging ground for oil production on the Caspian Sea.

After the Soviet Union: patrimonial structures

The modernising efforts of pan-Turkic reforms of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Jadid reformers found a certain yet guarded sympathy with Soviet power and its modernising efforts. Soviet nationality policy recognised the autonomy of ethnic groups, and the advancement of native elites: pursuing a policy of ‘national in form but socialist in content’ (Geiss 2003: 240; Martin 2001). However, Stalinist purges, famine and the collectivisation of the 1930s cut any lingering institutional and cultural attachment to these earlier efforts at self-determination in the region. New native cadres beholden to the Soviet Union and its patrimonial structures were developed, reproducing a tradition of patrimonialism that had arguably been in existence before Soviet power throughout the Soviet Union (Geiss 2003: 241).

Central Asian leaders at the time of perestroika saw the weakening of the patrimonial system within the Soviet Union as an opportunity to shore up their own
national power bases (Geiss 2003: 242). Late Soviet elites managed this transition effectively as Soviet first secretaries in Central Asia became national presidents. In Uzbekistan, this resulted in crackdowns on conservative Islamic groups and closures of mosques that threatened the secularist government. Islamic identification in Kazakhstan had always been weak. However, the zhuz (Kazakh clans) along with European ethnic affiliations (namely Russian and Ukrainian) have been important throughout the Soviet period and have emerged with particular significance under the presidency of Nursultan Nazarbaev. In contrast to Uzbekistan to the south, national identity and political culture in Kazakhstan are being directed towards a reworked ideology of ‘Eurasianism’. This is a territorially based and multicultural understanding of nationhood that is being promoted for the creation of a ‘Kazakhstani’ state, rather than an exclusively ethnically defined Kazakh state where Kazakhs until recently have been the titular minority. Ulan-Ude, however, as capital of an autonomous republic within the Russian Federation, is grappling with different problems of national self-determination from those faced by other cities and new nations in the region. As a provincial Siberian capital dominated by a large Russian ethnic population, the issue is how to create a Buryat character to the city without offending the majority of the citizens. In this, Ulan-Ude is typical of numerous provincial towns in the Asian part of the Russian Federation where Slavic populations dominate over much smaller indigenous minorities. The ‘Eurasian’ idea is sometimes invoked here too, but the Buryats are increasingly looking towards the east (China, Mongolia, Japan) with both attraction and ambivalence.

It is against this backdrop that the cities of this volume are being examined. Their ostensibly similar colonial and Soviet experiences and histories belie acute differences. These vary from the development of the double European and Islamic city of Tashkent, to the colonial outpost of Verniye that became the Soviet Republican capital city of Almaty – now politically supplanted by the old Cossack outpost of Akmolinsk (the capital of the Virgin Lands Campaign) which became Astana and Kazakhstan’s new capital. Finally, the former Cossack colonial outpost of Ulan-Ude, which emerged as the capital of the Autonomous Republic of Buryatia, and which remains within the Russian Federation, is struggling economically; here dormant Buddhist and shamanic traditions are being re-examined and recreated within a highly diverse setting that includes the renegotiation of relations with Mongolia, a revival of Cossack and nationalistic Russian traditions, and the perceived threat of market domination by Chinese entrepreneurs.

Theoretical themes

In this section we consider a number of themes emerging from the studies in this book as a whole, which have become particularly significant in the post-socialist city. At different levels and in a variety of domains (social, material, political), they are all characterised either by attempts to forge social connections from the family, kin and self to the level of the state and the social contracts therein, and/or by ways of experiencing and imagining the city as a whole. The first overarching
theme concerns questions of legitimacy and right order. How do kin relations fit in the new divisions of public, private and domestic spheres? What is the nature of the new social contract between citizens and the public sector? And how should urban municipalities relate to new national structures? The second broad theme is about new social and conceptual maps of the city. Into this latter group fall first, challenges to the earlier symbolic idea and value of the socialist city, especially in the context of ruralisation and new nationalist projects. Second, new social maps of the city have emerged as some areas become exclusive to the rich, others to the destitute, others still to migrants or ethnic enclaves. Third, the very materiality of the city, whether decaying infrastructure or crumbling surfaces, contributes to how urban citizens are re-thinking their cities and their places in them. These new problems of re-defining legitimacy and emerging social and imaginary geographies are all informed by the particularities of history and geography, as are the concerns of citizens from heads of state to individual householders. These are contested and mutable as new socialities slowly solidify into norms.

All these themes are, of course, intertwined: questions of legitimate relations are often understood, expressed and experienced through changes in the material environment. New social geographies of the city are in part caused by aggregations of kin-based groups, the homeless who colonise the interstitial spaces of the city are often without the relations that sustain life. Other areas are imbued with new or ‘recovered’ social meanings, which are often hotly contested since they point to different kinds of affiliation, such as the sacred spaces discussed by Hürelbaatar in this volume.

**Legitimacy**

For all the subversions, reinterpretations and inadequacies of the Soviet system, there was a common understanding of what constituted the relationship between people and authorities, a relationship which stood for both a social contract and the means to a communist future (see Alexander, this volume). In the socialist Weltanschauung, this was manifested most strikingly in cities, the locus par excellence of revolution and historical progress towards communism. In theory at least, the General Plan for each city directed its development in accordance with Soviet aims, the more personal or localised practices and knowledges of cities occurring within and through such overarching schemas. With the end of centralised planning and command, it has fallen to each new Republic, city and person to find new ways of living in and reading their built environment, of recognising what constitutes a legitimate order.

Legitimacy is loosely taken here to be a common understanding of a right order of social relations. Tracking such notions through the chapters of this book shows the surfacing of a number of different, sometimes competing versions of how to recognise legitimacy – let alone what it is and who claims the right to perform that act of recognition on behalf of ‘the people’ (see Alexander 2004). Humphrey’s and Alexander’s chapters show the continuing potency of Soviet notions of appro-
appropriate rights and obligations of a social contract between the ‘powers’ and the people, whether in the continuity, or the erosion, of the totality of the previous system. In the place of one single official version, several, sometimes incompatible, ideas of legitimacy are by turns fore- and back-grounded, ideas that are expressed through the physical appearance of the urban environment.

The importance of familial metaphors as a basis for understanding ‘right orders’ operates not only between state and citizen (with distinct shades of Soviet paternalism towards the ‘little brothers’ of the Central Asian and Siberian periphery), but also between cities and different administrative levels. This is most clearly shown in Alexander’s chapter where senior officials fall back on the trope of family structure to discuss how new relationships between citizens and state should be. The infinite variety of constructions available through the familial metaphor is also demonstrated here as another senior official tries to find a way of explaining and legitimating (or not) the relation between recently dispossessed but wealthy Almaty and the new capital, Astana, which was draining much of Almaty’s revenue in the late 1990s. In different forms, the legitimacy, or otherwise, of kin in new urban settings, appears throughout all these chapters: the ambivalence of competitive family relations, the morality of kin-based relations over market-based relations or the immorality of kin preferment in the public and business sectors and the effect on the city’s physical appearance of families clustering together in family compounds.

Temporality also plays a role in the search for the underlying authority of these cities, many of which are manifestly Soviet but are now the political foci of recently independent Republics. Astana, where the President of Kazakhstan is building a new city for an old one, is simultaneously pointing to the pre-Soviet past for Kazakh authenticity, and to the future for a potential legitimacy untainted by that same immediate Soviet past (Buchli, this volume; see also Grant 2001). These three chapters thus focus on ideas of legitimate social relations expressed through the very materiality of the city.

Humphrey’s chapter concerns the changing political economy of Ulan-Ude as privatisation begins to make inroads into the previously complete control of the city by the Soviet administration. As Humphrey observes, in contemporary Ulan-Ude, this separation of social groups through geographical distance has now been further underscored by privatisation, which has added another layer of economic differentiation. Whether or not privatisation (at a far reduced scale than is occurring in the other cities of our study) has produced increased wealth, it has certainly emphasised distinctions between the new rich on the one hand and the recently impoverished on the other. Aware of the divisiveness caused by these economic distinctions, the post-socialist institution of the mayorate is attempting to counter separation, first through stressing inclusive rituals and signs and, second, through shoring up the infrastructure of the whole city. In other words, rituals are being deliberately employed by the city authorities to suggest once more a single way in which the city can be read and hence a unified system of relations to which urban citizens belong. In defiance of the semiotic fragmentation described by Buchli, the
mayorate is attempting an enactment of concord and legitimate urban sociality. Again, in contradistinction to Almaty (Alexander, this volume), and in a public attempt to maintain authority and order, the public sector is attempting to take clear control of the urban infrastructure on which the city depends.

Some of the emerging career and indeed survival strategies take into account the necessity for close connections with the bureaucracy, and indeed also link recent urban migrants (whether businessmen or economic migrants) to the mayorate. Despite such links, however, the bureaucratic efforts to shore up the social, political and physical disintegration and separation of the city are being irredeemably undermined by the development of new exclusive forms of sociality created by economic changes.

In Alexander’s chapter, the effect of privatisation is once again considered both from the point of view of the officials who managed the process of divesting the administration of its assets in the early 1990s and now control what is left of the local state sector, and from the perspective of residents. This time the city is Almaty and there is a sharp difference from Ulan-Ude: Kazakhstan’s huge mineral wealth has attracted a plethora of foreign investors, from international oil corporations to those seeking smaller pickings from what the *Financial Times* called ‘The Kazakh Sale of the Century’ (25 October 1996) during the mass privatisation of state property in the 1990s. Although Almaty has lost its political primacy to Astana, it retains its pre-eminence as the Republic’s financial centre. As a consequence both extreme wealth and poverty are evident in the city, even though spatial stratification marks the centre by bright lights, casinos and four-wheel-drive vehicles for the rich, while impoverished migrants tend to live and work around the city’s edges.

While the authorities attempt to absorb and control the private and commercial sectors in Ulan-Ude, the question is turned on its head in Almaty. Here, the precise role and responsibilities of the city administration are decidedly unclear in a world where commercial interests now appear to dominate. The socialist social contract that offered a complete work and living environment in return for labour has unravelled – but there is little understanding either for citizens or for many officials about what should replace it. In the eyes of many citizens, the current municipal administration is failing to order and control the city, instead turning it over to private interests, which are generally taken to be incompatible with the public good.

With such abnegation of responsibility, the legitimacy of the new regime at both local and central levels is seen to be questionable by residents. Officials inhabit several positions from asserting that privatisation has led to a natural, and therefore legitimate, development of economic relations into a world where citizens must ‘grow up’ and participate as equal members, to querying their present role as failing to provide the overarching welfare provision that was their responsibility in the Soviet period.

Ironically, perhaps, the authority of the previous regime is now more apparent in its absence as property rights in the infrastructure that sustains the city switch rapidly between public and private management, and accountability becomes
murkier by the day. The crucial role of city infrastructures in actually materialising and constituting national, economic and social spaces has been analysed by Stephen Graham and Simon Marvin (1995: 176 and passim; Humphrey 2003), the large-scale, public provision of infrastructure being an aspiration of modernist administrations well beyond the Soviet reach (Healey et al. 1995). Stephen Collier (2004) further highlights the particular importance of utility networks in the Soviet and post-Soviet Russian context: the bitter cold and reliance on a co-ordinating institution to provide heating and hot water, often to far-flung locations, accentuated social and political connections and power relations through the highly visible pipes that are such a feature of Soviet urban landscapes. The devastating effects on public confidence in new administrations in 2002 when warmth and light abruptly ceased with the onset of exceptionally low temperatures are documented by both Collier (2004) and Humphrey (2003). The latter further emphasises how the operative failure of Ulan-Ude’s heating system only seemed to validate familiar Marxist connections between base (or infra-) and superstructures.

Alexander’s chapter adds a further twist on this theme of legitimacy and pipes. Through case-studies of the partial transference of property rights in the previously wholly state-managed water and sewerage complexes for Almaty, the chapter details the importance of the continuing flows within the pipes, as well as the conduits themselves, in literally and metaphorically constituting the body politic. Organic and familial metaphors are used by citizens and officials alike in talking through what is felt to be the dissolution of social norms and expectations, the severance of necessary connections for the continuation of social life. The apparent surrender of the basic means of urban life into the hands of foreigners has further raised profound anxieties among many citizens that their welfare has been abandoned by the very organisations whose role is to ensure it.

Focusing on Astana as the literal and symbolic centre of the new Republic of Kazakhstan, Buchli places the contemporary elite’s search for a material form to represent the legitimacy of the new Republic (and hence its new government) in a much longer timeframe. The question here is one of recognition and what comprises a right order in both spatial and temporal frameworks. In classic colonial mode, Tsarist Russian chroniclers of Kazakh villages (auls) linked such apparently basic dwellings with a sub-human order, thus underscoring the ‘natural’ right of the Russian Empire to extend its version of civilisation to such far-flung territories. Such confusion over the ability to distinguish between different modes of dwelling and what they signify continues now. The small Soviet city of Tselinograd is being consciously overlaid with a new, official version of a Eurasian capital to serve as the governmental pivot for the independent Republic. Visually, the city has changed dramatically, and is continuing to do so, with huge residential and ministerial constructions shimmering with shiny cladding dominating the centre. Yet anxieties proliferate over whether or not the new face of the city ‘looks right’ and thus is indeed constitutive of national legitimacy. This concern with the legibility of the material surfaces of the rising capital city is constantly confounded by local corruption in the construction industry, and consequent poor building
materials and practices, which result in surface decay almost as soon as striking, innovative buildings arise.

Buchli contrasts this spatial pursuit of legitimacy through the reading of the material surfaces of the city, following Buck-Morss (2000) with the expanding symbolic use of the shanyrak. This is the circular opening at the top, supported by a cross of birch twigs, of the traditional form of dwelling for nomadic Kazakhs, the yurta. The shanyrak is at once a key structural feature of the yurta, is instantly recognisable when metonymically extracted to serve as decoration for urban constructions and, further, acts as a metaphor for Kazakh lineages – pointing both to the ancestors and to future generations. In the proliferation of ornamental shanyrak, whether in the new Republic’s heraldic devices, inserted into fencing, overlaid on buildings or in interior decoration, Buchli sees an extrapolation from family-based legitimacy to that of the nation (see also Alexander 2004). Semantic readings of Astana’s surfaces are therefore invited to play through both spatial and temporal signifiers, both of which hark back to ideas of emerging orders of national legitimacy and a ‘correct’ material order.

The remaining chapters again play against and through different pasts and different spaces in setting up the contemporary stage as valid or lacking moral value and authority for various urban constituencies. Thus, Tokhtakhodzhaeva’s chapter is both articulated through and against the Soviet period. She sees, in Tashkent’s current condition, an erosion of the positive progress made during the Soviet period; for her there is now only social dissolution, anomie and a focus on individualist maximisation at the cost of previous cohesion for the common good. Manzanova’s chapter raises similar issues in the context of rural to urban migration in Ulan-Ude where, she suggests, the sudden, large-scale influx of impoverished rural dwellers is eroding the quintessential, moral nature of the city. This returns us to questions of whether ‘the city’ can be legitimately accounted for as a social phenomenon sui generis, and whether or not the ‘socialist city’ ever really constituted a specific category of spatial organisation and living practices in more than ideology and theory. The (re)emergence of sacred sites in Ulan-Ude that is discussed in Hürelbaatar’s chapter suggests at once the palimpsest of geographies contained in any city where administrative sectors are overlaid with individual routes and sacred urban topographies. Again, the question is partly that of recognition: whether or not one group’s reading of a given space as sacred (thus incorporating the city in a cosmological legitimacy) is acknowledged as valid by other urban units: administrative, other religions, other ethnicities.

The cities as lived symbolically and materially

In the previous section we discussed the theme of rethinking legitimate connections in cities, a theme that runs through most of the chapters in different forms, particularly in those of Humphrey, Alexander and Buchli. Here we focus on the different and changing ways in which ‘the city’ itself is conceived and experienced by local citizens in our four cities: the new social and imaginary geographies of the
post-socialist Central Asian city and the ways in which these geographies are condensing and taking on concrete forms within what might otherwise appear to be conditions of chaos.

Since the wished-for uniformity of Soviet cities was imposed upon highly diverse regional and historical conditions, the extent to which the homogenising and integrative effects of the Soviet Plan was achieved was significantly less than the ideal. Quite simply, the relatively uniform city plans were never applied to a physical and cultural terra nullius but on and through a whole raft of existing buildings and practices. Just as post-socialist economies have not followed standard, consistent trajectories but can only be understood in the context of particular histories (otherwise known as path-dependency: Stark 1992, 1994), so too have cities and their citizens ‘after the plan’ followed quite distinct courses. Beneath apparent similarities, both urban disorders in the wake of the Soviet Union and subsequent emerging new orders have taken distinctive forms, as the chapters in our study show. Here we see these disorders and orders as changing and sedimenting social geographies of access to different parts of the city, of political, economic and cosmological affiliations, of the exclusion of the homeless and the almost defensive clustering together of others in segregated, walled compounds.

As we mentioned earlier, a socialist sense of the urban self was strongly connected to an understanding of ‘the city’ as emblematic of modernity and progress. Crumbling cities, political systems and economies were mirrored by what has frequently been described as a ‘fragmentation’ of the self (e.g. Pine 1998). Quite apart from the need for survival, another necessity arose (admittedly of more concern to elites): that of finding a new way of thinking about ‘the city’. What does it mean to live in a city as opposed to the countryside? What does the city now signify, if not socialist progress, and to what broader political and geographical imaginary is the city now linked, if not the Soviet Union? Astana, as the new-for-old city in our study, most self-consciously plays out these dilemmas, yet these attempts to find ways of living in and thinking about post-socialist cities appear in all the chapters. What we are examining here, therefore, is how and what social and imaginative maps of the city have arisen through the newly visible fissures and cracks of the former system. We look at a number of phenomena, most of which have appeared in Central Asian cities since the fall of the Soviet Union and discuss particular formations in Ulan-Ude, Tashkent, Almaty and Astana respectively.

**The privatisation of public city space**

In all four cities previously public spaces have been sold off for private developments, and segregated housing compounds for the newly rich have emerged, often, though not always, on the city edges. The degree to which this has happened in each city is quite different.

Humphrey describes how citizens of Ulan-Ude experience privatisation as a process whereby new ‘private’ objects such as houses appear in the landscape where things were once predominantly public. Along with this, new kinds of
subjects are created such as owners and householders. New subjects are defined by wealth rather than status: these ‘new Buryats’ of Ulan-Ude are the counterpart of the new Kazakhs and Uzbeks elsewhere in our study. In key Kazakh cities such as Almaty and Astana, where privatisation has been far more widespread than in either Ulan-Ude or Tashkent, newly private housing has been accompanied by partial transfer contracts for the management and maintenance of the city’s core infrastructural services as Alexander describes. Formerly state buildings are now often leased as office space, half-built constructions that fell under the municipal authority’s ‘Department of Communal Property’ found their way into the hands of private speculators and have been transformed into offices, casinos, entertainment and sport centres. This accentuates the sense that previously public spaces and flows have been interrupted and marked off for restricted access. The fact that, in many cases in Kazakhstan, foreign companies often acquired the rights to manage utilities that directly affected the new private citizens in their homes added a further layer of anxieties as to what public space and private space in these cities actually mean in practice.

The old Soviet plan was broadly divided into industrial, administrative and residential zones, the last being relatively socially heterogeneous; these zones are now being overlaid with new social divisions which have largely emerged from the rapid re-configuration of assets. Neighbourhoods are no longer mixed as they were in the past, poor and rich are segregated, both often into marginal areas, the outlying developments of the rich or the outlying no-man’s-lands or ‘bandit-places’ as Humphrey describes where no outsider can go in safety. The two extremes here are the impoverished and the rich. One increasingly familiar feature of post-socialist cities is the appearance of lavish new houses (kottedzhy), often gated, often in settlements and usually on the edge of cities (see also Humphrey 1998). Certainly, this is the case in all the cities discussed here, although most markedly in Ulan-Ude, Astana and Almaty. In Ulan-Ude, building houses from scratch means that they can be set apart from the Soviet-style quarters. However, as Manzanova describes, the inability to secure these suburban areas has meant that elite ‘new Buryats’ are reconsidering the advantages that secure apartment compounds offer after their attempts at privatised, individual dwellings.

In Almaty, those who can, bribe officials to allow them to build on the edge of the city that slopes up towards the mountains: this is simply because the city’s pollution levels have become much worse and the southern edge affords fresh air as well as dramatic panoramas of the mountains and city. Such developments are damaging the fragile and potentially dangerous environment irretrievably. Increasingly, since 2002, tall, phenomenally expensive apartment blocks have also been shooting up in Almaty’s centre. While extra-urban gated compounds are less noticeable in Tashkent, by contrast, new elite settlements are highly visible and central in Astana, built along the riverside as part of the President’s plan focusing on revitalising the city centre.

This ‘publicness’ and high visibility of Astana’s lavish new private constructions, whatever the quality of building, is something that marks out this city from the
other three. More common is the element of secrecy that accompanies these new elite settlements wherever they are found: quite at odds with the otherwise brash flaunting of newly acquired wealth that is often commented on by poorer citizens. Often these new elite settlements are hardly known about and do not even appear on maps. They are hidden from view, off main thoroughfares, sometimes behind forests, nearly always behind high walls. Security is paramount where it is believed by the owners that visibility encourages crime and resentment of these new expressions of economic prosperity and the social aspirations they attempt to materialise. As people become more separated economically and geographically, these new enclaves based on wealth form more intensive networks of kin affiliations. For rich and poor alike, in Ulan-Ude as in the other cities of the study, it is your kin or imagined kin who are more likely to be trusted.

Urban networks

If the less economically successful are excluded by walls and fences surrounding private residential compounds, office buildings and leisure centres, so too are they often shut out from access to resources if they lack the requisite networks. Broadly speaking, two kinds of urban network can be observed operating to various degrees in all four cities: vertical (based on patronage) and horizontal (based on kin and friendship). In many cases these are continuations of the unofficial support networks that served to shore up the inefficiencies of the Soviet planned economy (Millar 1985; Ledeneva 1998). The key difference now is that these ‘grey’ relations have come to dominate the urban scene, creating a dense sociality of mutual dependence which serves to re-integrate the frayed social and urban landscape and provide a measure of stability. These social networks have supplanted the defunct system of allocating resources based on the plan; for the most part these are invisible, unlike the more palpably visible and evident nature of the old Soviet city and its workings.

Spatially, these networks are often reflected in clusters of mutually supporting kin, sometimes clubbing together to build joint dwellings. At the other extreme, the unconnected often find themselves homeless, barely scratching a living in the interstices of the city, sometimes living on city dumps as Baldayeva describes for Ulan-Ude, sometimes in heating ducts and abandoned buildings in the centre.

The last section discussed the importance of the past in the search for national legitimacy in the new independent Republics – especially where the city in question is a capital and therefore embodies the nation and the land. But this hunt for a virtuous order in the past also operates at more domestic levels, where intimate past connections of kin or friendship serve as the means for forging new relations in the present. In Ulan-Ude old school friends or neighbourhood associates who literally come from another time and place (the Soviet Union) now represent a nostalgic utopian past which becomes the basis for forming alliances in the present (Humphrey, this volume). This moral economy is based on nostalgia for a lost ideal state of sociality, a lost utopian space of past relations rather than the
Soviet promise of a bright future. However, these social densities can also appear dysfunctional and overwhelming in the context of Ulan-Ude, where, rather than moving you forwards towards a Eurasian future, they appear to ‘suck you in’ to the mire of Ulan-Ude’s stagnant development. Here old people stay, unable or unwilling to escape while the young move out to find opportunities elsewhere. On another level, Almaty’s municipal officials again draw on vanished relationships with ministers to recall a past when Almaty was the capital, and city and Republican power were co-located. In Astana, the new urban landscape is literally being implemented by another network: largely Soviet-trained, Russian architects.

Although discussed neither explicitly nor in detail in this volume, a particular kind of network has arisen in the post-socialist city which has profoundly changed its nature and orientation and is peculiarly characteristic of Central Asian cities, especially in Kazakhstan. As the section above on the regional background suggests, this region, together with Siberia, has a long history of population movement and long-distance trading links. This was intensified by Stalin’s policy of deporting ethnic groups and political prisoners to what became the Gulag heartland (see Pohl 2002). As a result many families were widely dispersed both across the Soviet Union and to neighbouring states such as China where many fled to escape famine and repressions. When national borders shifted with the end of the Soviet Union, many such far-flung kin relations were, and still are, used to establish international trading links that could still keep business ‘in the family’. This has particularly been the case in Almaty, not only located on the edge of Kazakhstan, but also close to China: the market that grew at an astonishing rate on Almaty’s edge symbolised, for many citizens, the simultaneous breaking open of old boundaries and the kin-based, enclosed nature of modern commerce. To a lesser extent, such trading across kin links occurs in all four cities, including Ulan-Ude, where relatives in Mongolia and China – formerly despised for having fled the revolution – are now being sought out for trading opportunities. This pattern of scattered kin regrouping in the post-socialist period has affected not only trading, but also the social geography of cities and the increasing ruralisation of settlements in Siberia and Central Asia, as discussed in the next two sections.

**New geographical spaces**

As we have seen in terms of the privatisation of public spheres, new sets or relations emerge and take concrete form. One of the most striking developments in the cities of Central Asia is the reassertion of sacred spaces. In Tashkent during the Soviet period, mosques were converted into storage facilities, workshop schools or other distinctly secular uses. Holy sites such as graves went untended. Now, as Tokhtakhodzhaeva describes, such sites are slowly being brought back into use. The Christian presence is less marked, although a new Orthodox church has been built recently and the former main Catholic church extended. Yuri Dombrovsky’s famous novels chronicling Alma-Ata in the 1930s centred around the city’s cathedral, then being used as a dusty storehouse for archaeological artefacts. This
cathedral is once more, along with the rebuilt Nikolski church, a thriving centre of worship. The early spate of building new mosques and churches funded from abroad has abated, along with a certain withdrawal from reliance on foreign models of development and finance. The broader religious ambivalence on the part of the state in Kazakhstan (as detailed in the regional background section) is reflected in the variety of mosques and churches appearing, and the singular lack of state funding to excavate or restore Buddhist monasteries. The sacred places of Ulan-Ude are steadily being restored by local citizens and reflect the variety of religious affiliations: shamanism, Buddhism and Russian Orthodox (Hürelbaatar, this volume).

In addition to these new sacred spaces, in Tashkent and to a limited degree in Almaty, are the mahalla. Taking the broadest definition, the mahalla, is a neighbourhood in an Islamic or Turkic settlement (see Alexander 2002; Lapidus 1967; Stirling 1965) and is therefore a community largely defined according to territory. In Uzbekistan, the mahalla has always been of peculiar importance in urban life as a unit of social organisation, but it has also changed substantially in terms of role and influence from the Soviet era. The importance of local mosques is now explicit rather than clandestine but, more significantly, the mahalla and, previously informal, councils of local elders have been transformed into new blocks in the state hierarchy of administrative levels. Thus this intensely ‘local’ space has been incorporated into ‘state’ space with the monitory elders effectively looking both ways (rather than just concentrating on internal control). In Uzbekistan the new official mahallas coexist with the old, much smaller neighbourhood mahallas. The mahalla, as an informal local community with its own strictures and norms, also appears in Almaty where there are seven Uighur mahallas, but these play no part in the wider urban or state administration.

As new social maps of the city have emerged with different groups having different access to and uses of various spaces, so too have new vocabularies emerged to describe these spaces that counter the more guarded imaginings just mentioned. Humphrey describes the appearance of ‘Yeltsin City’, the rubbish dump and its homeless population in Ulan-Ude, while the other side of the river where unregulated private construction take places is sardonically labelled the ‘Left Bank’. Similarly in Astana the same irony is used to describe the undeveloped southern bank of the river Ishym which is Astana’s own ‘Left Bank’ where the new capital’s government complex is being built. This irony is used to describe emphatically what a place is not: the civic paradise of Paris’s Rive Gauche and equally the dystopian and utopian visions of Ulan-Ude and Astana respectively.

**Ruralisation**

These variously hopeful and sardonic imaginings are accompanied by extreme anxieties. National and urban changes, in all the areas of our study, are accompanied by concerns over ruralisation: a fear that the road to progress, and the utopian bright future as promised and defined by Soviet development, is now not
only impossible, but is in fact likely to be reversed. Urbanity, in many cases, seems to be giving way to ‘pre-modern’ forms of living and sociality. These anxieties are particularly vivid in relation to observations of how the pre-modern past, in the shape of ‘the rural’, is coming into the cities. Rural migrants from defunct regional centres bring with them rural habits and subsistence patterns. This is the case in all the cities of our study as collapsing rural infrastructures force people off the land and either to local cities or abroad to richer pickings. Civil war in Tajikistan between 1992 and 1997 resulted in refugees fleeing to Kyrgyzstan and then on to Kazakhstan’s cities. The markets on Almaty’s borders were famously stuffed with illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries.22

While industrial infrastructures failed and subsistence costs skyrocketed, some resorted to an almost pre-modern peasant life of limited subsistence farming within their city garden plots or on ‘spare’ patches of land. This is the ‘countryside in the city’ that Tokhtakhodzhaeva describes as producing apprehension among more urban citizens in Tashkent. The same unease is articulated by informants in Astana over the illegality of keeping livestock in city-centre properties. The sounds and smells of hidden sheep, chickens and other animals give rise to the horror of possible social regression.

These stop-gap measures, though apparently designed to be independent of expensive and failing city structures, often exacerbate the precariously functioning city infrastructure – as in Tashkent where water is overused to maintain urban farming plots at the expense of other city dwellers. The peripheries of these cities are often where these rural migrants come and settle, illegally occupying land or occupying suburban dacha plots that have been abandoned by Russian and German emigrants as in Astana. As Manzanova notes, the village is brought to the city, creating a hybrid space. Similarly, Humphrey observes how people literally reassemble their homes on the urban periphery closer to infrastructure, services and the few jobs that may be going, while city officials feel morally compelled to ignore the illegal settlements and land appropriations. This uneasiness over regression is further exacerbated by the use of distinctly non-modern materials such as mud brick in Astana, Almaty and Tashkent where the stigma of poverty and a pre-modern past is associated with these materials. All these constructions flaunt Soviet-era industrialised norms for safety and construction, further exacerbating concerns especially in the geologically unstable earthquake zones of Almaty, Tashkent and Ulan-Ude.

**Imaginings of the city**

While these imaginative geographies are taking hold and shape at the local level in the experiences of these cities’ inhabitants, political elites are approaching the city from a different perspective. Of all the cities in our study, Astana is where the process of imagining the city and its place in the world is one of the prime concerns of the President and most visibly on display. Here state power, oil money and foreign investment are marshalled to materialise a distinctly new body of
architecture and urban life with which to give expression to state-sponsored Eurasianism. This imagined future is not purely conceptual but highly visible and material (if not quite durable, as Buchli shows). This new urban landscape of shiny new buildings in their bright colours and titanium cladding is intended to demonstrate a multicultural Eurasian modern capital free of interethnic conflict that assures investors and governments that this is the best place to do business in Central Asia. This is the style that local architects in Central Asia call ‘international’, as identikit shopping complexes and apartment blocks shoot up in the major cities. Most architects in Kazakhstan are aware that bolt-on cupolas or buildings decorated with elements of the yurta will win them tenders from Akims. Astana, however, also carries the burden of manifesting the imagined future of the President’s 2030 plan.

But the rapid construction with, at times, shoddy workmanship, also provides another means of imagining and speaking about rampant government corruption, the unsustainability of the developing capital and its future of prosperous interethnic Eurasian stability. This is a process that Tokhtakhodzhaeva also notes for Tashkent where money for economic development is redirected to spruce up government buildings, shoring up the prestige of the state at the expense of the true engines of development: industry.

The careful zoning of the Soviet plans and the neatly ordered microregions were always let down by the shacks and private dwellings that filled in the gaps and told another story of incomplete provision. These ‘alternative’ spaces that fail to conform to administrative imaginings of the city (see below) continue. In Astana, local preservation initiatives promoted by the sizeable Russian population serve to create an indigenous Russian connection. The descendants of the Russian peasant immigrants who came to Kazakhstan (see also Manzanova) in the nineteenth century are now asserting an autochthonous connection to the territory – as primordial as the Kazakh claim – and are thus unable or unwilling to ‘move back’, while still asserting a link with Russia.

The move of the political capital to Astana was a blow to the self-esteem of Almaty’s municipal officials despite the sop of officially being named a ‘special’ city of Republican importance. More than this, as Alexander’s chapter notes, Almaty’s wealth was drained in the late 1990s and early 2000s to support poorer cities and the transformation of Astana into a capital city. The slight is felt most sorely by officials who ran through a series of re-namings of their city in the search for a new identity: ‘leisure capital’, ‘Kazakhstan’s southern capital’ and so on. But the solidity of Almaty’s cultural, financial and educational presence gives most of the citizens, who comment on it, a great deal of pride. Moreover, the temperate climate (as opposed to the extremes of Astana) of Almaty together with its quite astonishing greenness give rise to formulaic paens from its citizens describing it (despite the recent efflorescence of high-rise, glitzy buildings) as ‘a garden city, a beautiful city, a city of trees’. For many, Astana is where one might work, but Almaty is where one ‘lives’. Imagining a city is a relative luxury it should be noted: all four cities host thousands of service workers who see the city simply as a source of income.
In Tashkent, when new architectural forms are imagined, the reinvention of traditional references in the shapes of cupolas is not pursued. Instead the references are to European neo-classicism and the ‘giganticism’ of the postwar Stalinist period. What is being invoked in the houses of the new Uzbek is not a nationalist imaginary, but a highly eclectic set of images that typically are foreign: overt nationalist or Islamic references could be seen as problematic in a secular state and among the emerging entrepreneurial classes.

**Conclusion: after the General Plan**

We conclude by thinking about the sharp variation in contemporary urban planning and directions between Tashkent, Astana, Almaty and Ulan-Ude. The regular appearance of ‘General Plans’ in the Soviet period detailed the approved directions and methods for each city’s development and they were based on a close knowledge of local environmental conditions, but were ultimately sanctioned by Moscow. As a result, powerful central industrial ministries frequently had the last word when it came to designing and implementing the development of Soviet cities. This tight, bureaucratic control of urban expansion has largely continued in Ulan-Ude (Zhimbiev 2000), but has changed markedly in the other three cities in our study. While Tashkent and Almaty, to different degrees, are caught between conflicting ideas of unfettered market development on the one hand and local or central state control on the other, Astana has become a presidential project carefully designed and directed to represent a very particular (Eurasianist) view of contemporary Kazakhstan’s future.

What the contributions to this book therefore show is the diversity of responses to the Soviet Union’s collapse, and the creation of capitals for independent nation-states from the shards of Soviet provincial republican capital cities. The fact that, in the 1990s, all these cities were broadly similar in administration, planning practice and, in many cases, physical appearance belies the acute differences that have emerged.

Astana, the most dramatically ‘new’ of all these cities, is a good case in point. Yet, for all its apparent radicalism, the ideas which inspire it are, in many ways, simply an updated version of older Soviet ideas about internationalism. Then, it was an ideological tool to suggest a unified socialist community of many, equal, national groups; now internationalism is given new life to ensure a unified state does not break up into ethnic enclaves. As Schatz (2004) observes, however, the internationalism with a Russian face that created the uniformly planned cities of the former Soviet Union has given way here to an internationalism with a Kazakh face in Kazakhstan. Again, the ideas of Kisho Kurokawa, the Japanese architect chosen to design Astana’s masterplan, resonate with the notion of ‘Eurasianism’ with which post-socialist elites are familiar from the controversial writings of the Soviet ethnographer Lev Gumilev.

As the chapters show, it is not only the ideologies of the new that are streaked through with past ideas – much of the basic infrastructure welding together each
city is Soviet. The main problems with maintaining and updating elderly systems of pipes and transport are first, the extraordinary degree of system centralisation: heating for an entire district is switched on and off at one point, and second the long period of lack of maintenance that cities suffered under perestroika and, in the early 1990s. Many key administrative, cultural, residential buildings are also Soviet in origin, frequently crumbling away – even if under the recently applied façades in richer areas.

The question we would like to end on is where and how genuinely new urban forms have arisen in terms of moral orders, urban sociality, spatial configurations and materiality. In some cases, the ‘new’ is a hybrid form such as where ‘city’ and ‘village’ appear to merge. In other instances, beliefs, practices and the sacredness of certain spaces which were suppressed during the Soviet era have re-emerged into the open – almost through the cracks of the failed Soviet system. What Ulan-Ude, in particular, shows is a developing urban landscape where an autonomous Buryat ethnic and religious consciousness exists in an ethnic space alongside, rather than in competition with, Russian, colonial or Soviet areas. Similarly, the state-sponsored shanyrak in Kazakhstan is an attempt to create a common point of reference within an unbounded landscape and thereby a common national space. In Tashkent, Almaty and Astana, the centre and the outskirts are the most direct materialisation of contemporary urban life in Central Asia. While migrants gather on the cities’ edges in shacks, new state and private wealth is externally manifested in the shiny new materials shipped from the West that mark out city centres and residential, suburban segregated compounds. Laminate, paint, granite, ceramics and other materials are clipped on to old façades to disguise deteriorating buildings or to adorn new ones. Internally too, evromont, the updating of Soviet-era flats to meet Western standards and taste, takes place everywhere the owners have spare money. Ironically perhaps, a new uniformity is emerging where it is hard to distinguish the house and lifestyle of the ‘new Buryat’ from that of the ‘new Kazakh’ or the ‘new Russian’. The lives of the poor and methods of ‘getting by’, to paraphrase Tolstoy, are more distinct, such as the ‘traditional’ lives, independent of modern state infrastructures in Tashkent. What might appear as ethnic revivals when examining these cities individually, appear comparatively, as the results of the creativity of individuals, groups and officials, making do the best way they can under the uncertain and highly varied conditions of these post-socialist cities in Siberia and Central Asia.

Notes
1 The case studies in this volume represent part of the output of a Leverhulme Trust Research Grant entitled ‘Reconstructing Urban Life in the Cities of Post-Soviet Asia’. Most of the research was carried out in 2001–2003. The principal investigators of the project were the editors of this volume. Caroline Humphrey, Catherine Alexander and Victor Buchli. As the preface details, subsequent grants also facilitated the fieldwork and research for this book.
2 Collectively, the studies in this book involved interviews with a wide range of individuals, from bureaucratic elites to householders and the homeless. In keeping with
standard anthropological practice, the identities of these individuals have been made anonymous throughout.

3 As Harvey (1990) and Buck-Morss (2000) both note, the 1920s and 1930s saw astonishingly close conformity between Euro-American industrialised nations and the Soviet Union. Both Fordist and Soviet industrial labour focused on the links between efficient factory floors and the minutiae of domestic life.

4 As discussed briefly below, archaeological digs in south-east and central Kazakhstan point to earlier settlements. Since, however, there is nothing to indicate clearly an organic development linking such archaeological remains with the nineteenth-century townships, we are assuming for present purposes that these cities began as colonial settlements.

5 Soviet Alma-Ata was renamed ‘Almaty’ in the mid-1990s. The names of present-day Almaty and Astana have passed through several variations. These are discussed in the chapters by Alexander and Buchli (this volume); the contemporary names are largely used in the Introduction for reasons of consistency.

6 A brief history of each city is provided in the chapters by Tokhtakhodzhaeva (Tashkent), Alexander (Almaty), Buchli (Astana) and Humphrey (Ulan-Ude).

7 Uzbekistan’s two other main cities, Bukhara and Samarkand, are traditionally Tajik, although the ethnic demographics are beginning to change there too.

8 A rough population count in 2005 is 3 million. Almaty follows at approximately half that size.

9 Both observations made to Catherine Alexander during fieldwork.

10 Henri Saint-Simon, a wealthy banker, envisaged a planned, modernised ‘socialist’ society driven by industrial technology and with the more chaotic elements of capitalism excised. His version of socialist organisation, however, was decidedly undemocratic: he suggested a ruling committee of bankers to oversee the smooth running of this brave new world.

11 Fourier advocated the reorganisation of society into units of approximately 1,500 people, termed phalanstère or ‘phalanstery’, which would share labour, wealthy and housing. The details were never fully worked out.

12 This usually refers to the high numbers of migrants to cities from collapsed collective farms.

13 Ulan-Ude has one such township, called Sotsgorodok, attached to the railway stock building company. It is now a somewhat dismal enclave and no longer prized housing. The collective aspects, such as common dining-rooms instead of large individual kitchens, no longer conform to citizens’ expectations.

14 New housing complexes of panel construction did become a feature of Central and East European cities, but were usually seen as residential quarters servicing the industrial zone rather than a complete city.

15 Chauncey Harris also had a long research interest in Soviet urbanisation culminating in his 1970 monograph entitled Cities of the Soviet Union: Studies in Their Functions, Size, Density, and Growth.

16 Whyte is discussing violent or dramatic incidents that make their way into the newspapers.

17 In 1861 Tsar Alexander II abolished serfdom, completely restructuring social and economic relations in the regions affected.

18 Nineteenth-century Central Asians (unlike Muslims within Russia) were not fully incorporated, treated at arm’s length as inorodtsy (aliens) and subject to Shariat (canon) and Adat (customary) law at the local level (Geiss 2003: 172).

Since the nineteenth century the forces of religious conservatism had always had a significant political role – in turns held in check by secular indigenous political elites or supported by Imperial authorities to counter these elites.

Funding for archaeological excavations is largely sourced from Japan. This is reducing with a crackdown on immigrants.

References

Bellamy, E. (1951) [1881], Looking Backward, New York: Modern Library.


Gradov, G. (1968), Gorod y byt, Moscow: Literatury po Stroitel’stvu.


Howard, E. (1946) [1902], *Garden Cities of To-Morrow*, London: Faber and Faber.


Reed, A. (2005), “‘My blog is me’: texts and persons in UK online journal culture (and anthropology)”, *Ethnos* 70(2): 220–42.


2

ASTANA

Materiality and the city

Victor Buchli

Introduction

While walking through the Tsarist-era back streets of Kazakhstan’s new capital Astana, my Kazakh companion, a Soviet-era trained economist, pointed to a new row of bright, neo-classically inspired housing, and asked me, ‘Does this look right?’ (Figure 2.1). At first I was a bit taken aback, not sure how the question was being put or how to answer it. I asked in reply, ‘How do you mean?’ He responded by saying that since I was a Westerner and presumably had a better understanding of Western architecture, he wanted to know what I made of these structures that were supposed to be Western and modern. He simply had no experience with these new forms. Attempting to be polite, I answered rather uncertainly and unsatisfactorily that I thought they were quite attractive. However, this question – ‘Does this look right?’ – points to something that has emerged in the course of research here. It is one of the key problems in understanding the built environment of this steppic region which this chapter will address – an anxiety over materiality, appearances and surfaces and how progress and continuity is reckoned. Much has been made of building surfaces in the study of the built environment (Harvey 1989; Wigley 2001; Jenks and Kopf 1997; Venturi et al. 2000; Tshumi 1994), as have other areas of scholarship as regards surface (Pinney 2002; Stafford 1996). This is a particular problem for post-socialist cities experiencing intense reconstruction such as the new unified Berlin (Huyssen 2003) as well as for Astana where the legitimacy of built forms and forms of social life are actively thought through one another by its citizenry and outside observers.

The city itself rises out of the vast steppes of northern Kazakhstan against big skies and a flat landscape, with the brightly coloured and shiny new highrises of the new capital reflected along the Ishym river (Figure 2.2). In the late 1990s this area was literally a backwater – a rundown and forgotten area used for fishing and swimming while the old town of Tselinograd as it was known faced away from the river. With the establishment of the new capital, stone embankments have been created and ornamental rails erected, along with pavilions, and monumental statues.
vaguely reminiscent of St Petersburg. Suddenly a promenade and water-lined skyline has emerged creating a new visual and ceremonial centre where the citizenry promenade, bridal parties gather, and fireworks are set off. Nothing has been more arresting than this sudden visual and physical change within these
‘monotonous’ and ‘barren’ steppes characterised by extremes of heat and cold throughout the year and the occasional locust swarm.

This striking visuality, however, is at the heart of understanding the problems associated with the urban environment. In Astana there is a particular history to these issues which also relates to how the perceived ‘bareness’ of the steppe has been understood in relation to successive modernising attempts, from Imperial expansion to socialist construction and subsequent nation-building. It is the social organisation of people’s material practices from the level of daily life in the home (household maintenance, do-it-yourself, etc.), to the broader political economy of the state (urban planning and development) that produces not only the specific materialities that are experienced both publicly and privately on building surfaces, but also the specific social relations produced through these material practices that sustain social life. It is at these surfaces that social life is made, specific subjectivities, ethnicities and nations are constituted and recognised, and the immanence of these social relations can be perceived, discussed and contested publicly and privately – from the scopic gaze of the Imperial or Soviet administrator surveying the landscape to the visitor to an individual’s home. Hence the pre-occupation of social reformers in many periods with these activities and their prosaic material effects.3

The discussions of the new city by individual householders, tour guides, planners, architects and politicians tend to concern themselves with surface image and appearance. The citizens of Kazakhstan and of the new capital itself (not to mention the old capital Almaty) mostly know it through images on news reports, magazines, calendars and billboards or (for a much smaller segment of the national population) through their brief visits to the capital on business or their strolls along the newly constructed embankment of the river Ishym (Figure 2.3). For this capital now being developed under the master plan of the renowned Japanese architect Kisho Kurokawa is an exemplary one like Brasilia (Holston 1988; see also Epstein 1973) facilitating the development of the new, multicultural, and Eurasian Kazakhstani nation state which came into existence in 1991 following the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is here that people are expected to know and recognise themselves and what it means to be Kazakhstani and modern. How it looks to bureaucrats, presidential officials, and planners is extremely important for getting the project of Kazakhstani independence and modernisation right (see also Schatz 2004). Later in this chapter I want to explore the different ways in which the materiality of built forms has been configured semiotically. In particular I wish to examine the social effects of these configurations in terms of the different ways in which continuity and belonging is reckoned: be it genealogical, ethnic, or national. With this I aim to achieve an understanding of the different ways in which space and time are understood from the perspective of individual householders to the executors of Kurokawa’s ambitious master plan.
Before proceeding further with this question, it is necessary here to put the city into historical context. Fourteen years after Ivan Shangin’s expedition in 1816, Akmolinsk, as the first settlement here was named, was established as a Cossack fort in 1830 essentially to enclose Kazakhs and their communities to a limited area as part of the Russian incorporation of the Middle Zhuz in the 1820s and gradually enforce sedentarisation (see Geiss 2003; and Matley 1994). Akmolinsk over the years became a minor trading centre between Russian Siberia and Central Asia. In the late 1880s a large migration of farmer settlers occupied land used by pastoralist Kazakhs, pushing them to peripheral less fertile areas. In 1890 the population was 5,640 but by 1914 these migrations swelled the population to 15,000. Kazakh intellectuals sought to limit this expansion of colonial settlers and its impact on Kazakhs and their livelihood. With 1917 and the Russian Revolution, budding nationalist Kazakh groups attempted to take power (Wolfel 2002: 493). Many within these reformist intellectual groups eventually found an empathy with Soviet revolutionaries and performed a key role in the consolidation of Soviet power in the 1920s until the purges of the 1930s (see Carrère d’Encausse 1994; Geiss 2003; and Wolfel 2002). This and the subsequent cumulative effect of collectivisation, which according to Shirin Akiner resulted in 40 per cent of the Kazakh population being killed (Akiner 1995), was a human and cultural
catastrophe which effectively broke continuity with the Kazakh past and its cultural institutions. However, with settlers from other parts of the Soviet Union and increased incorporation within the USSR through rail (1929) and air links (1934), the population overall, even with ethnic Kazakh numbers diminished, was twice what it had been before the revolution in 1939. With the Second World War and further evacuations, deportations and settlement of people and factories eastwards, the population jumped and nearly tripled (80,537).

With the postwar Virgin Lands Campaign a massive housing boom began and with it the construction of what is mostly recognizable as present-day Astana (see Pohl 1999). When Akmolinsk became the capital of the Virgin Lands Campaign it was renamed Tselinograd (Tselina meaning virgin soil) in 1961. The General Plan for the city created by Lengorstoi in Leningrad followed a model of Miliutin’s linear cities.\(^5\) It was, however, Khrushchev who, when visiting Tselinograd, announced his intention of extending the city on to the left bank of the river Ishym as part of his utopian Virgin Lands Campaign (Pohl 1999: 430), a project that was later to be taken up again towards another utopian enterprise by the post-independence president of the Republic, Nursultan Nazarbaev.

The capital was moved from Almaty (see Alexander, this volume) to Astana in 1997. In 1998 Kisho Kurokawa’s plan was adopted, superseding a locally designed plan by Montakhaev (Montakhaev 1997), and the construction of a new city on the left bank of the Ishym commenced. During this latest wave of migration and construction Astana’s population grew to approximately 320,000 in 2000 (see Figure 2.4). According to Nazarbaev’s much-publicised 2030 plan it should reach the appropriately symbolic population for a capital city of 1 million in that year.

![Figure 2.4 Population of Astana, 1869–2003](source: Tatibekov 2005: 20)
Nazarbaev’s adoption of the Kurokawa plan is not merely an attempt to gain international architectural prestige. Kurokawa himself trained in Moscow for a period during Khrushchev’s building boom, in particular to study the production and use of the panel construction which had been so highly developed by the Soviet architects during this period. Kurokawa’s architectural and cultural philosophy of symbiosis (see Kurokawa 1997) shares many structural and philosophical points with Nazarbaev’s Eurasianist philosophy for cultural and national development and Gumilev’s Eurasianism, while simultaneously reproducing an ideology reminiscent of Soviet internationalism (Schatz 2004: 130; 2000: 491; see also Wolfel 2002; Pohl 1999). According to Schatz this was a reversal of Soviet internationalism with a Russian face to post-socialist internationalism with a Kazakh face (Schatz 2004: 492). Like Brasilia (Holston 1988), Kurokawa’s Astana serves as an exemplary capital for the creation of a new Kazakhstani etnos – a utopian ideal that echoes back to the Virgin Lands Campaign (‘the planet of 100 languages’ as it was known; see Pohl 1999: 85) that has found renewed purchase under Nazarbaev.

**Material anxieties**

Within these very dynamic historical circumstances, I want to argue that this notable anxiety over the appearance of things, however, is more than just a preoccupation with image. It is about being able to discern appropriate social categories – recognising a modern society, nation and way of life (hence my companion’s deferral to me as a Westerner and foreigner). This question is by no means new. People have been asking versions of it since the earliest written records, and notably from the late eighteenth century and the early nineteenth, when Russian observers, both colonial Imperial and later Soviet, would typically survey and question the appearance of local habitations and consider them in relation to proper ways of living and dwelling. Variations of this question carried over into commonplace encounters in Soviet times as one elderly Kazakh informant recounted how shocked a Russian musician had been to discover that buildings in the aul (the traditional Kazakh village or settlement) where she lived were in fact people’s homes. She responded laconically but with sympathy, ‘How was he to know what their houses looked like?’ Related to this question is a highly contradictory understanding of what constitutes ‘bareness’ as ‘nothing there’: that is a confusion over what is cultural, how things might fit into appropriate social categories and thereby provide a manifest for ascribing value and the terms of legitimacy (see Benhabib 2004). The most recent instance of this question has been posed by my companion earlier: ‘Does this look right?’

The built environment in this historically isolated and sparsely populated steppe region has always been rather problematic. It has almost never been easy to ‘get right’ at any point in its history. Much of this story hinges on whether the right built environment, with its appropriate materialities, particularly focused on surfaces where they can be observed could be realised along with the proper social
and economic relations that would sustain them. What others might single out as a distinctive post-modern preoccupation with surface has been a recurring preoccupation from colonial times to the present. Getting the surfaces right has always been about getting these relationships worked out. While that may be a truism anywhere in the world, it has been particularly problematic here. The reasons are varied – relating to climate, isolation, flora, technology, the experience of colonialism, socialism and people’s relationship to the state – and how, in particular here, these relate to changing notions of social time, continuity and ethnic identity.

Discerning appropriate social categories and what ‘looks right’ has been a problematic question since Ivan Shangin’s first expeditionary reports of 1816:

> it appears that the flowers are planted by a lover of nature’s beauty, and you appear to forget entirely that you are travelling in a country untouched by the labour of man – in a steppe without people and to consider that the inhabitants are untutored in the customs of the social lives of men, not having a permanent place of habitation, wandering through space, which they use for the benefit of domesticated animals, towards which their own way of life is very similar.

(Shangin 1820: 32)

Shangin’s narrative is confusing and contradictory, and there is a cultivated (almost Romantic) garden-like landscape, which is at once empty of people. Yet this empty place is also traversed according to his own observations by large caravans of 114 camels (p. 30) and nomadic Kazakh herders who criss-cross this landscape which they use for the benefit of their herds. So is it or is it not inhabited, is it or is it not cultivated by human industry? The problem is identifying what is happening since things don’t seem quite to add up according to Shangin’s description in 1816. Shangin clearly identifies human activities, yet finds them beyond the confines of what is accepted as evidence of full social life. The herders have domesticated animals and engage in animal husbandry and herding (clearly the landscape is not ‘untouched by the labour of man’). But these locals are virtually indistinguishable from nature, sharing the way of life of these animals. Animal and human (nature and culture) are hard to disentangle and recognise. This is a very frustrated (and frustrating) attempt to reckon an order of things. Humanity is recognised not only from the body or face of the individual (Taussig 1993) but by the shelters people create: is this a human who lives here as opposed to a beast or something other? These are all questions that concern themselves with the materiality of built forms but which belie deeper and more significant questions concerning the very terms of being, of which being modern, that is being fully ‘human’, is one of the key questions. This is the perennial and elusive problem on the territory of the former Soviet Union of living normal’no, kak chelovek (normally, like a person) – full personhood being an aspirational state that circumstances otherwise conspire against (see Fehervary 2002 for Hungary; and Raussing 1998 for Estonia). But these concerns over being and personhood are intimately linked with nationhood.
and social progress. The two concerns are produced in relation to one another. The materiality of the built forms of the new capital is where all these issues can be seen to be played out and made visible, and hence, rather than being merely superfluous, they are constitutive of the immanent terms of moral order and social legitimacy and how people see and then interpellate themselves and others.7

Central Asian modernising reformists (Jadid), at the beginning of the twentieth century, were also vexed by similar questions and by how a ‘modern’, more moral and more advanced state of being might be recognised. The materiality of built forms was just as vital then in making these assignments as it is now. Crumbling buildings in Jadid satirical illustrations were presented as signs of the immanent moral, social and technological backwardness of their fellow Central Asian Muslims – all manner of social ills, from moral turpitude to pederasty, were indexed by these apparently unstable surfaces (Khalid 1997). At the same time the representatives of Russian Imperial improvement such as colonial medical officials were profoundly anxious over the perceived moral turpitude of Russian women emerging within the unstable surfaces of their dwellings in Astana (Pereselencheskata Upravleniia 1902) as elsewhere. Similarly, Imperial officials were troubled by the intermingling of Cossack (Europeans) with Kazakhs. They found Cossack colonists adopting Kazakh dress, diet, speech, subsistence patterns and dwellings and discovering that social, linguistic and economic categories were coming undone – even the Europeans themselves did not ‘look right’ (Martin 2001: 66; and see Geraci 2001 in particular regarding anxieties of missionaries over Russian settlers who have become Kazakhified or adopted Islam obasurmanilsia (Geraci 2001: 302)).

In present-day Astana, the integrity of built forms holds much together, not just notions of self, propriety and moral order. They also broach public secrets as well, being implicated in the moral qualities of emerging social relations and order. In the present climate of ‘authoritarian democracy’ under Nazarbaev where self-censorship in the press and government reigns, rumours spread as do secrets. One of the sites where such public secrets, – publicly acknowledged but never discussed – can be seen and engaged with (Taussig 1993) is where buildings begin to crumble, façades begin to decay and the corrupt relations of society can be indexed both literally and figuratively. As before, this unstable materiality indexes the failure of social relations and moral orders seen as immanent in these material forms. The truth of how things are cannot be avoided. They are manifest with every failed structure, and crumbling surface – repeatedly revealed to everyone and every passer-by and elaborated through the rumours surrounding them. They permit a subdued criticism of political life and become the opposition texts literally to be pointed at and read from the crumbling walls with the discussions and rumours they elicit (see also Schatz 2004: 127–8).

Much of these discussions surrounding the efficacy of built forms concerns the use and availability of building materials through what can be described as the four great building episodes: the nineteenth-century colonial period, the Stolypin reforms of the early twentieth century, the Virgin Lands Campaign of the mid-twentie
century, and the period of post-Soviet Kazakhstan (1991 to the present). Against these discussions are the continuously reworked tropes of emptiness dating back to Ivan Shangin’s first descriptions of the region as characterised by ‘emptiness’ ‘nakedness’ (golaia), and ‘virginity’, etc. and the qualities of the steppe itself (on the trope of emptiness see Pohl 1999: 15, 72, 82, 99). These are constantly invoked tropes of inhospitality, due to climactic extremes, as well as more recent ecological changes such as the near-biblical locust hordes of late spring. ‘Nothingness’ as construed here legitimates the exertion of power to shape political and social life (see Benhabib 2004). After 1861 colonial interest in the region and its economic potential saw a shift in perception from arid useless desert to a land of opportunity and value (Martin 2001: 67), a theme that has persisted ever since especially during the Virgin Lands Campaign (see Pohl 1999). What is of interest here is how this ‘nothingness’ is created both materially and semiotically and how it is different every time in terms of the material relationships it enables and legitimises. The scopic gaze of the Imperial traveller and the Soviet agronomist variably surveys ‘nothingness’ (despite evident presences) and legitimises specific material interventions. Their social effects emerge immanently through their use and maintenance. These are evidenced on their surfaces, in the way people at the level of the city and the household maintain them, constitute their materiality and in turn produce the terms of social life.

It has been difficult for enterprising reformers, Tsarist, Jadid, Soviet and others, to ensure appropriate social categories and distinctions. Further, the ubiquity of an indigenous mud brick tradition (samannyi) confounds even more the ability to make such distinctions (Figure 2.5). Even before the presence of modernisers and reformers, Imperial, Jadid, Soviet or otherwise, samannyi-built habitations were considered inferior to yurts which received considerable symbolic and material investment (Geraci 2001: 292). Samannyi structures were associated with bleak winter months and the close airless and uncomfortable quarters of animals and humans intermingling with one another bodily and spatially (see also Nelson Fell 1916: 189–93).

However, through all the major building periods, samannyi are constant and thwart all modernising attempts, yet they are instrumental in realising the various modernising visions of the settlement (see Pohl 1999: 439–50). They represent the makeshift and temporary dwellings for the construction of permanent structures dating from colonial times to the present. This was in many ways the secret of the successful settlement of the region from the present back into the nineteenth century. Anyone can use them (as Russian settlers quickly learned from Kazakhs). They do not require bureaucratic management, transport infrastructure or the state; in fact one might argue the structure is non-state by its very nature, anti-modern, and equally non-Orthodox Christian (Geraci 2001: 296) by virtue of its quasi-anarchic, and ‘primitivist’ qualities, being of the earth, uncomfortably obscuring nature and culture. These have been some of its qualities from the very beginning, from traditional Kazakh contexts where it is associated with poverty and bleak winter months, to colonial, Soviet and independence times where it is additionally
associated with backwardness. The quasi-anarchic quality of *samannyi* as a building material has recently been supplemented by the detritus of the Soviet period (remnant concrete panels, railway ties, etc.) procured by various legal and illegal means by male household members through their social networks, while the women of the household make the bricks according to their own family ‘recipes’. The material qualities of these materials, especially *samannyi*, and their surfaces are by no means superficial. I will argue here further that they represent a moral dilemma concerning being and modernity and the conflicting moral nature of existing social relations that are created through the use and maintenance of these materials.

**Kazakhstani material instability**

Clearly within this setting a plurality of materialities have been at play with differing social effects from indigenous Kazakh forms to Imperial colonial, Soviet and post-Socialist Kazakhstani forms. What has characterised them all is a certain endemic instability that has had profound implications for the way society and personhood have been understood at this location both for residents and for officials of various stripes, and that helps explain the particular anxieties over built forms emerging here. Astana is described by observers, and commentators as the face (*litso*) of the country as well as its visiting card (*visitka*) to the outside world. However, it is a very unstable face that is being presented. Everything is on the
verge of falling apart. No one knows whether the capital will succeed and for how long. This instability is expressed by the nicknames popularly given to some of the large new residential piles dotting the Ishym embankment. All these structures are on the apparent verge of catastrophe in the local imagination such as the ‘Kursk’ (officially the ‘Prestizh’) (Figure 2.6) or the ‘Titanic’ where within six months of construction everything seemed to fail (heating, plumbing, etc.). Since very high-ranking officials lived here at the ‘Titanic’ matters were quickly taken to court. The building went up in record time to everyone’s astonishment and many short cuts were believed to have been taken. But these anxieties are not new: they echo earlier anxieties and reports of short cuts and corruption in construction during the Virgin Lands Campaign (Pohl 1999: 420).

These new structures emerging here take advantage of a strategic moment, as some locals suspect, to make as much money as possible and build quickly and cheaply to last just long enough until the capital moves back to Almaty after Nazarbaev leaves office. But with Nazarbaev’s successful re-election this is not likely to happen soon and construction presses on. There is the sense that it could all fall down at any second. Renovations in the old city centre are temporary, designed to last just a while, until the new city could be built on the other side. Vinyl siding is used extensively to create unified boulevard façades, a sort of Haussmanisation in vinyl strips that are often torn off by powerful winter gusts. Architectural critics refer to the kartonovaia arkhitektura or cardboard architecture of the new capital. The new presidential bridge across the Ishym could not be realised in time as the maze of patronage and kick-backs necessary to complete it meant that it was opened unfinished. Walking along the new embankment along the Ishym one Kazakh southerner remarked that this was their ‘five minutes of

Figure 2.6 The ‘Prestizh’ housing block locally known as the ‘Kursk’
Las Vegas’ – uncertain how long something like this could be experienced – a moment that could disappear as quickly as it appeared – an ephemeral image like the images of the city rendered on notebooks, calendars or posters as film stills.

Tsarist material instability

Temporary and unstable structures have been a constant problem since the nineteenth century. Within the Imperial Russian and Soviet periphery, problems associated with continuously unfinished and unstable development pervaded. This is what Ssorin-Chaikov refers to as ‘deferred social order’ or ‘development as forever’ – it is the construction site that is modern, not the finished structure: these are the ‘poetics of unfinished construction’:

as a display of work in progress, disorder inscribes progress as an already stagnant yet ‘new’ condition. It embodies the linear time of construction, and yet takes itself out of linear time. The disorder of the frontier villages freezes in time the moment of beginning, construction from scratch, social life, and construction work, all mixed together.

(Ssorin-Chaikov 2003: 136–7)

This has been the characteristic of this colonial environment and region of development, both Imperial and Soviet, far removed from infrastructural transport links and the building materials of modern development.

Historically, the prosaic task of procuring building materials had contributed to the instability of the built environment and the social orders forged within. The Imperial government provided loans for timber and even arranged for free timber for settlers to build in the appropriate manner as befits respectable peasants: that is the classic wooden izba and the Christian moral order the izba and its practices describe (see Geraci 2001: 292 on the association of Russian homes and domestic practices with Russian Orthodox Christian morality). The problem of materials was expressed in worries over hygiene and moral health and how household and family relations were difficult to maintain under ‘diminished’ conditions. According to a 1902 survey by the Imperial Ministry of the Interior (Pereselencheskaia Upravleniia 1902), Akmolinsk district had a total of 3,992 households in 1902, of which 2,435 were of temporary construction, that is 62.5 per cent temporary, 23.3 per cent permanent but not wood, 11.4 per cent wood and 2.7 per cent just homeless. Wooden or srubnoi construction typical of the east Slavic peasant represented a small fraction of overall housing. The traditional materials of the forest-steppe region which typically sustained Great Russian peasant migration and expansion (Moon 1999) were not easily procured as far south as Akmolinsk. Samannyi and srubnoi were roughly the same price in the region of southern Siberia. However, access to material for srubnoi was determined by proximity to timber markets. For Akmolinsk, timber was only available from Kokchetav, roughly 180–150 versts away (1 verst is 1.06 kilometres), where there
was a permanent supply. Kolinsky had a yearly market after the spring market, and timber quality varied and was usually bad, not proper mill quality. Here timber for an izba would cost 300–240 rubles, almost twice what it would cost in Omsk. This was how things were for Russian settlers. Kazakhs did not qualify for loans and free timber for construction (as they were obviously not settlers but lived there already). Therefore a samanny was clearly the cheaper alternative for a Kazakh as timber was equally prohibitive in cost (see discussion in Martin 2001: 70).

Moreover, as we know from early twentieth-century sources and from Shangin’s own descriptions, local birch was readily available. However, it was not ideal compared to the fir trees Russians traditionally used. Its propensity to discolour with the appearance of grey spots rendered it inappropriate. It was difficult to maintain according to accepted practices and was thereby implicated in the spiritual depression (dushevnaia ugneta) of those living in temporary dwellings (Perezenselcheskaia Upravleniia 1902). The dwelling, of course, was understood to affect the bodily and psychological health of the inhabitants (as reported by a doctor in Omsk studying the living conditions of settlers in 1901). The damp, the lack of air circulation and the presence of animals in winter and exposure to their excrement threatened the skin and health of the occupants. Such concerns were echoed later by Soviet-era modernists decrying the conditions of peasant life in favour of the industrial materials of socialist industrialisation (Buchli 1999). The use of clay or samannyi was considered unhygienic, as were temporary peat dug-outs (zemlianki), because of problems related to humidity. The inappropriateness of materials and surfaces interacting with the bodies of settlers through skin diseases and suchlike also affected the psychological and moral health of the settlers and threatened established Russian moral orders. The overuse of peat accelerated soil erosion, exacerbated by agricultural use, and contributed to the overall ‘bareness’ of the region along with the overuse of timber and resulting local deforestation during the colonial period, first by Russians and then by Kazakhs adopting Russian building techniques. This ‘bareness’ unintentionally created by colonial-era practices made the colonial rhetoric of ‘emptiness’ all the more physically real by rendering the local forest/steppe more steppe-like.

**Colonial Kazakh material instability**

While Imperial Russian material and moral orders were difficult to maintain and unstable, nomadic Kazakh ones were also characterised by a certain instability. At the level of nomadic cycles, Kazakh yurts were frequently assembled and disassembled. These cycles, albeit constantly changing, were consistent and regular. It is at the level of the generational cycles that a certain critical instability is in evidence in understandings surrounding the shanyrak. The shanyrak is the bent wood frame at the top of the Kazakh yurt that permits smoke to escape from the central hearth below (Figure 2.7). Representing the male lineage of the household, it is passed from youngest son to youngest son. As such it is not simply a representation of the male lineage but productive of the lineage itself, coming
into being only when lineal continuity from one generation to the next is achieved. Semiotically within this material setting, the shanyrak works as an index and not as a metonym. It is an anticipatory index of the continuity of the male lineage. The shanyrak is glossed holy that is sky blue (kwok), even though a very successful one is actually blackened with soot because it is so old (and therefore called a kara shanyrak). But it is old and thereby beautiful and sky blue because it frames the blue sky and indexes the realm of the ancestors and heavens outside. Continuity is sustained by this immaterial anticipatory index (literally a negative space: the blue sky continuously framed by a genealogically sustained shanyrak) assuring the moral and biological continuity of life, time and kinship that order the social relations that sustain the shanyrak (see also Akiner 1995: 53–4).

Obviously lineal continuity is an achievement, and sustaining it is not at all easy or assured. A Kazakh colleague and ethnographer described a story from childhood. She was told that someone’s shanyrak collapsed (razvalilsia). She heard this from an older woman and actually thought the ceiling had collapsed in someone’s home, conflating the ceiling of a yurt with the roof of a Soviet-era house. She wanted to go and see this collapsed roof and ruined house. An older woman had to explain to her that it wasn’t the roof that collapsed but the fact that the man died without children. Of course, the house would in fact later collapse and become a ruin since there was not the generational continuity to reproduce the family and its relations to maintain the physical structure. People were afraid to go near it, afraid the same fate of dying childless would befall them. Later, however, a tractor

Figure 2.7 Detail of a shanyrak
driver from outside the village moved into the dilapidated site, renovated it, and quickly had two children by his wife there. Here the indexical work of the *shanyrak* is transferred to the Soviet-era ceiling, making a foreign architectonic element imaginatively function according to local semiotics in this rural setting in northern Kazakhstan.

Since independence in 1991 the *shanyrak* has re-emerged as a decorative emblem that metonymically invokes the common national homeland of the Kazakhstani state and serves as the key element in state symbolism, appearing on banknotes, flags, and the state seal. During the Soviet period, in the spirit of the socialist realist injunction to be national in form but socialist in content, the yurt served as a sign for Kazakhness and appeared in various guises as fountains, bus stops, pavilions and civic monuments (see also Akiner 1995: 53–4). Since independence the yurt as a sign of Kazakhness has been replaced by the metonymical *shanyrak* of the Kazakhstani state. This shift is not without significance. As the *shanyrak* in traditional and contemporary domestic contexts represents the continuity of the lineage, the *shanyrak* as state symbol represents the continuity of the newly independent and sovereign Kazakhstani state. Traditionally the disarticulated *shanyrak* segregated from its yurt signifies the death of the lineage, literally detached and placed on the top of the grave of the last male. Here the disarticulated and widely dispersed metonymic and decorative *shanyrak* in various media serves to collect the multiple ethnicities of the newly independent Kazakhstani state (Figures 2.8 and 2.9). Thus a profound shift emerges through this material and semiotic reconfiguration – a shift from an index reckoning geneological time in a strictly ethnic Kazakh context to a metonym claiming national space for a multi-ethnic state with the new city of Astana as its metonymic exemplar.

*Figure 2.8 Shanyrak as decorative element in street railing*
Not surprisingly, it is the architectural and decorative elements of the yurt that are being mined as a resource for the creation of a newly independent Kazakhstani nation as it had been during the Soviet period but with an emphasis on different aspects of yurt morphology. However, the ubiquitous sedentary architecture of mud brick (samannyi), reminiscent of similar construction around the world such as the adobe architecture of the American south-west, is completely overlooked. It is not an appropriate source of decorative and architectural elements like the yurt. Whereas in the south-west of the United States it serves as a carefully curated and preserved architectural heritage, here it is still tainted with negative associations (see Pohl 1999: 339–40 for negative views of samannyi during the Virgin Lands Campaign). Traditionally the building form is associated with Zhatak Kazakhs (see Martin 2001: 78–9; and Geraci 2001: 291–2), that is poor Kazakhs who have become sedentary because of poverty and lack of livestock. It is also associated with the bitter winter months where life slows down in anticipation of spring and summer pastures and life in the yurt (Nelson Fell 1916). In Russian Imperial (Geraci 2001: 291) and Soviet modernising contexts (Pohl 1999: 439–41) it was unfavourably compared with the Russian izba, in the eyes of modernising Russian settlers, Imperial and Soviet, as well as in the eyes of modernising Kazakh intellectuals. The yurt was elaborately studied and widely documented and published, whereas this tradition of mud brick construction is almost never documented and when it has been, usually always negatively (Pohl
The negotiation of these moral orders through the manipulation of building materials and their surfaces can be seen in the way local families go about their unofficial and often illegal building projects. The household of Auntie L. (as she likes to be known) is an excellent case in point. As matriarch she supervised a new illegal addition to her srubnoi house built at the beginning of the twentieth century in samannyi bricks in the old colonial settlement of the city. The walls of the addition went up swiftly within three days (Figure 2.10). The bricks made from clay (dug up right outside the household) were mixed with water, hay and clay and dried by the women of her immediate family. The builder (stroitel’) was her youngest son and heir – but Auntie L. was clearly in charge during the work where the men assembled the bricks on a foundation of concrete beams taken from a construction site and used as waterproof foundation and the women in turn covered the bricks with clay.

Auntie L. described samannyi as very well insulated and effective against the damp – she noted in particular how important it is to know how to damp proof the structure appropriately (something Tsarist-era officials and settlers evidently were slow to realise). At the beginning of the summer after the thaws one heats up the whole house from the pech’ (wood-burning oven) to dry it out. Her pech’ is located in the srubnoi part, and pipes from there conduct the heat to the other rooms including the samannyi. Auntie L. praises samannyi as better than srubnoi for insulation against the cold and very high winds of the winter on the steppes surrounding Astana.

Auntie L. calls the construction a kapital’nyi remont (major renovation) when in fact it is an illegal addition (whether or not it can be worked into the official zhilploschad’ or not will probably depend on whom they can bribe in the city offices). The room is for her son and his family. He and his wife have a little boy (clearly a feasible shanyrak genealogically speaking). As Auntie L.’s youngest son and heir, his parents have a strong say in choosing his wife as she will have to take care of them as they get old. The new construction is on the site of an old room and kitchen that has already fallen apart. Auntie L. hopes to arrange for five flats instead of compensation after they tear down the house which has been slated for destruction. Her son thinks it more likely that they will get two flats, one for his sibling and a larger one for him with his parents and his children. He doesn’t
Figure 2.10 New samannyi addition
have a salaried job but his wife does. He works on constructing the addition and running their small enterprise.

Other households in the neighbourhood make similar calculations in this uncertain setting. An old Cossack/German couple invests strategically as little as they can to renovate their house and rent rooms out to migrant workers, before they might be compensated for the slated demolition of their house for the construction of the new capital and thereby ease their anticipated emigration to Germany. Another case in point is the household of a Kazakh single mother, who is unable to procure resources or access extra labour as she would if she had a husband. She cannot maintain her house which she has renovated minimally and precariously (the *samannyi* is prone to flooding because of its location). Too much of her ‘vital energies’ (youth), as she put it, have gone into the house. Too much is at stake to let her pull out as she waits for the inevitable (and repeatedly deferred) demolition. She too carefully calculates which relatives can be registered and be entitled for compensation in *zhilploschad* and whose labour and monies could be called up to expand *zhilploschad* through renovation and the bribery of city officials. All this is done against a background where city officials could quite suddenly tear things down and prevent the registration of relatives – it is a waiting game to see who can hold out the longest.

Within this setting of failed infrastructure and high-cost electricity, sewerage, heat and water (see Alexander, this volume and Humphrey, this volume), *samannyi* houses as well as other individual homes are actually very self-sufficient. They are free from failing state infrastructural supports as well as difficult to maintain traditional extended family relations of mutual aid. The relative independence of individual dwellings is well understood by householders in terms of costs and maintenance. Maintaining a building is extraordinarily labour and time intensive, calling for the very strategic organisation of resources, time, social obligations and family life. Within this setting, family and social obligations and their costs are literally and materially renegotiated and produced through the activities surrounding house maintenance.

All around the old colonial town new Western-style apartment blocks such as the ‘Kursk’ and ‘Titanic’ arranged along the Ishym are going up. These independent households of the old colonial settlement are resentful of the new buildings designed to house incoming southern bureaucratic and oil company elites from the old capital Almaty. They see these buildings as evidence of southerners grabbing everything for themselves and their friends and families. The tall new buildings are not liked and the ethos of the individual household (*uchastok*) is upheld as an even more effective way of achieving the desired greening of the city (now readdressed by the forested zones reintroduced by Kurokawa in his plan) and affirming the precarious yet morally honest and upright nature of these inhabitants and their families and ways of coping. High buildings do not make sense here with so much land around in the middle of the steppes. Only the bureaucrats build that way because they feel that Astana should be like Hong Kong or New York with everyone forced to live in tall buildings while they themselves
live in one of the many so-called ‘New Kazakh’ kottedzhy across the river (see Humphrey 1998 on New Russians; and Czegledy 1999 on Hungary). Here, high fences surround large luxurious houses of jarringly contrasting materials of domestic and foreign origin which index uncertain and questionable gains from the post-Soviet economy and the transfer of the capital to Astana and the ensuing construction boom.

**Preservation**

The issues surrounding surfaces, the perceived social relations immanent within and the problem of ‘nothingness’ come together in the problem of architectural preservation and the new project of creating a Kazakhstani national heritage. Preservation efforts came into being in 1992 when the first lists of monuments were compiled (see Schatz 2000: 500–1 for the flourishing of historic sites and monuments across Kazakhstan after independence). Previous to this there were no lists or preservation initiatives as there were as yet no lieux de mémoire, in the sense proposed by Pierre Nora, that required such interventions. More significantly, preservation lists designate by exclusion what is not worthy of protection, to be left to decay or more likely to be demolished and make way for new more relevant material forms. What goes on the list or is even able to be viably sustained on the list has become a focus of struggle between historians, preservationists, city bureaucrats, local citizenry, architects and builders. Buildings could be designated for protection but their files would mysteriously disappear. If there is no file, then there is effectively no ‘monument’ to protect, and demolition work and construction work can continue unimpeded.

However, this process does not occur entirely quietly. There is the overall question of disappearing buildings, and the disappearing cities and communities they are supposed to house, such as the medieval, pre-colonial, colonial, Soviet, and post-Soviet cities that various preservation and cultural heritage concerns attempt to negotiate. The most recent controversy has been the previously unheard of question of the medieval settlement, not the one on the site of Astana itself (as there is none), but in nearby Buzuk. This medieval settlement undermines, the Imperial, colonial, Soviet and even southern Kazakh insistence on the ‘bareness’ of the territory. This is a recent archaeological discovery outside Astana that has received extensive presidential funding. Nazarbaev has an interest in claiming that something is in fact ‘here’, something ancient, nationally Kazakh and sovereign. This site is a complex of military fort, necropolis and (very significantly in terms of presidential urban ambitions) a brick production centre and possible irrigation canals. The most recent finds have been of a Chinese mirror dating from between the tenth century and the twelfth, and one Arab coin. This was a fort probably surrounded by a large settlement of yurts and shoshola (storage structures), and probably dates back to the tenth–twelfth century AD according to the project archaeologist (Akishev 2001 personal communication; Smteskoi 2001). According to him, the remains were observed by Shangin in the 1820s. This military complex with
surrounding civilian population was possibly the summer residence of a Kipchag Sultan. Rumours have circulated that the finds such as the bricks with their decorative motifs, the Chinese mirror and the single Arab coin were probably placed there from outside, and have questioned whether or not the features identified were in fact water canals. This would certainly not be the first instance where archaeology has been manipulated to serve the interest of nation-building and the assertion of a primordial connection on the territory of the former Soviet Union (see Shnirelman 1996 for former Soviet Republics in general; and Alexander 2004 and Schatz 2000: 496, both for Kazakhstan in particular). The implications of these excavations, regardless of the veracity of rumours, are that this is a site where urbanism was practised in some form (brick production), that extensive agricultural use occurred, prefiguring projects such as the Virgin Land Campaign and the President’s Kurokawa plan (irrigation canals), and that the site was a crossroads between East and West (as evidenced by the Arab coin and Chinese mirror), suggesting a proto-Eurasianism. However, if Imperial Russians, Soviets, and southern Kazakhs have always asserted that there is ‘nothing here’, then this find, of course, creates a very different history and justification for the move north and the consolidation of presidential power (as the imaginary heir to the Kipchag Sultan).

Yet another story about preservation offers a different perspective in regard to the pre-colonial city. Official histories assert that before the first colonial fort in 1830 there was, of course, ‘nothing here’. Some local historians, however, have long asserted that there was a significant pre-colonial settlement associated with the locale called Kara-Utkul’ (black ford), associated with a well-established trading caravan route connecting Petropavlovsk to the north with cities to the south such as Tashkent, Bukhara and others. The settlements associated with the zhatakskye sloboda (or Kazakh suburb) were believed to be here before the Russian fort. It was a settlement of mixed Tatar and Kazakh families, and wealthy Kazakhs who built here along the caravan trade route before Russians built the fort in the 1830s (of such trade activity there is much evidence in Shangin’s expeditionary account). Local historians attempted to revive the pre-colonial history in the early 1990s just after the collapse of the Soviet Union at the time of independence but this would be brushed aside in favour of the colonial history. With the establishment of the Presidential Culture Centre of the Republic of Kazakhstan in Astana, which absorbed the old regional museum and its historians, the opportunity to assert the pre-colonial history has been lost with the demotion and departure of local staff and the influx of new staff from Almaty. These have little local training, have taken over their predecessors’ positions, and promote the old Soviet official colonial history (on how unifying definitions of national identity are reshaped and undone according to local lineage identities, see Schatz 2000: 502). Conspicuously, none of the early pre-colonial buildings – which are typically domestic and constructed of samannyi bricks identified by the earlier local historians – appear on the post-independence preservation list.

The colonial city is also the subject of much negotiation. The preservation list serves these interests well. It is composed almost entirely of Russian colonial and
Soviet-era structures. But as the files to preserve them disappear, large sections of the old colonial town are subject to demolition to make way for the large new housing projects my Kazakh companion noted at the beginning of this chapter (Figure 2.1). Ethnic Russians complain that their past – encompassing the colonial-era buildings – is being eradicated, torn down to make way for the new capital. Efforts to list such buildings are a means of creating ancestors, as well as materially asserting a relationship to the land indexing Russian primordial presence and history in the face of anxieties over Kazakh nationalism. This is not at odds with the President’s Eurasianist ideology and his ambitions for a new capital, but the ethnic Russian presence is under threat from the influx of southern Kazakh elites. This is a new strategy to claim space and assert nationalist presence, indexing the past through preservation efforts as opposed to the future-oriented claims of socialist time (Buck-Morss 2000; and see Ssorin-Chaikov 2003).

Under the dominant terms of Euro-American national territoriality, settlement and urbanism imply a primordial right to territory, hence the significance of the different attempts by various interests to assert this in Astana. It is under these terms that colonial history dominates and the pre-colonial is suppressed. Nomadism is less powerful in asserting such claims on territoriality for the creation of a nation state (see also discussion in Akiner 1995: 67) and in a certain sense reckons futurity. In regard to the Soviet Union, Susan Buck-Morss argues for a shift from space to time and back to space again and for the need to create a primordial attachment to assert sovereignty based on space such as territoriality. Architectural projects and building help to occupy space versus occupying history, as Buck-Morss cites Lenin on this issue in relation to the territorial concessions of the 1918 Treaty of Brest-Litovsk: ‘I want to concede space . . . in order to win time’ (Buck-Morss 2000: 24). Or as in the case of traditional Kazakh temporality, the yurt reckons and occupies time and continuity of kin within an unbounded landscape as opposed to the Great Russian peasant izba as an ethnic signifier which occupies and colonises space through the expansion of the Russian Empire as Russian Imperial authorities were anxious to assert.

The question of who can build a city (Russians, southern Kazakhs, medieval Kipchags) determines the kinds of cities that can exist, never exist or are soon to disappear. Local ethnic Russians say Kazakhs cannot build anything, that whatever was built on the territory of Kazakhstan was built by Uzbeks and Tadjiks (see also Pohl 1999: 440). Whatever was built up north was Russian. Soviet constructions which reckoned time rather than space (Ssorin-Chaikov 2003; Buck-Morss 2000) – under the conditions of national independence – are now converted to reckon space as signifiers of Russian ethnic presence (confirming what Kazakhs chagrined by Soviet power, that is, Great Russian ethnic dominance, already knew). Russians and southern Kazakhs are of the same opinion as regards the constructed ‘bareness’ of the territory of Astana as both need to establish the right to use that this discourse permits.

As one southern Kazakh architect commented, all the Kazakh architectural traditions are southern, and up north there was ‘nothing’ but livestock herding.
This comment echoes Shangin almost 200 years later. This is further enforced by the eclectic use of decorative details: Russian neo-classical and central Asian, mostly urban Kazakh motifs and architectural elements derived from the south. National forms created here are derived from southern Kazakh sources, the cupolas, or the decorative motifs of the esplanade and so on. Soviet-era art historical texts on Kazakh decorative art (such as Margulan 1986) are openly used as the key source of ‘national’ decorative details to be deployed in the decoration of the city, imposing hybrid sources from all over the Republic on to the north.

Under socialism, there was a common future and common past as Buck-Morss observed. Socialism was about time and not bourgeois nationalist notions of ethnic space. Under the terms of independence such commonalities fall along ethnic lines. The continuity of the Kazakh shanyrak is now the term for reckoning national sovereignty and multi-ethnic unity for Kazakh political elites, while the continuity of the ethnic Russian presence is facilitated by preservation initiatives focusing on colonial Imperial and Soviet structures. Both are means of sustaining relationships through different interventions and social practices which sustain very specific materialities of built forms. Yet, local Russians still have an important voice. The local architectural establishment is significantly Russian ethnically and benefits the most among the local population from the move of the capital to Astana. A provincial architectural establishment is at the centre of the largest construction project in the country with unprecedented levels of investment. It is also their local power which limits the extent of the Kurokowa plan and who will have the means to actually implement it according to the legally binding General Plan (GenPlan) of the city. As one official noted in reference to the implementation of the plan and its continuous negotiation, citing a Russian proverb – ‘you measure, once, twice, three times and then you cut’ – this individual being precisely one of the officials doing the ‘measurements’ and responsible ultimately on the ground for the final ‘cut’.

Ethnic Russian preservationism focused on the surfaces and materials of colonial and Soviet-era structures does not anticipate a future but does the same job of reckoning continuity in a different way. To produce an ancestor or a descendant is really a question of which direction you are looking at along a continuum and how you reckon that continuity. ‘Who were our ancestors?’ – the people who used to live in these houses that looked like that there – after all what is there to point to? – to say where you came from in both the local Russian and local Kazakh sense. In this respect, pointing to the old buildings as the Russians typically do (Figure 2.11), like pointing towards the shanyrak, both serve indexically to reckon continuity and recognise ones place within, either retrospectively or prospectively that is through the material effects of the social relations that sustain them. In the Russian case this continuity is reckoned after the fact and not in anticipation, as in the Kazakh example or in the socialist attempts to occupy future time. These reckonings take on two radically different materialisations, one focused on materially stabilised surfaces, its materiality forged through retrospective preservation practices suggesting continuity with the past, while the other is preoccupied with
Figure 2.11 Russian colonial-era wooden izba
the prospective, immaterial index of futurity that the *shanyrak* frames within the yurt structure. History is created and occupied differently – retrospectively and prospectively. One creates space (the settled Russian) and the other creates genealogical time (the nomadic Kazakh), but both are similarly unstable in terms of the social relations needed to sustain them because of historical, environmental and infrastructural factors. Additionally, depending on scale, they can be characterised by a certain unstable materiality that is a consequence of a landscape and the human technologies that have attempted to engage it in different ways over the centuries. The local *samannyi* brick, the traditional yurt, Soviet-era panel construction, the *izba*, the new constructions of Astana – all have their individual cycles of sustained materiality and durability shaped within existing social relations and networks and used by virtue of their materiality and viable durability for the production and maintenance of these relations (based on some combination of kinship, gender, sexuality, or bureaucratic patronage, and so on).

These materialities are not so much immanent and inherently distinct, despite what their physical and semiotic qualities would appear to suggest. Rather, they are characterised by nuanced differences; the result of the specific material qualities which can, however, be overcome and refashioned with different semiotic techniques and thereby become productive of different immanent social orders. The metonymic *shanyrak* and the indexical *shanyrak* are two different materialisations within two different semiotic modes with two different social effects. That is, one works well to reckon genealogical continuity, while the other works well to reckon national/ethnic continuity. Their relative effectiveness is also a function of the physical limits of a given materiality and the semiotic work it is able to do. However, transformations from indexical to metonymic work can overcome the apparent physical limits of a given materiality, as can be seen with the *shanyrak* in its various modes. Preservation efforts turn the lineal continuity of the Great Russian peasant’s *izba* into an ethnic heritage part of an earlier nation-building enterprise, whereas the lineal continuity of the *shanyrak* reckons genealogical time, not space. The *izba* as ethnic signifier, however, refigures the *izba* to conquer space (see Moon 1999 on great peasant migration and imperial state expansion), whereas the *shanyrak*, now disarticulated from the traditional yurt, rendered decorative and no longer structural, and refigured as metonym, is used towards claiming national space and national unity. The evidence for this metonymic work is the *shanyrak* itself reconfigured as state symbol (see Figure 2.7).13

‘Does it look right?’

The constructed structures of the new capital using Kurokawa’s plans with its bright colours and seamless façades are materially uncertain for the city’s inhabitants, architects and observers. This is a consequence of the morally uncertain terms by which the structures were built (by Turks ‘whose buildings tumble in earthquakes’, by the family of Osama bin Laden or some other ‘dark forces’, gangsters, racketeers, corrupt politicians and the like). The unofficial names such
as ‘Kursk’ and ‘Titanic’ suggest, if not an impending disaster, certainly an uncertain
future, though these structures embody many of the qualities associated with the
post-modern and its imageability required for the attraction of global capital neces-
sary for a newly emergent and oil-rich national economy. This quality is, however,
as we have seen through the examples presented here, just one aspect of surface
and the materiality of the built environment and the social relations it effects in
this place at this point of history – from indexing corruption and moral turpitude
to the promise of an inclusive socialist future. Rather, when one looks at the sky-
line, it is not at all unpleasant, and people seem to love to promenade and visit the
bank side as newlyweds do just as they used to visit the tomb of the unknown
soldier. Strolling along the embankment at sunset, I could myself at times
just imagine this as a place I might want to be at a time in the near future. This
‘five minutes of Las Vegas’ might be able to sustain itself but no one knows for
sure. But this question has been perennial at this place in the world; it is a question
concerning the adequate terms of being that has always recurred in these materially
dynamic and uncertain conditions. The question of sustainability in all its senses
has been problematic because of migration and landscape at all points in history
when the various materialities used to create the built environment have been
instrumental in sustaining and producing various social projects. Unlike in
Soviet times when the materiality of built forms and their surfaces were less durably
invested as in Ssorin-Chaikov’s ‘development as forever’ – time, not space, was to
be conquered. The aesthetic of the ‘unfinished’ facilitated this notion of constantly
deferred progress. Now new materialities of built form emerge and their surfaces
are being reworked to sustain the nation-building enterprise. Their material
instability might ensure this potential and projection into time as Pelkmans (2003)
duly notes with reference to the unfinished buildings of Soviet Ajaria: ensuring an
inclusive future.

To conclude, I would like to go back and answer the question at the beginning
of the chapter posed by my Kazakh companion: ‘Does it look right?’ I wish to
hazard an answer again and suggest that this was a question not about how
something looks, but almost whether the surfaces and materialities we see and
engage with are productive of good moral subjects and appropriate relations (like
the Russian observer who was unable to recognise a human dwelling or the Tsarist
official worried about European Cossacks being indistinguishable from Asian
Kazakhs (Martin 2001: 66)). That is, do they aspire to being moral, ordinary and
modern (normal’no) and are they recognisable as such – the question which has
characterised social life and urban settlement in this region since colonial times.
I am afraid I gave the wrong answer the first time out of misplaced politeness
and said yes it is beautiful. My response seemed to please my interlocutor, but
not for the reasons I thought. Rather, the response was pleasing because maybe
one could begin to discern modern people who live here ‘normally’ (normal’no), as
people should and have always aspired to. As that ambiguous distinction becomes
more clear (and easily identifiable by a foreigner, and thereby more apparently
‘universal’), it might in fact be the case that the materialities and the social relations

ASTANA: MATERIALITY AND THE CITY

Downloaded by [Universiti Malaysia Sabah] at 08:29 15 December 2012
they are attempting to sustain therein are indeed working, albeit uncertainly within ever newer and more uncertain economic and social conditions.

Notes

1 I am very grateful to K.M. Kizmadieva-Kasenova for her observations from her research on traditional northern Kazakhshtani material culture and to Anna Portisch for her insightful comments. Any and all inadequacies are entirely the author’s own.

2 The research took place over three field seasons of one month each in 1997, 2000 and 2001. The first was funded by Sidney Sussex College Cambridge and the last two seasons were funded by the Leverhulme Foundation. During these field seasons, key figures in the city government, architectural establishment and relevant academic and cultural institutions were interviewed, as well as householders in the old town of Astana.

3 The present day echoes concerns at the beginning of the twentieth century. See Hirsch 2000: 215 for the role of byt (‘daily life’) and its constituent element architecture for the constitution of national identity and the formations of new ‘national’ borders within the Soviet Union in Central Asia in the 1920s. See also Mauss 2006 on constituting national identities and recognising borders on the basis of architectural forms in the same period in the wake of the First World War and the reworking of West European borders and nationalities. And see Auslander 1996: 411, 421–3 on the role of French political thinkers in the wake of the French Revolution and early nineteenth-century France such as Abbé Siéyès and Jules Michelet for developing an understanding of surface and material and how the ‘look’ of things mattered for being able to constitute, recognise and sustain a new national and republican French subject.

4 Ivan Shangin was a Tsarist officer in charge of a military/scientific exploration to assess the economic potential of the region.

5 Nikolia Miliutin was a Soviet avant-garde town planner and architect of the 1920s and 1930s. His highly influential ideas about linear cities found their realisation in various forms in the Soviet period, notably in Magnitogorsk. This was a reconfiguration of Garden City principles devised by Ebenezer Howard (see Introduction to this volume). Rather than the concentric zones proposed by Howard, Miliutin suggest linear plans which segregated residential, industrial and green zones from one another along a lineal pattern determined by road and rail links (see Miliutin, Sotsgorod, and Cooke 1978 on Russian responses to the Garden City Movement).

6 Soviet architects, planners and engineers developed a system of mass production of prefabricated panel wall units for mass housing to alleviate the postwar housing shortage. Its legacy is visible all over the former Soviet Union and former Soviet Bloc.

7 See above, n. 3.

8 Comment made to Catherine Alexander.

9 I am indebted to K. M. Kizmadiera-Kasenova for these observations.

10 Zhilploschad’ refers to the square meterage allocated per person which determines access and right to housing.

11 Throughout the Soviet period significant historical structures were torn down as part of modernising efforts on the part of the state. In 1973 the remnants of some of the original Cossack barracks were demolished because the structure did not accord with the kul’turnyi vid (cultured look) of the modern city (Dubitskii 1990: 12). Throughout the Soviet period numerous other structures that could be associated with the pre-Soviet and ethnic Russian and Kazakh past suffered the same fate.

12 Tellingly, ethnic Russians who have remained and not emigrated to Russia call themselves ‘Astanki’. This is a pun on being at once a Russian from Astana and also being the remains of a dead body (Ostanki).

13 See Kairbekov et al. (1997).
References


Pereselencheskaia Upравления (1902) Zhilishche Pereselentsv Bezlesnoi Chasti Sibiri i Stepnogo Kraia, St Petersburg: Tipografiia Minsterstva Vnutrennikh Del.


3

ALMATY
Rethinking the public sector

Catherine Alexander

Introduction

This chapter is concerned with redefinitions of the relationship between state and citizens, what might be called the social contract, after the end of the Soviet Union in Almaty, Kazakhstan’s former capital city. Specifically, I focus on the diminution of urban social welfare provision after 1991 as the element of the revised social contract that was experienced and debated most keenly by my informants (see also Haney 2000). I explore this aspect of the retraction of state concerns as seen within the public administration and two neighbourhoods through an examination of water and electricity use and ownership. One neighbourhood case study is drawn from the 1960s micro-region of state-built apartment blocks in which I was living in 2000 and 2001, the other study is based on one of the rapidly growing peri-urban areas around Almaty where basic infrastructure is still poor or lacking.

As Inkeles and Bauer (1959), Dunham (1976), Nove (1982: 347–9), Millar (1985), Bahry (1993) among others have noted, Soviet ideas of what constituted a social contract between society and the administration changed first, over time, second, between classes and third, between the codified ideology of the regime and de facto toleration of certain contradictory practices. Thus, Dunham (1976: 3–5) categorises the accommodation of a growing middle class under Stalin as the ‘Big Deal’, while Millar (1985) analyses the extension of this tacit acceptance of material as well as moral privileges and incentives under Brezhnev as the ‘Little Deal’, noting the temporary move towards increasing material egalitarianism under Khrushchev. Bahry (1993: 551) describes Gorbachev’s reforms as a ‘new deal’ between the regime and ‘a constituency of professionals and intellectuals’ (see also Hauslohner 1987; Ludlam 1991; and Cook 1992, 1994).

In terms of class fragmentation of the relationship between regime and people, Inkeles and Bauer’s (1959) study of the Soviet public suggested that intellectuals, white-collar workers and the younger generation broadly endorsed the core values of the Soviet regime: ‘state control of the key means of production, a comprehensive welfare state and a paternal government that would regulate political life’
These, however, were the strata that benefited most directly from the security granted in return for political quiescence. The various deals that emerged in practice were the tacit acceptance by the regime of engagement in services and practices that resulted in private gain, activities that technically bordered on the illegal (e.g. Verdery 1996; Firlit and Chłopeci 1992; Gabor 1989; Stark 1989). By the time of Gorbachev’s reforms, this key constituency had shifted towards expectations of greater individual freedoms and reduced welfare provision; the material conditions of blue-collar workers had improved but (according to Bahry 1993) there was less need to court their support for the regime.

The codified essence of what constituted the social contract remained fairly constant, however, from Inkeles and Bauer’s 1959 study to the end of the Soviet Union: ‘state control of the economy, . . . maintenance of political controls . . . [and] the provision of social welfare’ (Bahry 1993: 513). It is notable that all the authors referred to above take a relationship between state and society as a given: what is up for debate is the nature of that relationship. What added to the difficulties in understanding the new order of independent Kazakhstan was that the model of a benign, paternalistic government acting on behalf of its citizens was only one of several paradigms summoned by citizens to explain the Soviet system (Alexander 2004). Other images suggested that Soviet state and society had been unified, even if only in theory. The logical consequence was that the sharp retraction of welfare provision and the simultaneous growth of a private sector were understood by many as the abrupt disintegration of a seamless whole and an abandonment of the masses – an ending of any kind of relationship. The key refrain during my fieldwork from those of my informants who were over 40 years old was that they had worked all their lives for a pension and for a secure future for their children. In their view, the end of the Soviet Union meant that they had been cheated of this return for their labour.

The various tacit deals and accommodations referred to above were effectively acknowledgements of the existence of a private sector in terms of economies of favours and exchanges outside the formal state system of reallocation (e.g. Ledeneva 1998). Nevertheless, the mass privatisation schemes that were ushered in across most of the former Soviet Union in the 1990s destroyed the quiet consensus of the core values of the Soviet system. State control of production was largely sold or handed over to the private sector, initially in the absence of a supply and distribution system that would allow it to operate (Alexander 2004; Lavigne 1995; Burawoy and Verdery 1999; Stark 1989). The regulation of political life by the party was given up and this was manifested not so much in new democracies but in the lack of a clear definition of state responsibilities and an enforced legal system (Humphrey 2000; Nazpary 2001; Volkov 2002). In Almaty, this was expressed both by officials unsure of what their new role entailed vis-à-vis the city’s residents, and by citizens who spoke of unchecked crime on the streets, the lack of order, the absence of the powers to watch over them. The uncertainty of this relationship between city administration (Akimat) and citizens was thus the result of the discrediting of one all-embracing ideology, the lack of any clear replacement...
and the physical manifestation of this vacuum. For this last reason, I focus here on a case study of the transference of property rights to the private sector of one key infrastructural and highly visible element that had previously connected state and people: water.

Both water and electricity (along with gas and other energy supplies) have become key points of friction between the Central Asian states, connected as they are by a complex web of supplies weaving these states together into an awkward position of mutual dependency. The literature from political science and international relations addressing these tensions is considerable (e.g. Cummings 2000, 2005; Kobori and Glantz, 1998; Micklin and Williams 1996). The emphasis here, however, is rather on how the nature of the social contract in the new setting of the independent republic is experienced by the three groups of this study: bureaucrats and two neighbourhoods.

It is worth noting at this point that neither my informants from the Akimat nor the various groups of citizens I spoke to referred to a ‘social contract’ in so many words. However, anxieties were discussed over what the role and responsibilities of central and local government should be morally and pragmatically towards citizens. Arguably, in the early years of independence and economic disintegration, the point was thrown into sharper relief in the urban setting where fewer people had recourse to plots of land and dependence on the state for the maintenance of the urban political economy was more pronounced.

This chapter then is concerned with shifts in Almaty’s urban administration, which are in turn understood through tropes concerning the moral nature of connections between the state and its citizens. Those connections include the rights due to, and obligations due from, each party: mutual commitments that were suddenly thrust into the spotlight as the state and everything it had stood for became uncertain with the fall of the Soviet Union. To a large extent, these social and political conventions had become implicit during the 70-odd years of the Soviet Union, woven into the daily fabric of work and life along with the everyday tactics of resistance to the state and strategies for filling in the holes of a social contract that was incompletely put into practice. Privatisation, and the consequent sudden withdrawal of this background relationship between state and citizen, suddenly made explicit what had been lost with the end of the Soviet Union. The sweeping mass privatisation programmes (see Alexander 2004; Ash and Hare 1994; Radygin and Entov 1999; Lieberman 1997; Lieberman et al. 1997; Humphrey 1995; Kalyuzhnova 2003) that followed hard on the heels of Kazakhstan’s independence from the Soviet Union on 16 December 1991, effectively undid a raft of welfare provision for citizens, much of which had been taken for granted until it disappeared.

Almost as soon as Kazakhstan became an independent republic, Almaty’s officials found themselves charged by the new government with implementing a sweeping programme of privatisation. This fragmentation of the city into state, communal, private and commercial sectors provoked a new question among officials and citizens alike on what the new role of the public sector should be in a
market economy. It was a question that continually appeared during changes in urban configurations of ownership, rights and obligations, and is in marked contrast to the bureaucratic realm of Ulan-Ude where Soviet regulations and management mechanisms largely continued to be pursued. Indeed, in Ulan-Ude quite the opposite question was being asked: what exactly was the role of the private sector where the city was still dominated by a public political economy (see Humphrey, this volume)? As far as Almaty’s citizens and officials were concerned, no clear and satisfactory answer had as yet arisen to its own conundrum in 2002.

Implementing radical adjustments in the way the city was to be managed was complex enough, but officials were further hampered by having to deal with the past. At the turn of the millennium, the post-Soviet urban landscape was typified by hulks of incomplete or decaying Soviet construction projects. This material legacy, pointing towards a discredited future, demanded attention at the same time as large sections of the city were being passed from municipal to private hands. One further change troubled Almaty’s Akimat officials. In 1997 the government moved the capital from Almaty to the central steppe city of Astana (see Buchli, this volume). Suddenly, from being Kazakhstan’s central city, Almaty became politically peripheral. Loss of official status had several effects on the city administrators: their own eminence was diminished, government ministers with whom business had traditionally been carried out face-to-face were now a considerable distance away and the construction of Astana drained Almaty’s budget.

The focus here is on the urban infrastructure that was always a key component of the Soviet welfare system, even if little regarded at the time since it operated almost invisibly in the background (see Humphrey 2003: 91–105; Collier 2005). It was a crucial means of allowing a city to function and it also connected people to other urban areas and social domains. I concentrate on water provision because it was a keen topic of debate during my initial period of fieldwork. Additionally, it acted as a direct and indirect means for citizens and officials to talk through other anxieties such as the retraction of the state in caring for citizens, as well as the lack of clarity as to what a new relation entailed. For many, in the immediate aftermath of independence it was hard to descry any relation at all between the people and the state bureaucracy.

As carriers of meaning, water, gas and electricity worked on a number of levels. Pipes had literally connected domestic spaces to state-owned and -operated power and water stations; and hence the flows of electricity and water were a manifestation of continuing bonds and renewal between a paternalistic state and its citizens. There is an implicit wholeness to these ideas of flows and ties that is emphasised in its contemporary reverse form: abandonment, isolation, the lack of connections needed to produce and reproduce life. ‘How do I know I can trust the man who comes to my door and says he is from the electricity company. Who is he?’, residents of the micro-regions said, along with scandalous tales of elderly grandmothers being duped into handing over money to con-men posing as utility rates collectors. ‘Who will mend my broken water pipe?’, another neighbour asked me, going on to tell how the Soviet neighbourhood management organisation
ZhEK) would have solved the problem after one call. Now, she said, ‘I don’t know who I am supposed to ask. This time, I spoke to many different people who all wanted payment and promised they would mend my leaking pipe, but nothing happened. In the end, my neighbour wrapped some duct tape round the leak.’ The lack of trust in these new organisations to care for the households is common, particularly where regulation and oversight by the Akimat is absent.

The rest of this chapter sketches out fieldwork, Almaty’s location,6 and the city’s history and current appearance, before going on to consider how the Soviet inheritance affected both the material landscape of the city and official practices. The fact that Almaty was founded only shortly before, and thus largely grew alongside, the Soviet regime7 makes it a particularly apposite example through which to consider both the material and moral legacies with which the current administration was left, together with the new demands on the public sector to manage the privatisation of the city’s housing, industry, commercial sector and, to a large extent, its infrastructure. Unlike Tashkent (Tokhtakhodzhaeva, this volume), the physical appearance of Almaty in 2002 was still that of a Soviet city, albeit one that was rapidly undergoing changes in the surface appearance of the built environment (see Buchli, this volume).

The final section of this chapter revisits this idea of absent connections through the use of metaphors of the family. Here, discussions of the city’s budgetary allocation with city officials moved to analogues of the city with an overlooked child: an abnormal, immoral enactment of the family relation. Privatisation further unlocked concerns about foreigners occupying the position previously held by the state at the other end of pipes leading directly to and from the domestic space: the space of kin relations. Suddenly, citizens found themselves literally linked to strangers, once more a morally uncomfortable position. Discussions, whether from citizens or officials, about the new role of the city administration in the care of the city ceaselessly wove in and out of these concerns about the contested and confused relations (or lack of relation) between government, municipality and citizen.

Fieldwork

This chapter is drawn from two periods of fieldwork I carried out in 2000–2001. My main aim was to interview officials in Almaty’s administration to understand their view of transformations in the city since 1991 in order to examine the nature of public-sector provisioning and the implications this might have for the changing character of the social contract. Initial access was readily granted since the head of the Akimat’s construction department was a friend of a friend. He gave me several interviews,8 arranged for me to meet his colleagues and allowed me to sit in on some intra-departmental meetings. He also gave me copies of some documents internal to the administration, observing (as many did) that publicly available statistics at that time were unreliable.9

The second focus of my fieldwork was to understand the impact of changes in the social contract on the ground via two neighbourhood studies. The first case-study
was in the micro-regions built in the 1960s. These are the clusters of Soviet state-built apartment blocks approximately two miles from the centre, originally built as dormitory regions (спальный район). In these blocks, the demography changed sharply during my residence. Many Russian pensioner couples or widows moved to live with their children, usually in Russia. Several apartments were sold on to Kazakh families. Despite many of my Russian neighbours claiming that they were newly surrounded by Kazakh families from the аул (Kazakh village), the most I found were six such families in a block of 50 apartments. What was noticeable, however, was the number of relatives who came to stay for a few weeks or months in Kazakh households while they looked for work or studied; these residential patterns were not captured in statistics of internal movements as temporary living arrangements were rarely registered. The opposite also held true: those wishing to settle more permanently in Almaty found it hard to gain a прописка (residence permit) without which formal jobs and rights to welfare were impossible.

The picture was different again in the emerging regions of self-built private houses on the outskirts where I also carried out interviews. These areas were almost exclusively Kazakh, although residents were keen to point out differences depending on where recent arrivals had come from: regions within Kazakhstan or neighbouring countries. Many informants here lacked formal residence papers and worked in the large black market on Almaty’s edge, saying, ‘this is an illegal district’. Infrastructural provision in these areas was poor: there were few or no roads, no running water, little electricity and no gas.

Almaty: location, history and the contemporary city

Tucked into the country’s south-eastern corner, Almaty is bordered to the south by the Zailiisky Ala-Tau spur of the Tien Shan mountain range, and to the north by steppe. The most sought-after residential areas are those at the city’s edge where it begins to climb towards the mountains: here the air is considerably cleaner than the highly polluted centre (Alexander in press), the streams run with clean water and the view over the city, when the haze allows, is spectacular. Not for nothing was Almaty famed as the third greenest city in the Soviet Union. Until the furthest edges are reached, the roads are thickly planted with trees while the centre is set about with parks and fountains designed, from the city’s earliest days, to act as its ‘green lungs’, in the phrase of local architects, creating open channels through the city to counteract the sluggish winds caught in the dip at the mountains’ base.

Periodically, the spring snow melt running down through these rivers proves too much for the concreted channels to contain and there are small floods. As if this problem were not enough, the ground on which Almaty is built is sandy and liable to seismic activity, and the mountains are similarly unstable and prone to mudslides that, in the past, have swept through the city to devastating effect. A few colossal boulders, souvenirs from the last mudslide in 1976, are still scattered along one of the main streets, Lenin Street, now renamed Dostyk, a reminder of the city’s environmental fragility and need for specialist care by the municipal administration.
The location of the city was originally chosen for military purposes in the mid-nineteenth century, the last of a line of fortified outposts stretching south from Orenburg in Siberia to protect Russian trading interests. As Vernyi, the small military township was officially founded in 1854. In 1921, Vernyi was renamed Alma-Ata by the new Soviet administration and, in 1929, became the capital of the Kazakh Soviet Socialist Republic, remaining the principal city of Kazakhstan until 1997 and the capital’s move to Astana. Although some of the site’s environmental difficulties were known about in the mid-nineteenth century, the unfurling of the full consequences of Almaty’s location proved a continual and increasing headache for a succession of urban administrations. In 1911, only 57 years after its foundation, a second earthquake smashed most of the small township to ruins. It was rebuilt slightly to the east of its original position, but with a new self-consciousness of its vulnerability. Thus Almaty’s administration has always had a series of distinctive difficulties with which to contend. However, the structure of the centralised command economy and the sometimes awkward relationship between local municipalities and Moscow frequently exacerbated environmental conditions; quite simply, centralised industrial ministries had more power than local city planners. As Beisenova (1998: 163) puts it, Almaty suffers from two fundamental historical mistakes: ‘an incorrect site and the decision to locate heavy industry in Almaty’. The former is specific to Almaty; the latter, a result of central decisions overriding local needs and specificity, is common to many Soviet cities (Shaw 1995: 118). In fact, as the case studies below suggest, the Akimat has inherited far more from the Soviet regime than merely ill-judged decisions to place heavy industry in Almaty.

The rapidity with which the centre of Almaty had changed since 1991 was a constant cause for comment by local residents in 2000. The volume of traffic had increased rapidly, jamming the broad axial avenues of the centre morning and evening and sharply raising the pollution levels of the city. Some of the principal roads in the centre had had their asphalt renewed; five-star hotels, casinos, restaurants, sports centres and large shops opened, as did a plethora of small grocery stores carved out of the ground floors of apartment blocks. Shops no longer had their windows blocked by net curtains, but displayed their goods openly. Increasingly, old buildings in the centre were clad in shiny façades and rented out as office space; other glossy apartment blocks rapidly emerged in available gaps in the streetscape. Two major construction companies had a near-monopoly on such projects, Basis and Elitstroy (Elite Constructions), the latter owned by one of the President’s daughters. Previously, to be part of the nomenklatura (Soviet elite) with all its associated privileges, party membership had been necessary, but it was now possible to buy access to the once reserved and concealed appurtenances of the elite.

Beyond Almaty’s central area, a stretch of privately built adobe and small wooden houses runs along either side of the roads that lead out to the micro-regions, originally and hastily built from the late 1950s onwards as dormitory regions for the rapidly growing population of workers (Kozabaev 1983). Quite explicitly, as an
architect involved in the early projects described, one key idea behind the design of these regions was the Garden City movement (see Introduction to this volume). Thus a series of clusters of housing blocks in small neighbourly units was created, each structured around basic services such as small shops and kindergartens, and separated from the main city by a green band. Needless to say, private housing swiftly ate up this empty dividing stretch of land, so that a continuous belt of development came to unfold from the centre to the edge of the city.

In 2000, the outer ring of the city comprised private housing until open fields were reached. Here dachas, palatial villas (kottedzhy) (Figure 3.1) and small mud and straw shacks were either built side-by-side or formed small huddles of similar buildings. Some of these almost extra-urban private houses, whether small shacks constructed by rural immigrants from scavenged oddments (Figure 3.2) or walled and gated villas (see Humphrey 2002; see also Buchli this volume), were built without sanction from the Akimat, although few have been challenged. The standard approach was to ratify such buildings after their construction providing they were in line with minimum regulations – where they were not, as a senior architect in the construction department noted, there was little that could be done to force new owners to dismantle unsafe or illegal houses. In these further reaches of the city there was frequently neither much control by the Akimat nor adequate provision of essential services such as gas, electricity, clean water, roads, clinics, schools and rubbish collection.

![Figure 3.1 Almaty’s outskirts (new villas)](image)
The sense of mutual obligation between Akimat and local residents was equally tenuous in these peri-urban areas. Officials were understandably reluctant to be drawn on their attitude to these districts that represented a distinct challenge to the nature of state responsibilities to citizens and the reach of state oversight. Some officials somewhat piously spoke of the long-term goal to ensure that all such areas had full infrastructural provision. Others clearly saw such residents as having moved themselves outside the remit of state care since they paid no taxes, frequently worked on the black market and often had no official residence papers. Connections here were largely absent on both material and political levels. Although most informants in these areas emphasised that they wished to maintain this distance from an administration, in the light of their lack of registration, a concerted protest hit the news in 2006, with residents of these areas threatening self-immolation if these micro-regions were not provided with minimum levels of infrastructure and residence permits were not provided (Respublika 2006: 5; Pyatnitsa 2006: 1).11

While trying to address these and other manifestations of the post-Soviet city, officials were also shackled to the past both in terms of the material forms that they have inherited, and the knowledge of how to operate a city; this legacy is described below.
Almaty’s material Soviet bequest fell roughly into three categories of public construction. In 2000, Almaty’s urban landscape was still characterised by features attributable to the Soviet period such as vast roads and huge constructions for public activities. Many of these inherited projects were halted with the cessation of subsidies from Moscow, their half-built structures scattered across the cityscape: rusting tunnelling shafts for Almaty’s metro, a sports centre intended to hold 10,000 spectators, fenced-off concrete frames with steel rebars sprouting from unfinished, supporting walls.

The second main group of public construction ventures often suffered from low-quality initial build and subsequent lack of upkeep; these covered the city’s infrastructural services ranging from transport, the heating and power complex, sewerage and waste management to civic service buildings such as hospitals and schools. These services and buildings were usually partly completed, but what there was ran on a makeshift permanence cobbled together to cater for the tide of workers and citizens that had constantly poured into the growing metropolis over the preceding decades. Table 3.1 and Figure 3.3 show Almaty’s population growth 1926–2003; the decline between 1995 and 2003 was largely caused by emigration to Russia and Germany. It is worth remembering that migrants without official papers are not represented here, and that the actual population after 1996 is therefore likely to exceed the numbers shown.

The imperative to provide minimum coverage to meet acute necessity as the population swelled frequently outweighed the need to meet (often over-exacting) construction regulations. Water and sewerage provision, and its subsequent part privatisation, is discussed below as a means of exploring changing understandings of a social contract between state and citizens. In common with most utilities, water provision had been part of the sometimes concealed background of city living – although as Collier (in preparation) observes, a characteristic feature of the Soviet landscape is the highly visible pipes for water and gas that snake through the city. At the same time, once in a building they are hidden from sight whether in walls, under floorboards or below roads, but such invisibility was also fuelled by the sense that pipes served only to channel infinite natural resources to residents via the mediating technology provided by the Soviet state. Further, access to such resources was part and parcel of the broader package of rights due to the citizen through their labour. This invisibility changed sharply in the 1990s after a series of moves to isolate utilities from the broader process of dwelling, count the costs and pass them on to citizens-turned-consumers. This suddenly shone a spotlight on the social and political connections implicit not only in the pipes but in the quality of their contents.

The third category of mass public construction was the expanses of micro-regions (mikri) beyond the central grid to the north, east and west. These apartment blocks were built from the late 1950s onwards as part of Khrushchev’s drive to address the urban housing crisis across the Soviet Union and provide a separate
Table 3.1 Almaty’s population, 1926–2003 (in thousands)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Population ('000)</td>
<td>454</td>
<td>929</td>
<td>1,780</td>
<td>2,236</td>
<td>2,351</td>
<td>2,815</td>
<td>5,143</td>
<td>6,348</td>
<td>7,471</td>
<td>9,748</td>
<td>10,533</td>
<td>11,320</td>
<td>11,724</td>
<td>11,354</td>
<td>11,475</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Tsentralnii Gos archive goroda Almaty

Figure 3.3 Almaty’s population, 1926–2003

Source: Tsentralnii Gos archive goroda Almaty
apartment for each family (Figure 3.4). Spalling concrete, inadequate sanitation, rusting pipes, lack of insulation and the leaking roofs of many former state apartment blocks were a sore legacy to inherit, but largely one that was handed over, in the 1993 mass privatisation programme, to the apartments’ occupants. Previously, maintenance and provision of utilities in state-built apartments had always been borne by the state. Suddenly, with privatisation, the provision and cost of utilities across domestic and commercial sectors took on an unprecedented importance, signalling the retraction of the extensive Soviet social infrastructure and the withdrawal of state care for citizens. Utilities thus served to focus attention both on what municipalities were, and on what they were not, providing for their citizens. As the following case-study shows, the fate of utilities also drew to them other keen anxieties about what privatisation, migration and shifting urban demographies meant both for urban citizens and for the city as a whole.

Water: a case-study

During the Soviet Union, autonomous branches of Vodokanal provided each city or state’s sewerage and water supply requirements while the Soviet Republic’s Ministry of Communal Economy managed overall administration. Little changed in the management structure after 1991 since, even in the Soviet period, there had been no supra-Republic co-ordinating body. In Central Asia, the particular problem of scarce water resources (Cummings 2002) has added to broader dilemmas faced
by public utility companies, which often continued to be reliant on funding by city administrations after independence. The sudden emergence of scarcity also demonstrated how pipes and light switches connected citizens and their domestic spaces not only to urban, corporate and state organisations but to international geopolitics. Soviet Central Asia was tightly meshed together, not only in the familiar network of supply and distribution chains that characterised the enforced interdependence of Soviet Republics, but also through the cat’s cradle of energy and water lines that wound through the Central Asian Republics. Independence from the Soviet Union immediately erected political borders across these lines that consequently became bargaining counters at government level. The effects were felt, quite literally, at home. The state ceased to provide a protecting buffer from the vagaries of chance – to paraphrase Marx – and instead became part of the competition for resources.

As touched on above, Soviet regulation was frequently premised on an ultimate, perfect state of affairs as opposed to setting targets according to a pragmatic compromise between the desirable and the achievable. In this case, hot and cold water was to be provided for all dwellings and public buildings together with immaculate levels of sanitation and waste water disposal for the city as a whole. Such construction and environmental regulations were often impossible to meet in full (see Peterson 1993: x). This situation was exacerbated by the frequent lack of enforcement of many measures, particularly those concerning urban services and pollution, through a combination of lack of will, money and expertise. As Almaty’s population swelled after the 1950s (see Table 3.1), with the influx of workers from the Virgin Lands Campaign to plough up the steppe for grain, provision of basic utilities lagged far behind regulatory directives, and indeed basic sanitary requirements, despite the endless plans detailing what should be done. Many of the pipes that were laid at this time lacked adequate waterproofing, leading to chronic pollution of underground streams. The sewerage and water supply systems were never fully extended to cover all the new micro-regions that were springing up, and private houses were rarely connected up to mains supplies but generally relied on street pumps laid 200 metres apart. Interim measures became the norm. The overriding urgency from the centre of pushing forward the Soviet modernisation project constantly took precedence over local inability to provide adequate supporting infrastructure and implement utopian plans.

A retired sewerage engineer who had worked for the city’s department of communal economy from the late 1950s onwards recalled that with the constant flood of workers into the city, a limited budget and few technical experts, the emphasis was placed on building as many living quarters, hospitals and schools as possible. Despite laws forbidding the construction of such buildings without sanitation, immediate needs were deemed more pressing. As the engineer commented, ‘You know what they say, there’s nothing more permanent than a temporary structure. The only difference now is that they don’t build anything at all.’ This, then, much as Kotkin describes in the building of Magnitogorsk (1995), was the material effect on daily lives of the great Soviet drive to modernisation:
the ideological crusade that exhorted citizens to dispense with present comfort
in the name of a future-orientated communist glory.\textsuperscript{13}

Agricultural and industrial enterprises also contributed funds to Vodokanal,
paying higher rates for their water than the residential tariff. In fact, in line with
other utilities and urban services such as electricity, heating and waste disposal, a
common perception among informants was that water had been free for citizens
during the Soviet period: part of the social contract that provided the necessities
for living in exchange for labour. Extremely low rates set for water did nothing to
staunch the very high residential usage, nor did the method of calculating each
apartment’s bill according to apartment size rather than consumption.

Not only were the charges to each apartment very low, they also remained fairly
static. For example, charges for apartments were established in the 1930s; between
1932 and 1934 the monthly charges for a good apartment of about 15 square metres
in the centre of Almaty with all services provided was about 1 rouble and 30
kopecks. After the currency reforms of the 1960s, charges for a similar apartment
were raised to 13 kopecks per square metre, still an insubstantial amount. Speaking
of this cavalier attitude to water, as much as energy, a grandmother living in the
micro-regions said,

No-one counted up the amount of water used by each person then; it
was only calculated by the whole apartment block. If there was a hole in
the pipe and water ran across the street no-one knew or cared because
the price was so low that it was just ignored, no-one took any notice, or
counted up what was lost.

Perestroika marked the beginning of trying to charge each apartment an amount that
reflected proportional usage, but few apartments were metered. Where meters were
installed they were frequently tampered with, either through magnets to change
the meter reading or more destructive tactics (see also Humphrey, this volume).
The effect of this move to charge households for usage was first, to undermine the
assumption that utilities and social care more broadly were provided in exchange
for labour and second, to produce a new kind of moral citizen: the consumer citizen.
By logical entailment, the state/urban municipality was transformed into an entity
that was not the overarching provider of the Soviet period and yet not quite
commercial: at the start, charges were supposed to reflect costs, not profit margins.
But underlying both of these shifts was the progressive commodification of both
labour and the infrastructure needed for daily life: increasingly markets and money
were being used to mediate the previously direct relationship between people and
the state.

As infrastructural elements such as water took on a new importance they also
served to objectify a series of broader anxieties about rapid urban transformations
in Almaty. Citizens’ narratives of how the city had changed often centred around
what were seen first, as uncontrolled and inexplicable hikes in water (and other)
charges, and second, as loss of control of national resources through the sale of
Vodokanal to foreign interests which led to the country becoming vulnerable to (apparently) unregulated global firms. In fact, most of the autonomous municipal water companies were formed into Joint Stock Companies, with the state retaining a majority percentage share; private companies were funded from charges and took over responsibility for managing the urban networks for a fixed term – as happened in Almaty.

In 2001, 52 per cent of Almaty’s Vodokanal was sold to a French company for a 30-year term, and renamed Almaty Sui. Costs of improving the city’s water supply and sewerage network were split across an EBRD loan of US$6.3 million, a bilateral co-operation agreement with the French Ministry of Finance, which underwrote their commercial interests, and funding from the Akimat. Illustrating the problems in navigating the unknown area between public and private sectors, this contract took three years to negotiate. In return for utility charges, the French company’s obligation was to invest $100 million in upgrading the current piping and sewerage network. Up to award of contract, the split of management between the Akimat and government continued. The Republican Ministry of Communal Economy covered the technical management and gave money for planning the network of pipes, either laying new ones or repairing existing pipes – the latter absorbing most of the effort and available finance. The Akimat paid for all other staff, until the French company took over the management. In 2002, Ulitsa Pravda (Truth Street), one of the principal roads through the older micro-regions, was dug up to re-lay the elderly pipes underneath. This was irresistible fodder for the local inhabitants who commented, ‘we knew things weren’t good, but now they’re destroying truth’.

The cost of domestic supplies of gas, electricity and water was thus for many citizens a central index of the changed world in which they found themselves. Often barely able to pay the maintenance charges on their apartments now demanded by local management groups, they additionally found themselves subject to what appeared to be utterly unreasonable demands for utilities charges. During the Soviet period, these charges were either nominal or subsumed in other subventions. Along with housing, the highly subsidised domestic provision of utilities was effectively a series of payments in kind and, to a large extent, simply part of the backdrop of living, and therefore almost invisible. This withdrawal of a subsidised social infrastructure had profound effects on living standards. It has been estimated that during the Soviet period such benefits accounted for up to 40 per cent of standard incomes (UNDP 1998). Calculations of subsistence levels in order to target the most needy have not yet taken the full opportunity costs of infrastructural provision into account.

The next step was to turn management of elderly canalisation systems over to private companies that then not only collected the costs for unit consumption but also began to charge for the maintenance and incremental renewal of the pipe system. The effect was that what had been the backcloth of daily life was suddenly foregrounded and carefully itemised into parts, each of which was commodified. The process of extracting chargeable elements continued beyond expectation.
Poring over a bill recently received from the neighbourhood housing management organisation, a resident of the micro-regions said in disbelief, ‘Last year they began to charge for water separately from central heating. Now look! There are separate items for hot water and cold water.’

Not only was the sudden increase in the cost of keeping alive barely manageable, but residents in the micro-regions also expressed profound unease that suddenly everything seemed to be for sale. ‘The next thing we know,’ one woman muttered, ‘they’ll privatise the air we breathe.’ Like air, water was seen to be part of the bounty of nature, belonging to all. Such exaggeration was in line with fears that nothing appeared to be sacred and set apart from the commodifying logic of the market. The disquiet among many residents in the micro-regions accompanying the privatisation of core urban utilities was threefold: first there was the moral repugnance at dismembering a whole, second, distrust that commercial interests would place profit over care and third, fear that foreign business in particular had no concern for either the land or the people of Kazakhstan. In short, privatisation of the urban infrastructure quite literally brought home to citizens the undoing of a social system which, though far from perfect, had mapped out roles and relations together with the exchange flows of services, work and the necessities for life that had allowed the system as a whole to function. Fracturing and opening up this system not only seemed to cast citizens aside as so many abandoned children, but also stopped up the possibility for the reciprocity needed for social and moral reproduction.

Although the systems built to serve the city had been barely able to cope with demand and had had little spent on their upkeep during perestroika, it was widely believed that both the quality and quantity of water had plummeted once the system had been ‘privatised’. In a typical lament, again recalling themes of the Soviet state’s paternalist care for its citizens versus the current situation where the new state seemed to have rejected its role of welfare provider, an elderly occupant of an apartment block in the city centre commented:

Before, the water in the irrigation canals (aryk) used to be clean and clear and was supplied for drinking, but it was also used for watering plants. If people had a private house then of course the water would also be used for the garden. The canals don’t work so well now, they worked better when the city was smaller. Before we watered our plants with drinking water but now it’s too expensive to use such water to wash dust from the roads, or water plants in courtyards. That’s why so many plants and trees are dying and there’s so much dust everywhere. Only God waters them now.

The decay of the present-day privatised city, which is suggested here, set against a past of natural fecundity in the city supported by clean, plentiful ‘state’ water is part of a genre of explanations of present disarray that is encountered throughout the Soviet period. Ssorin-Chaikov (2003), for example, chronicles what he terms
‘the poetics of unfinished construction’ as an exegetical trope for the failure of a regime orientated towards the future ever to achieve its vision. The trope was, of course, modified in the post-Soviet era: not all disorders are the same. With the disappearance of a future goal, there was no need to explain lack of achievement. What appeared instead was a comparison between present fragmentation and the previous emphasis on holism and solicitude. These are incomplete tropes. The contemporary construction of a caring former state (whose paternalist solicitude is now matched only by God), does not chime perfectly with accounts of inadequate urban provision in the past. Moreover, once the hard years of the early 1990s were over, the central parks were well provided with the necessary water during the hot summer months, a provision that provoked no resentment since it was seen to be for the public’s benefit.

The new cost of water and electricity served to draw out and focus other anxieties about urban changes. Several long-standing residents of the micro-regions were unsettled by the rapid demographic changes in their neighbourhoods as many Russian families emigrated to Russia. Increasingly, Kazakh migrants came to the city from collapsed collective farms to live in micro-regions. Relatives, also in search of work, frequently came to stay for protracted visits. Water meters temporarily served as a focus for anxieties about abrupt shifts not only in the ethnic composition of the micro-regions but, more specifically, about the inflow of people from rural areas to the city. Table 3.2 shows the official statistical version of migrations in and out of Almaty as a whole by ethnicity in 2002.14

This shows a dramatic net increase in Kazakhs moving to Almaty, coupled with a less significant but still marked net outflow of Russians and Kazakhs. As Table 3.3 shows (listing the largest ethnic movements), most Kazakhs came to

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Number incoming</th>
<th>Number outgoing</th>
<th>Balance</th>
<th>% incoming</th>
<th>% outgoing</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>24,336</td>
<td>9,916</td>
<td>14,420</td>
<td>71.9</td>
<td>47.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>4,964</td>
<td>7,743</td>
<td>-2,779</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>37.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>-124</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussian</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>-21</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>778</td>
<td>-578</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tatar</td>
<td>445</td>
<td>364</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uzbek</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Azeri</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greek</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chechen</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>789</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>553</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uighur</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>355</td>
<td>701</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1,292</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>560</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistiki ezhegodnik goroda Almaty (2003: 21)
Table 3.3 Migration source and destination by ethnic group, 2002 (Almaty)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Intra-oblast movement</th>
<th>Migration (CIS)</th>
<th>Migration (non-CIS)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Incoming</td>
<td>Outgoing</td>
<td>Balance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kazakh</td>
<td>22,588</td>
<td>9,361</td>
<td>13,227</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russian</td>
<td>3,459</td>
<td>2,409</td>
<td>1,050</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian</td>
<td>278</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belorussian</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>German</td>
<td>169</td>
<td>89</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>548</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uighur</td>
<td>992</td>
<td>319</td>
<td>673</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Statistiki ezhegodnik goroda Almaty (2003: 21–2)
Almaty from elsewhere in Kazakhstan, most Russians moved out to CIS countries and beyond, while Germans usually returned to Germany. It is worth noting in passing that a relatively small number of Uighurs and Koreans left Kazakhstan, either having no legal nation-state to return to, or lacking a welcoming one.

This migration to the cities added a further layer to the concerns about flows and connections. Soviet Alma-Ata, in common with most capital cities, had nominal limitations placed upon its population size and obtaining an official residence permit was extremely difficult, especially for non-Russians. As a consequence, Alma-Ata was a distinctly Russian urban space (see Figure 3.5) with clumps of private housing where non-Russians were more likely to be living. Rural migration threatened to blur distinctions necessary for perception and order. This was the wrong kind of flow, uncontained and breaking down borders.

Until the late 1990s, a single water meter recorded the volume used by each apartment block. The cost for each apartment was then calculated simply according to the ratio of square metres, or living space, per apartment to the total space per apartment block. As many smaller, usually Russian families grumbled, this method failed to take into consideration the high number of people, and therefore high usage, in some apartments. In a characteristic complaint, one young Russian doctor observed that he was effectively subsidising his new Kazakh neighbours from the villages since their apartments did not have individual meters. Lying behind his comment is the fact that typical rural Kazakh families are considerably larger than Russian ones and moreover, in the cities, often host a stream of relatives looking for work. From 2000 onwards, neighbourhood management organisations began to provide separate water meters to each apartment, at a cost of between 1,000 and 2,000 tenge.¹⁵ Those unable to afford the installation could ask for

---

Figure 3.5 Ethnic composition of Almaty by three largest groups, 1939–1995
Source: Masanov et al. (2000)
subsidies from the Akimat, though some preferred to minimise contact with the administration and tried to continue paying a proportionate share instead. Gradually, as more meters were installed, protests about new neighbours took on different forms with tales of gangs of unemployed youths from the rural areas and sharply increased levels of crime on the streets. Nevertheless, the means of paying for water continues to provoke friction between neighbours and minor scandals. In 2006, new ‘urban scandals’ emerged, caused by the differences between the water meter for the entire apartment block and the total accounted for by all the separate meters in each apartment. The KCKs (Neighbourhood Management Organisation) had obliged each apartment to pay a share of the shortfall, once again provoking distrust of the KCK and resentment of the neighbours who were thought to be the cause of the discrepancy.

Despite advertised municipal plans to extend provision of clean water and sanitation to the rapidly growing peripheral areas where many migrants have settled, this has yet to happen. Again, infrastructural responsibility became a mode of talking through the relations, or lack of them, between the Akimat and these new citizens of Almaty. Many migrants I interviewed had sunk their own wells. Some, if living near large new villas, had tapped the supplies laid by these wealthier house owners – with their permission. Perhaps surprisingly, many of these peripheral dwellers expressed little desire to have closer connections with the Akimat through improved infrastructural provision, expecting little help from it and wanting no interference in their lives. Such rejection of relations was mirrored in interviews with some Akimat officials who observed tartly that if such people failed to pay taxes they could not expect the state to provide them with services.

Post-Soviet urban bureaucrats

As much as the material urban landscape that displayed an accretion of personal and political histories of the city, Soviet bureaucratic practice still permeated administrative affairs, particularly at the municipal level. Many of the same officials who planned and managed the city over the last 30 years were still in key positions in the Akimat 10 years after the end of the Soviet Union. The city’s future organisation was thus formulated as much through a tacit framework of values naturalised during the Soviet period, as through imperfect understandings both of the highly abstracted form of the free market and of the consequences of carrying out economic ‘shock therapy’ in the absence of a resilient institutional structure of law and welfare provision. Policies were announced and attempts made to put them into practice. As the often unexpected and sometimes disastrous effects of these actions uncoiled, however, policies were frequently abruptly changed, leaving officials – never mind citizens – in great confusion. Listening to officials describing attempts to find ways of carrying out the privatisation programmes enjoined upon them by the government shows the fog in which many officials felt themselves to be operating as they struggled to enact rapidly mutating governmental directives, or found themselves faced with unexpected consequences from their actions.
Recalling the period when state housing was being privatised, the Akimat’s head of construction said,

In the beginning of the privatisation programme, the government gave money out to help housing costs, but by the end of 1997 the population had to pay 100 per cent [of the cost of utilities] themselves. This was real shock therapy for the whole population, as they suddenly had to pay very high prices for services. There was a delegation from Moscow around this time, and it was only then that I discovered that in Moscow they give money for communal services; the people there only pay 30 per cent themselves. When I asked why the people there didn’t pay the full cost, they said that if they did this then there would have been social chaos. It was quite a shock to hear that. That’s why the communal services are so expensive here in relation to income; there is no support at all.

As a small addendum to this narrative, it is worth noting that in 2000 the average monthly cost of housing services in Almaty was 3,000 tenge (approximately £12), which consumed three-quarters of the state pension. Unable to buy enough food as well as to pay utility and service charges, many pensioners and unemployed workers were forced out of their homes, some moving in with relatives, some ending up living on the streets (see Baldayeva, this volume). Privatisation of apartments failed to take into account the costs of the process of dwelling after the initial purchase. There were no statistics available showing exactly how many people had had to leave their privatised apartments for this reason, but eviction after problems over service charge and utility payments accounted for most of the pensioners in Almaty’s night hostel for the homeless, later renamed ‘social rehabilitation centre’. The one point they all made was that they had spent their lives working in return for security in their old age. Merging old and new states, these pensioners saw a morally bankrupt regime as having reneged on the defining social contract of their lives.

But behind this official’s story was also the theme threading through this chapter: the question of the post-Soviet municipality’s role or, more fundamentally, the role and responsibilities of the Akimat as local representative of the state, towards its citizens – and indeed towards the government. To what extent should a modern municipality help its citizens, identify with the government, or struggle to keep locally generated funds in the city? The story from the Moscow delegation was perturbing, suggesting that there had been alternative, gradualist approaches to ‘shock therapy’.

Transitional events

Quite apart from managing a city created to serve political ends that had suddenly become redundant, officials were faced with abrupt changes in the social, economic and political environment in which they operated. As the previous section suggests, they had to enact a colossal programme of privatisation virtually on a trial and
error basis. But this resulted in the, as yet unresolved, question of the nature and responsibility of public administration and services in an economy driven by an untempered theory of the free market.

More than this, the nature of the administration itself also began to change fundamentally. In the Soviet period, Republican-level ministers and urban administrators had not only lived in the same city, but also shared a habitus. They were part of an administrative line that stretched to Moscow and was knit tightly together not just by common Party affiliation but also by shared practices. Under the guidance of the Kazakh Communist Party’s First Secretary Dinmukhammed Kunaev, considerable funds had been directed towards Almaty from Moscow from the late 1960s onwards enabling the construction of the centre’s grander buildings. With the collapse of the Soviet Union these subsidies to the city ceased and the administrative line to Moscow was snapped. This fragmentation of the bureaucratic world was intensified when the government moved the capital of the new Republic to Astana. At a stroke, Almaty lost not only its status, but also the close, often personal, relationships between Republican and city-level bureaucrats. Accustomed to carrying out business face-to-face with familiar colleagues, officials now found they had to fly to the new capital and wait their turn. In other words, the loss of sustaining flows encountered by citizens as they were forced to account and pay for utilities, was mirrored within the urban administration as bureaucratic connections, which had allowed and supported a particular mode of working, were cut.

These then were the problems encountered by urban officials within their sphere of work. But the object of their labour, the city and its citizens, had also undergone rapid and unprecedented change making them almost unknowable in terms of bureaucratic representation. Abrupt cessation of central subsidies and the dissolution of the integrated Soviet economic infrastructure led to massive unemployment and widespread migration in search of work. New levels of mobility coupled with the frequent lack of registration and identity documents presented huge problems for a bureaucracy used to containment and regulation of the population. Effectively, a large part of its object population now vanished from sight. Not only that, but the plan, the standard means of connecting the city outside with the bureau, was rendered even more abstract by the increased dubiety of its statistical basis that relied heavily on the documentation that had located and defined the population (Humphrey 2002; Alexander 2007).

Closely tied to statistical challenges and plans was the issue of regulation. Targets were often needlessly high, or their means of implementation inadequately described. Once again the practicalities of implementation and enforcement became interwoven with dilemmas over the role of state intervention into private-sector business. After all, the version of the market that was implemented incorporated ideas of the market as a self-regulating institution. Here, however, I consider one of the consequences of privatisation: the new requirement for public-sector bodies to manage the grey border area between public and private, running competitive tenders, writing contracts and ensuring (or not) a reliable institutional framework within which the contractual relationship could be played out.
Here, the key question is once again one of the right connections. Many colleagues, with whom bureaucrats had close bonds forged over years of working together, were now found to be, by a wave of the privatisation wand, in a different moral camp. Continuing former relations across public and commercial sectors was technically now corrupt, even though this was muddied by the fact that very often there was simply no other organisation or person with the necessary specialised skills. It is worth stressing at this point that there are no such tensions in Ulan-Ude and virtually none in Tashkent, simply because there is little or no interest from the private sector in urban investment.

**Negotiating the private sector**

The history of urban regulation in the former Soviet Union was never straightforward. Unrealistically, even unnecessarily high targets yoked with output targets often set the scene for pay-offs between directors of enterprises and inspectors. This very common perception of state regulators continued among many citizens after 1991: that many of the unfeasibly demanding regulations were merely a mechanism for generating cash for officials. Certainly, many former owners of small shops told tales of being forced to close after weekly and sometimes daily visits from different representatives of the Fire, Sanitary and Tax Committees, each requiring money in order to sign off the relevant inspection certificate. When these official extortions were added to money demanded by local protection rackets, the amount of cash flooding out became unsustainable (see Nazpary 2001). Without the shield of patronage, many larger enterprises were also the object of frequent ‘inspections’.

Excessively stringent regulations, lack of consistent implementation and the regular pay-offs that tend to accompany arbitrary bureaucracy were inherited, almost institutionalised, problems. The more recent shading was provided by uncertainty within the Akimat over the extent to which public administration should regulate private business. Was the state there to provide a framework in which market activity could flourish or to safeguard citizens from the predations of commerce?

In effect, the legitimacy of the Akimat, and by extension the state, was at stake. The authority to act on behalf of citizens in the Soviet period was provided by some sense of the social contract discussed above where the state was there to look after the collective interests of citizens in the immediate and particularly the long-term future. The introduction of market principles obscured this relationship, not least because citizens could be simultaneously members of the public and work through the market. Thus one key to the anxiety experienced over the proper role of the administration is the existence both in demotic speech and in academic discourse of a series of public–private binary oppositions, where, in each case, ‘public’ and ‘private’ represent quite different constituencies of interests. The collectivity of citizens, the market, and the institutional framework of the state may all be classified as ‘public’, in different contexts, but may equally represent contradictory concerns (see for example Warner 2002: 23).
The points of contact between commercial and state sectors were highly lucrative and much sought after, whether the initial contract-tendering process, granting licences, or the regulation of activities thereafter. Quite simply, the allocation of large contracts whether for construction, running city services, or operating businesses represented an unrivalled opportunity for kickbacks. Not unnaturally, these jobs were much sought after, representing the contemporary equivalent of being placed in a position in the Soviet administrative structure to which not only prestige but also access to restricted services and goods accrued. In the place of old connections, new entanglements arose between public and commercial interests, between public and private individual interests. To residents commenting on the increasing opacity of the process, as ownership of the urban infrastructure swung between different parties, the key connection that appeared to have been lost was the one where the Akimat or state as good father took care of the long-term interests of the city’s citizens.

The dissolution of the good family

In this penultimate section I consider the more direct use of metaphors of the family that have been implied in many citizens’ comments on and reactions to the withdrawal of the public sector from direct control and management of the urban infrastructure. Here we again focus on bureaucrats talking through their sharply changed relationship with central government, but this time quite explicitly using the conveniently plastic metaphor of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ familial relations. Here too, ideas of exchange flows as a means of sustaining moral orders and social structures are reprised, although here the flow is neither water nor electricity (the infinite bounty of nature harnessed by Soviet technology) but money. Nevertheless, in the accounts reported below, money, the classic symbol of the sphere of market alienation, is merged with notions of food and nurture due to a child from a parent. Reflecting Humphrey’s (2002) thesis that in the Soviet system everyone was simultaneously inside and outside the state, narratives from urban citizens that first unite Akimat and central government and then speak of a sense of betrayal by the state, emerge again here with Akimat officials speaking through tropes of disconnection and abandonment from government.

One significant change in the post-Soviet urban administration was the means of allocating of the city’s budget. During the Soviet Union, the economy was based on a material balance sheet: the city’s budget and the construction programme were determined centrally. After 1991, the city had to raise its own revenue and decide what was to be financed, within the broader remit set by government. In common with the rest of the former Soviet Union, Almaty’s industrial sector, and chief revenue source, declined almost to the point of standstill, reaching a nadir in 1995. Since then, however, industry gradually began to improve. In 2000, Almaty was by far the richest city in Kazakhstan, but despite an annual income of approximately 80 billion tenge, it could only keep 13 per cent by governmental decree, and the rest was forfeit to the national budget to be reallocated to poorer
regions and cities and, as most officials muttered, to support the construction of Astana. The removal of 87 per cent of locally generated revenue provoked several responses. Most revealing was the use of the familial metaphor to structure explanations. Explaining Almaty’s hefty contribution to the national budget, a senior city official began by saying that this was just as it should be:

There are some regions that are permanently in debt and have big financial problems. So the government gives them money from Almaty. Of course the government must redistribute money. The country is like a family and if one child has money, that doesn’t mean that the parents should give them more, or let them keep it if another child is hungry. The parents should share out according to need.

However, this was later modified by a comment that this centralising, standardising method was scarcely fair:

Even though Almaty is no longer the capital, it is the scientific, business, educational and cultural centre. Such standard accounting procedures cannot be right, as they don’t take into account the needs of a city as opposed to the needs of a village. The government doesn’t understand this – it treats all its children the same, and they are not the same, they have different needs. If one child has managed to do well, you don’t punish it by taking away its money and giving it to another child! So we have constant arguments with the government about this, but it is hard to change the psychology of the bureaucracy.

The Republican state divided the available finance by population of each region, so by allocating a standard 14 tenge per person to the official 1.1 million population of Almaty, a total allowance of 15 billion tenge is arrived at. One problem is simply the variation between official demographic statistics on which such budgetary calculations were based, and the considerably larger actual population caused by internal migration movements. The variation itself was largely simply a result of the lack of official documentation of many recent migrants into the city. Yet, as city officials pointed out, it was not just a question of numbers; Almaty was also qualitatively different from other conurbations, let alone rural areas.

These budgetary discussions touched on a variety of anxieties explored throughout this chapter about the position of citizens and urban bureaucrats in the new independent Republic. Once the capital, the presidential decision to move the governmental centre to Astana had left Almaty shorn of its nominal primacy. Despite the small sop of being named a city of Republican importance, the administrative equivalent of an oblast, in one stroke Almaty lost its defining identity and the proximity of ministers and suffered the simultaneous indignity of having to generate its own income, only to see most of it displaced to the national budget and thence to the new capital. In effect, to recall the family metaphor, from being
the paternalist centre of direction and decisions and distribution, the city admin-
istration found itself jostling for funds with other cities in sibling rivalry. Still, the
question of how paternalistic the new city regime should be to its own citizens
hovered in the air. It is striking how often officials described urban citizens as
children who needed to grow up and take responsibility for their own lives and
environment. Only slowly were protectionist policies being introduced to support
domestic industry, and some revenue diverted to welfare projects: a residential
home for pensioned war veterans, a small number of flats for the elderly, and a
hostel for the homeless have recently been built. Capacity is tiny in all estab-
lishments. The Akimat established a department for the administration of the Social
Programme as recently as 1999; reflecting its budget, the size of the department has
been volatile, as shown in Table 3.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of employees</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1,267</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>975</td>
<td>1,044</td>
<td>1,146</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Upravleniia Statistiki goroda Almaty, Zhenshchiny i Mushchiny (2004: 122–7)

Changes in the overall size of the state sector (see Table 3.5) can be attributed to
the shrinking of departments managing communal property on the one hand and the
growth of those concerned with financial management, import duties, contracts,
welfare, and the provision of financial advice and regulations for small and
medium-sized enterprises in the city.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1998</th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>2003</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No. of employees</td>
<td>20,035</td>
<td>21,041</td>
<td>21,307</td>
<td>20,949</td>
<td>20,946</td>
<td>21,122</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The familial metaphor is conveniently elastic, allowing both for ideologies of
equality and mutual support on the one hand, and for structural inequalities and
qualitative difference on the other. Significantly, though the family metaphor is
a familiar part of Soviet speech in the guise of paternalist direction from Moscow
and peripheral ‘little brothers’, I heard it used only by officials who were trying
to explain or think through the manifold severances and re-connections to which
they had been subject since independence. The only time citizens spoke about kin
relations with regard to the administration was in the context of the containment
of administrative and political preferment within the presidential clan, ‘the Greater
Horde’ or sub-groups within that. The most common motif from residents of the micro-regions with regard to the Akimat was a sense that they had been abandoned. Local and central governments were conflated in these accounts where a safe, orderly Soviet world was contrasted with the present one where Akimat officials appeared remote and unconcerned with urban welfare. This picture does not completely tally with the view from inside the Akimat where, as this chapter has described, there have been a plethora of material, ideological, economic and political changes affecting the administrative configuration within which Almaty’s city officials are suspended.

**Conclusion**

The question of the role and responsibility of urban administrations, and the public sector more broadly, remains open-ended. Control over key urban enterprises is still fluctuating although, as described above, some have been recalled into the municipal administration after a brief flirtation with privatisation, a pattern that is developing across the former Soviet Union. Within the Akimat itself, officials are confronted with a series of new changes and problems. Opinion is divided over whether welfare support for citizens or encouragement of commercial enterprises should take precedence, problems exacerbated until 2002 by the removal of much of the city’s revenue by the government. Akimat departments have become more independent from each other, both making holistic co-ordination of the city difficult and rendering the internal workings of the Akimat more opaque to citizens who have to obtain official permission from several departments for licences to operate businesses. But the increasing separation of administrative and executive functions has also resulted both in the insecurity of contractual relations between public and commercial sectors, which have frequently been declared void by the Anti-Monopolies Commission in response to political demands, and in the lack of confidence that the courts will enforce regulations, particularly in the area of construction.

Such internal problems are rarely visible to citizens who speak instead of the changing face of the Akimat, of anxieties about approaching the huge white building that houses the main administration (Alexander 2007). Previous channels of communication between municipal administration and citizens appear to have silted up. The large notice boards along principal streets that had been posted with news of urban developments, architectural competitions and general information are now empty and rusted over, occasionally pasted with advertisements. Many informants observed that newspapers now merely report decisions made by the Akimat rather than inviting responses as had been the custom during the Soviet period. Citizens have seen their standard of living plummet as job security and the social infrastructure, previously provided by state enterprises and the city administration, have both degraded. The simultaneous opening of the economy and the city has allowed in both foreign investment and escalating migration from the rural areas; both have provoked fears among citizens of the lack of clear control.
and care over the city. Such fears are articulated through a number of themes: here I have focused on the urban infrastructure and the problem of social and material connections within the city and between the city and other social domains that are manifested through the piped utility networks.

Perhaps the most significant result of the Akimat’s retraction of involvement in the infrastructure of social support has been the loss of trust in the state and its institutions. This is most marked on the edge of the city where many recent incomers to Almaty have chosen to turn their back on the state and any idea of a social contract that can be worked out through a large-scale imagined community. Instead, possible help from the Akimat is rejected and support networks of relatives and sometimes neighbours and friends are relied on. If this continues, the result will be a sharply divided polity with an increasing gap between the centre and peripheral regions where an extra-legal private sector is developing outside the state. This phenomenon of a mutual rejection of relations between state and citizens is not unknown within the Akimat itself. Walking through a severely impoverished district to the north of the city with an official from the Social Affairs department prompted him to exclaim, ‘The state doesn’t come here, you know. It doesn’t want to see all this. It prefers to stay away in its big building up on the hill.’

Notes
1 Unlike an ethnography of the administration (see Alexander forthcoming), this chapter is a discussion of the questions raised by the retraction of the state from its previous pervasive concerns with the lives of its citizens.
2 Although modern scholarship now accepts that classes existed de facto in the Soviet period in the sense that different groups of the population had variable levels of access to privileges, the basis from which these classes are to be identified is a moot point. Bahry (1993) takes educational level as a key determinant in class definition; Inkeles and Bauer (1959) adopt occupation as a means of categorisation.
4 Significantly, production in many of the more profitable sectors across the states of the former Soviet Union has been brought back into state control – even though ownership is far from clear – as political and economic control has become more established and new economic configurations have solidified.
5 Despite the plethora of second economies and alternative social structures to shore up lives, it is worth emphasising that these emerged in the interstices of an overarching system. In the absence of such a system, the careful tuning of these secondary arrangements also faltered (Alexander 2004).
6 Almaty’s siting has long been considered both one of its main curses and one of its main advantages. With respect to the latter, Yuri Dombrovsky describes the natural splendours of 1930s Alma-Ata in his novels The Faculty of Useless Knowledge (1997) and The Keeper of Antiquities (1969).
7 The standard date used for the founding of Almaty is 1854 when a small Tsarist fortress was established on the site and grew into a small town, Verny, later renamed Alma-Ata. Recent nationalist-inspired archaeology puts the date somewhat earlier, claiming settlement at least since the thirteenth century and possibly the Bronze Age.
8 Interviews and conversations with officials were conducted in Russian even though the official, but unpublicised, policy at this time was to use Kazakh and increase the
numbers of Kazakh officials. I did this because, whether Kazakh or Russian, most of the officials I spoke to said they were learning Kazakh but were not comfortable with the language.

9 For this reason, reinforced by my own fieldwork with unregistered migrants, I have not placed a heavy emphasis on public statistics as representative of changes in the city’s political economy and demography. Where cited, they are best seen as very broadly indicative.

10 Again, the methodology underlying the collection of labour statistics does not reflect the situation I found. Unemployment figures (following the ILO definition and addressing different durations) were taken from those who registered at the Labour Registry Office (for which a propiska was necessary). In the course of several interviews with people who were not formally employed, I found only one man who had registered; others spoke of a deep reluctance to become embroiled with the state. Employment figures were drawn from the official registration of employees. These figures, therefore, do not address the numbers of people working without contracts, and they also exclude casual or seasonal labour.

11 Respublika is an opposition newspaper published in Almaty.

12 An unpublished report by the Department of Public Health in 1989 suggested that groundwater was polluted in Almaty up to a depth of 200 metres.

13 Buchli (1999) suggests a slightly different angle in his discussion of the emphasis placed on manipulating and moulding byt (everyday life) within and through domestic space. The case study here, however, is the Narkomfin House in Moscow and therefore a highly conscious showpiece of what could be achieved through the domestic and collective built environment.

14 There are no statistics for the ethnic composition of Almaty’s sub-districts.

15 In 2000, £1 sterling was roughly equal to 250 tenge.

16 The hostel provided a semi-permanent home to approximately fifty men and fifty women, and about 70 per cent of them were pensioners.

17 Note Volkov’s (2002) quadripartite taxonomy of what he calls ‘violence managing agencies’ in post-Soviet Russia: public legal, public illegal, private legal and private illegal. The excessively stringent regulations described here could be seen as a blurring between public legal and illegal.

18 This percentage was raised in 2003 to 25 per cent.

19 The Presidential Decree of Almaty’s special status was issued in November 1997, a month before the official relocation to Astana. No officials I spoke to knew precisely why or how Almaty was ‘special’.

References


Dunham, V. (1976), In Stalin’s Time: Middleclass values in Soviet fiction, New York: Cambridge University Press.
Ethnography: Forces, connections and imaginations in a postmodern world, Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press.


Zhenshchiny i Mushchiny (2004), Upravleniia Statistiki goroda Almaty.
Introduction

My whole life has been linked to Tashkent both as a citizen and as an architect. This chapter sketches out the many cities that co-exist through memories, archaeological monuments, the architectural remains of previous centuries, the city’s current form and its newly emerging social organisation. A glance at the past shows that acquiring the status of a capital city 150 years ago changed Tashkent’s appearance beyond recognition, as well as altering its residents and their lifestyle. Before then, life was a constant struggle for everyone. Their sons and daughters entered the new world in the Soviet period and, confident of their destiny, built a new city. Today, their descendants have still not fully recognised the significance of their heritage; they face the choice of destroying or restoring that link with the past, without which there is no future. The city’s high political status must be reinforced by an active social, industrial and cultural life, otherwise the city risks becoming nothing but a village with a seven-figure population.

Tashkent is a city of varied cultures that are the source of its individuality and its dynamism. The transitional period has been a time of trial and significant changes, which must eventually find expression in something qualitatively new, just as what was once a city segregated between Europeans and Asians became a provincial city of Soviet people joined by a common slogan. Today’s Tashkent is already a different city. For the time being, social contrasts have not become blatant although in other areas changes are already marked: industrial activity is losing ground to trade and, in the cultural sphere, popular culture prevails over high culture. Tashkent is acquiring the characteristics of an emerging capitalist city where trade predominates but social life is still traditional, and where an eclectic architecture expresses the values of political authorities. In what follows, I trace the history of Tashkent through three distinct yet closely linked epochs, all of which are still apparent in the present-day city (see Table 4.1 for history of population growth, and the Introduction to this volume for the wider historical context).
Tashkent: nineteenth-century capital of Turkestan

The architecture of Imperial Russia’s last colony reflects the historical and social processes of the twentieth century. The defining event for the political, economic and cultural development of Central Asia, from the late nineteenth century until the present, was its conquest by the Russian Empire and its subsequent absorption into the Russian state and then the USSR. The conquest of Central Asia was a colonial enterprise begun in the eighteenth century when the north of modern Kazakhstan was incorporated into the Russian Empire.

After the annexation of Central Asia, two forms of administration existed in its cities. The Russians did not interfere in the internal life of old cities and the Muslim communities with their forms of local self-government; the life of the Asian community thus preserved certain institutions of medieval life and traditional relationships. On the other hand, the colonial administration was specifically formed with the aims of strengthening Russia’s military position in Asia, exploiting the colonies for raw materials destined for industry, and boosting Russia’s geopolitical importance.

At the beginning of the twentieth century the seizure of Central Asia’s fertile lands began and was quickly followed by a massive transfer of the peasant population from Russia. As a result, local peasants were deprived of their land and nomads were expelled. The indigenous population began to be exploited in colonial agriculture, and people started to move to the cities – first and foremost to Tashkent. Both the number and the population of cities rose.

The upper echelons of Russian society in the cities of colonial Turkestan consisted overwhelmingly of military personnel, colonial officials and entrepreneurs. Life was organised on the model of the Russian provinces. The new Russian-populated cities arose either as military settlements overlooking Asian townships or as separate garrison-towns, as in the case of Vernyi (see Alexander and Buchli...
chapters, this volume). At the time of the Russian conquest, the walls of Asian cities were dismantled, Asian garrisons were demolished, and some cities almost entirely lost their medieval structure. But the cities that were left remained centres of trading and craftsmanship and started to expand outside their former walls (Figure 4.1). The development of Tashkent during the nineteenth century took place at the expense of the surrounding territories. By the beginning of the twentieth century, Tashkent consisted of two administrative sections linked only by a transport artery: the ‘new’ Russian city and the ‘old’ Asian city had quite separate administrations.

After the conquest of Turkestan, Tashkent became the administrative centre of the territory and the location of the Governor-General’s residence, until the administrative centre moved to Vernyi (present-day Almaty; see Alexander’s chapter, this volume). Along with the old city, a new city was built on its eastern side on the site of the destroyed garrison. This was an independent settlement, separated from old Tashkent by the Boz-Su and Ankhar canals. The new city initially bore more resemblance to a garrison, in which residential quarters and administrative buildings were guarded by military and defensive installations. Colonisation led to the city’s rapid growth, with regularly planned central districts rich in green spaces. At the same time, the first unplanned workers’ suburbs emerged to the east and south of the new city, inhabited by peasants who had emigrated from Russia.

New Tashkent began from the garrison, which spatially faced the Asian city. Tashkent, like many Russian ‘new’ cities in Turkestan, was planned according to
the radial ring scheme, although with certain peculiarities. In the centre of Tashkent was a green square, while in many other ‘new’ cities the centre was the garrison. In Tashkent the garrison stood slightly to one side, well defended by a large troop contingent and by Cossack settlements and camps. Before the twentieth century, the new city had a thoroughly military character but, beginning from the late 1890s, Tashkent was also a capitalist city with industrial districts, with warehouses, factories, workshops and workers’ residential quarters.

Before the Russian occupation, Tashkent had been divided into four sections – Shaykhantaur, Sibzar, Kukcha and Beshagach – and had consisted of 280 mahallas (neighbourhoods united by craft or nationality and a common mosque), with 13,260 households, eight medreses (Islamic educational establishments), eight bath-houses, 4,548 shops, 116 mills and many small handicraft workshops. The centre of the city was the bazaar covering roughly 16 hectares, and including 16 caravanserais and 2,400 stalls. An earthen wall with 12 gates and a moat surrounded the city. The main streets formed a radial structure, running from the gates to the main bazaar in the centre. In the central districts up to 75 per cent of space was built on, and there was practically no green space.

A particular feature of some Central Asian cities, including Tashkent, was what was called the mauza or mavze, which encircled the whole city in a broad ring outside the city walls. The width of the mauza was from 4 to 6 kilometres. This was a zone of well-worked, green, well-watered land, and occasional waste ground. It was divided into allotments of varying size and configuration in accordance with the prosperity of the owners. The allotments belonged to residents of the city, and in particular to those who lived in the heavily built-up central districts, and were used only in the summer.

Lightweight dwellings were built on the mauza and each spring the owners of the allotments would bring their families to work on the land, growing produce for sale or for their own consumption over the winter. In late autumn, the residents would leave their allotments on the outskirts and return to their town houses. The structure of the mauza included kishlaks (villages), which – together with the land belonging to city residents – formed the core agricultural base of the city. It was later, when they had been swallowed up by the growth of the new city, that these kishlaks and small farms gave their names to particular streets, housing units and districts such as Beshkayragach, Chulpanota and Katartal.

But the old city, which before the conquest had consisted of the citadel (Urda) and Shakhristan, grew after the destruction of the city walls and the citadel by incorporating the lands of the rabad, a territory which consisted of the gardens and vineyards of the city’s residents, who spent the summer here, and which gradually incorporated small settlements and agricultural land. Today the names of these settlements survive as districts of the city.

The Russian ‘new’ cities arose at a distance from the old Asian cities. Natural boundaries such as rivers and canals served as borders between the old Asian and new Russian cities in the case of Tashkent. But the most powerful boundaries between the Asian and Russian city were the cultural divisions. Russian cities had
arisen in the middle of the nineteenth century as advance military posts at the time of the conquest of Turkestan, dominated by army encampments. By the early twentieth century, civilian life was also developing in these cities. Entrepreneurship and the service sphere were growing industrial enterprises and workers’ settlements were being built – even crossing the borders of the Asian city. Tashkent’s trade flourished but it was dominated by its administrative function.

The trading community in Turkestan was multi-ethnic with Armenians, Jews, Poles, Germans, Russians, Uzbeks and Tatars. They had already built their offices and even their homes near or within the Asian city, and the result was a conjunction of European and Asian architecture that can no longer be seen either in Tashkent or in Samarkand. Russian architects built residential and public buildings of the European type and new civic buildings appeared: banks, schools, colleges, hospitals, railway stations and civil engineering projects. The new cities were built by Russians for Russians. Their rapid growth was boosted by the colossal raw-material reserves of the colonies, and by the Russian government’s policy of supporting the transfer of large numbers of Russians – something that was essential for the empire’s Asian policy.

Reciprocal mistrust, alienation and the differences in way of life and cultural traditions led to the existence of parallel worlds, societies and cities. Visible progress was slow in terms of collaboration in the fields of politics, economics and particularly culture. But by the beginning of the twentieth century, architecture and town-building had become one sphere where there was cooperation.

Russian architects understood that their previous copying of Russian models in the new cities of Central Asia, especially in residential buildings, was out of keeping with local climatic conditions. Although civic construction tended to proceed in accordance with the same projects as in the metropolis, and town planning followed the Russian models of a regular scheme, civil engineers looked to the experience of local master-builders. The construction of the parallel city was a feature of colonial town planning in other parts of the world. Most Russian cities in Central Asia were drawn up on the basis of a regular plan with a clearly delineated administrative city centre and grandiose scale. The new cities were built on the site of former rabads and mauzas, that is on irrigated territory, so they could be established very quickly.

The architecture in the new cities of Turkestan, including Tashkent, was stylistically eclectic: private dwellings incorporated elements of the Russian Empire style, big offices and residences were built in Art Nouveau style, some involving elements of Gothic and of Russian Baroque. The main building materials were fired and unfired brick; metal and iron-concrete constructions were used in only a few buildings.

The new and old cities formed a stark contrast: the plush, green and spacious new city confronted the cramped layout of the old, with its narrow streets and low buildings. The mahallas of the old city had the small green spaces of the mosques and the pools (khauz) used for drinking water. The inhabitants lived according to the old ways; the children of craftsmen continued in their fathers’ craft; the clergy’s
successors were their sons. The world of women was still the home, surrounded by high walls. The life of the old city continued as it had for many centuries before as a city of craftsmen, traders, dervishes and cults.

The wealthy, who traded with Russia and other countries, moved to the new city and built new houses like the Russians. The old city’s other residents lived like their ancestors in traditional houses, selling their handiwork in the bazaar. Change entered their lives very slowly through the sphere of education. Changing economic life demanded new skills.

Tashkent: capital of Soviet Uzbekistan

In the post-revolutionary period the ‘old’ and ‘new’ cities were administratively united into a single Tashkent that in the 1930s became the capital of Soviet Uzbekistan. The growth of the city continued, by including lands that had previously been gardens, vineyards and fields within the city limits. And the city boundaries grew to include both Uzbek kishlaks and lands that had belonged before the Revolution to Russian entrepreneurs and Russian immigrants; these residents had settled in Turkestan after the reforms of 1861, with the result that these districts kept their Russian names such as Tezikova Dacha (once a village) or Dachnoe. The general plans of the city were revised, to include new highways and an extension of the city borders.

Within the system of the centralised Soviet economy, the 1930s saw the construction of ‘new’ industrial cities aimed at boosting industry in Uzbekistan. Most were built around single-sector industries. For instance, the city of Chirchik in the region around Tashkent was developed around a giant chemical factory that produced nitrogen fertilisers. In time, during the Soviet period, other industries began to grow in these cities, but the leading industry remained a specific enterprise that figured in the economy of the Union as a whole.

The Soviet town-planning policy in Uzbekistan was targeted at overcoming the social and national inequalities that had existed between the old and new cities so it included the active reconstruction of the old city sites. From the 1930s, roads were paved (which made urban public transport possible), communication infrastructures were created and buildings renovated. Instead of traditional housing, standard housing blocks were erected, as in the ‘new’ city. But when the ‘new’ (industrial) cities were being planned, local settlements were ignored.

The question of developing general city plans for the chief cities of Uzbekistan, Samarkand and Tashkent, was already acute. The key architectural and planning idea underlying the first General Plans for Tashkent was the unification of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ cities into a single spatial and functional whole. In the 1930s this idea was put into practice in the form of a reconstruction of Dzharkuch Lane, the only connection between the two parts of the city: it was rebuilt as Navoi Avenue and became the axis of the central planned district of the city. The residential housing built around Tashkent’s textile factory in the 1930s was the first use of standard housing blocks in Tashkent.
But the city was still not a single organism. The local and Republican authorities, the universities and technical colleges, science, and the nascent industry were all concentrated in the new city. The heart of the old city was still the bazaar, which provided employment for its residents – still traders and craftsmen. New life was brought into the old city not only by administrative organs, but also by new schools, clubs, hospitals, theatres, parks of culture and recreation, libraries and tramways. People’s appetite for education and culture was enormous; theatres and cinemas were widely patronised. People worked and learned eagerly, not noticing the poverty of their housing, clothing and daily lives: they dreamt about the future, when they would have everything they needed. The big mosques in the old city became workshops; some were turned into school buildings and sacred places such as the ancient cemetery in Shaykhantaur and the Sufic bridge were incorporated into the grounds of the new film studio. Young people studied at workers’ faculties, took part in voluntary labour sessions, and repudiated the past. Different ethnic groups learned to live and build together. The political repressions did not seem to extinguish people’s dream of the new.

The war years left a deep mark on the city. With the wartime evacuation of people and industry eastward the population rose sharply. Former agricultural territories were taken over and workers’ suburbs were built on the site of former rural villages and rice fields, but still housing stock grew on the basis of individual construction. More than 100 industrial enterprises were evacuated to Tashkent, necessitating a sharp increase in the city’s land area: vast industrial zones were created in the north and the south-east. The war and postwar years were characterised in Tashkent, as in the rest of the country, by an acute housing crisis; and the decision was taken to overcome it by taking all steps necessary to encourage individual housing construction.

The postwar period was a time of building, and the city took on a new image (Figure 4.2). The reconstruction was completed of Navoi Avenue, the highway linking the old and new cities. The buildings constructed on it were outwardly monumental, intended to bear witness to the strength of the people, victorious in the war. This was the style that came to be known as ‘Stalinist Empire’: the eclecticism of moulded forms on façades hiding primitive construction and insecure foundations. These buildings served as residential housing for the local elite, while the majority continued to live in old houses in the old city and communal dwellings in the new, but people were given the opportunity to improve their housing conditions themselves.

The most intensive individual construction in Tashkent took place in the 1950s, when the estates of the Workers’ Town, Badamzor, and the southern parts of Beruni St. and Shota Rustaveli St. were built. The construction of these estates took place as follows: an area was singled out for building on farmland contiguous to the then border of the city; a plan of construction was drawn up; roads and communications engineering were laid; plots were allocated; public buildings – schools, kindergartens, shops, health centres – were put up. Plots were granted to residents of the city who needed housing for a period of 35–40 years (the plan at
that stage was that some of the new buildings would eventually be taken down) by enterprise or by public authority and were officially registered, and building materials were then made available at discounted prices.

The absence of a construction industry at that time led to the use of local building materials for the erection of housing stock, including unfired clay bricks and local varieties of timber. All the same, builders were required to work in accordance with the established projects for standardised housing units, and their fulfilment of this obligation was subject to fairly rigorous control. This measure caused a certain uniformity in the architectural profile of the districts, but at the same time it guaranteed a degree of quality control which was to save these buildings from serious damage in the 1966 earthquake.

Practice demonstrated that an exclusive emphasis on individually built, low-rise housing was far from cost-effective, since it occupied a large quantity of valuable ground space. As a consequence, house-building enterprises were established, and by the middle of the 1950s work was under way on the new multi-storey estates of Chilinzar and Vysokovol’tnyi. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Uzbek families at this period were very reluctant to move into high-rise blocks, and preferred to try to obtain a plot of land on which they could build.

The 1960s and the transition to industrial construction opened the way to a massive expansion of the city into the surrounding agricultural land. Large-scale housing construction was carried out by the state, and the seizure of farmland for urban building led to the transformation of former settlements and farms into

Figure 4.2 Soviet Tashkent
outlying parts of Tashkent: the city lost its green ring of gardens and vineyards. The outskirts of the city had formerly had the unique profile of an oasis, where rural villages and farms were dotted across a slightly hilly area with its network of large and small streams with their picturesque water mills and beauty spots. Where the low, clay-brick houses of the Uzbek kishlaks once stood there now rose multi-storey concrete blocks; the irrigation network has been destroyed, and the area flattened. The orchards’ place has been taken by other trees, and while the subdistricts of new regions abound with greenery, little here has been preserved of Tashkent’s picturesque oasis landscape.

The 1966 earthquake made a fundamental reconstruction of the city necessary. The ‘new city’ area of Tashkent has suffered heavily in the course of this reconstruction. Its core has been gradually destroyed since the 1966 earthquake, which has caused irreparable harm to the city’s appearance. A whole cultural stratum has been irrecoverably lost: the brief, but in cultural terms invaluable, history of the Russian colonial city and modernity.

**Housing in the Soviet era**

The residents of the old city lived permanently under the threat of demolition, while those in the new city inhabited colonial-period buildings, which had been restructured as communal apartments. As a result, the housing stock which was left on the state’s books turned out to be in a critical state, and after the 1966 earthquake it was remorselessly demolished. The cosy private homes, the streets vaulted by tree branches, the streams and patterned trellises of the manor houses all vanished.

The need to build sufficient housing meant that large areas of land were set aside both for low-rise and high-rise individual construction. The vast majority of Uzbek families took plots of land on which to build. Construction took place on former agricultural land, on unused space in the central districts of the city, or on the site of buildings that had been ruined by the earthquake. In the period 1966–1979 major residential districts of the city were built. At the same time the first metro (subway) line was installed, the formation of a single unified city centre continued, and sections of important road links were laid.

The new high-rise residential sub-districts often avoided existing kishlaks, extending the city boundaries to include unbuilt agricultural areas. This was when the kishlaks of Yunusabad and Pakhta and the territory of the K. Marx Collective Farm – now the G. Abdullaev Mahalla – and others ended up in the middle of the city. The land shortage in the 1980s led to an outright ban on individual house building: state housing construction at this time was exclusively of multi-storey blocks. And this was also the time when residents were banned from carrying out independent reconstruction work on the structure of the ‘old city’: instead, a sweeping reconstruction of the area, using industrial methods, was proposed. All this provoked the population into a spontaneous occupation of unused land followed by the erection of illegal housing, particularly on the outskirts of the city.
The colossal scale of state housing construction (up to 1 million square metres) did not resolve the problem of providing housing for all those who needed it, and the queues of those requiring housing from the authorities did not diminish. This situation was characteristic across the Soviet Union, and so in 1989 state housing policy experienced a radical change of direction. The emphasis was now placed on the development of individual housing.

In this period the authorities of the city of Tashkent took a number of decisions which would have a long-term effect on the development of the city. They included:

- the registration of all unofficially built housing (some experts suggest as much as 1 million sq. m.);
- the *de facto* end to the demolition of existing housing, including antiquated housing in the ‘old city’;
- the allocation of a vast area for individual construction, including areas which had previously been set aside for high-rise developments. At the same time these lands – which were being gradually settled by rural residents either on the basis of decisions by collective farm boards or simply spontaneously, despite the fact that most of these areas fell inside the city limits – remained collective farm land. That is, the state was the owner, but the collective farm was the designated land user.

**Monuments and sacred places in the Soviet era**

Many places survived in Soviet Tashkent which are connected to the Sufic cult of saints. Of several, only the names have survived. They have given their names to new city districts, streets or neighbourhoods, and today are no longer destinations of pilgrimage as in the pre-Soviet period. All the same, they are marked on the landscape of the city normally as green islets, with mighty ancient trees on the tops of hills. Fragments of the monuments’ pedestals survive, and grave inscriptions, along with archaeological remains of ceramics and settlements. It was once forbidden to build on these sites, but many of them functioned as cemeteries; some are now full, while others are in use even today. These sites lent their names to the surrounding areas. Most people do not regard the sites as sacred, but they are popularly associated with spirits and legendary characters.

Almost all the architectural monuments which have survived from old Tashkent are linked with Islamic traditions. Many have been irrecoverably lost as a result of intensive building works. The 1968 project to create an architectural and ethnographic museum on the site of the historic Shakhristan (medieval city) was not carried out. Proposals to preserve fragments of traditional residential architecture likewise remained unrealised. The Kukel’tash, Barakkhan, Abdulkasim and Sheykhantaur medresas comprise the historical and architectural heritage of Tashkent, and they have tremendous significance in understanding the history and culture of its people.

The plans for the reconstruction of Tashkent in the twentieth century can hardly be termed a ‘reconstruction’ since they destroyed the fabric of the city, which
served as an organic context for many architectural monuments. After the destruction of this fabric, this special environment changed. The streets, thoroughfares, cul-de-sacs, pools, old elm-trees, and mix of small and large buildings which made up the unique face of the city had all been erased. Until the 1960s, surviving architectural monuments and religious buildings were used as warehouses or for industrial or administrative purposes. Their restoration began only at the end of that decade. After restoration, some were put to use as museums, or were passed to the Ministry of Culture’s Administration for the Protection of Monuments.

In the Soviet period, architects looked in the 1930s at ‘national’ forms and reproduced the arcs, the *panther* (grille), vaults and domes of traditional architecture, using traditional materials and techniques such as glazed brick, wooden coverings, gypsum, and clay-framework constructions. This type of construction dominated until the 1950s. Metal and concrete were imports, and were used only in industrial construction. After the middle of the 1950s, however, new types of construction emerged with the industrialisation of the building industry and the use of iron and concrete. A nostalgia for ‘national’ architectural decorative elements emerged and took the form of heavy iron and concrete grilles on façades, with iron and concrete arcs and domes. By the end of the 1980s, however, this ‘national’ profile in architecture had ceased to be a feature of the city.

**Ethnicity in the Soviet city**

Soviet town-planning policy cannot be assessed only from the perspective of architecture, it is also important to consider the way questions of ethnicity were considered in planning decisions. On the one hand it seems that the goal of ‘overcoming the social gap’ between the residents of the Asian and Russian cities was achieved. The residents of the Asian parts emerged from a state of cultural isolation and became familiar with the norms of a modern Soviet way of life. They lived through a period of transition. From the centuries-old, hierarchical, extended family they slowly made their way to the nuclear family. This was viewed as a sign of great progress. It allowed young families to make their own choices, rather than living according to the ‘behest of the ancestors’. This change eased the position of women, although the transition was not always straightforward.

Understanding replaced hostility to the ‘other’ as people learned to lived together more easily. In Central Asia, including Uzbekistan, it is the city dwellers who are distinguished by their tolerance, acceptance and interest in other cultures. In Tashkent itself the spirit of a multicultural environment and of openness between different ethnic groups existed and, for the time being, still survives. High-rise standardised buildings may have put people on a par with one another, and accorded with the socio-economic condition of the USSR, but they were also a step forward in ending the cultural isolation of people of different ethnicities and encouraging inter-ethnic cooperation.

The ethnic structure of the Tashkent population was also affected by planning decisions such as the location of major industrial enterprises in the city which
attracted a workforce from outside the region, since local labour was comparatively unskilled. Whole districts of the city were built by major enterprises such as the Textile concern (1930s–40s), the Tashkent Chkalov Aviation Association (1960s–70s), and the Tashkent tractor works (1970s–80s), which took their workforce from various regions of the Soviet Union.

**Labour and the black market**

Most of the indigenous population was occupied in spheres other than production. Regardless of the existence of great labour potential in the city itself, and of unemployment, the local population did not seek to become involved in production. The growth of the shadow economy and the black market swallowed up some of the labour reserve, both expanding after the end of the 1970s, when a certain liberalisation took place in the countryside. The peasants received additional personal land (*tomorka*) for agricultural use. Together with the allotment, this gave rise to small-scale commodity production – all production was aimed at the market, whether inside Uzbekistan or beyond. The USSR was an enormous market, so a whole army of middlemen and transport organisers appeared for new markets outside the Republic. Being part of the shadow economy, they became involved with semi-criminal structures, living by their own laws. The middlemen and organisers strengthened their material position and raised their social status in traditional society. They were employers for those from the same region, and protectors for their families. Since their background was in the countryside, small towns or economically less developed areas of the capital, they were and remained supporters of tradition, becoming the ‘legal’ basis for economic relationships in patronage networks. The shadow economy was closely linked with the bureaucracy, which also grew wealthy. Income from the shadow economy found a material outlet in the individual construction of homes. People from the shadow economy in the *mahalla* acquired great influence and authority. Being the richest people on the scale of the neighbourhood community, they provided assistance to their *mahalla* neighbours, set the tone for decoration and arrangement of the house and lifestyle, and supported by their contributions the public institutions of the community: the mosque (normally underground), the teahouse, and the *mahalla* centre.

**The mahalla**

The *mahalla* is a local self-management body which has long arranged a way of controlling the general duties of this separate district, and has acted not only as a territorial, but also as an administrative unit at the most basic level of the city and countryside. The *mahalla*, in the town and in the *kishlak*, irreversibly reinforces people’s membership of social and ethnic groupings. Today, the *mahalla* plays a fundamental role in unifying neighbouring communities and has further become incorporated into the hierarchy of state administration. The term *mahalla*
traditionally embodied a range of unchanging principles and characteristics: democracy, paternalism, succession, and established moral exemplars: respect for one’s elders, concern for future generations, and the importance of the family.

The traditional duties of this body fell into four categories: economic, religious, ritual and social. The relative importance of these categories depended on the period. If it was the case that in the early modern period religious and economic duties dominated the town, then in the Soviet period it was ritual duties which held this place. The mahalla was both a site of memory and a symbol through which rituals and traditions were fiercely guarded. The mahalla became the guardian of Islam.

As it was not only an urbanised but also a social institution, the mahalla consisted of a centre (the guzar) and also mosques, where the elders would gather to discuss problems in the community. The Soviet government destroyed the mosques and transformed the centre into a district committee – an official institution. The centre of the mahalla, the guzar and the mosque, were transformed into a teahouse and a district committee. After 1991 and the declaration of independence, the mahalla became a local administrative organ for the city, and multi-storeyed buildings of the micro-region were also divided into mahallas, each with its own committee.

**The final decade of the Soviet city**

Towards the beginning of the 1980s there emerged within architecture a tendency towards gigantism, signs of which had already been present in the 1960s. The number of administrative buildings increased, as did the scale of construction. At the same time, the streets and the squares emptied. Palaces of culture, theatres and libraries lost their visitors. Both the economic crisis and the departure of a large proportion of its inhabitants into ‘the shadows’ contributed to the return to tradition of a society which had been turned towards a different set of values. In a country ruled by corruption and lies, people began to look for new rules, which seemed to them eternal, and therefore just. They turned towards tradition, and away from the Communist Party.

Traditional ways of life (how one’s ancestors had lived) returned to prominence. Although for some, social activity died away, for others, quite the contrary occurred and radical new formulations appeared under the banner of ‘national rebirth’.

**Tashkent: capital of independent Uzbekistan**

As we have seen, Tashkent, the capital of independent Uzbekistan, was not built according to any unified concept of town planning, in which national elements were dominant. Above all, this is connected to the fact that Tashkent is a multi-ethnic city, but one with a significant architectural heritage and associated preservation problems. Notwithstanding the losses sustained during the process of reconstruction, Tashkent has managed to preserve aspects of its architectural traditions. In the late Soviet period (1970s and 1980s) the tendency was more
towards the expression of national peculiarities in architecture, and this was extended in Tashkent into the 1990s, with the construction of the Amur Timur and Oliya Mazhilis museums and their pseudo-Islamic cupolas.

In the 1990s a large-scale renovation of the façades of administrative and municipal buildings began, replacing iron-concrete grilles with reinforced glass. The overall appearance of the architecture became westernised as a result of the incorporation of new materials both on the façades and in the interiors. The new houses of the ‘new Uzbeks’ were built in an eclectic style containing elements of Gothic, Baroque and especially Classicism, while new Orthodox church construction revived earlier styles (Figure 4.3), but the idea of national architecture was not explored.

The ideology of a national capital in the new buildings of Tashkent is mainly expressed not through the presence of ‘national architectural elements’ such as cupolas, arches, minarets and so on, but principally through an emphasis on the monumental scale, reminiscent of European Classicism. In the 1990s, a large-scale programme of construction or renovation of bazaars began, acknowledging emerging market conditions. The number of stall spaces in the bazaars multiplied by five to ten times, occupying several hectares of land, as the bazaars became the major places for the sale of foodstuffs as well as manufactured goods. A portion of the constructions here represented an investment of capital, but most of them were temporary. Spaces on the bazaars were fixed, and could not be sold or rented. On the space they bought, entrepreneurs erected shops, awnings or kiosks. This

Figure 4.3 New Russian Orthodox church

Downloaded by [Universiti Malaysia Sabah] at 08:29 15 December 2012
commercialisation of architecture has taken place all over the city. Alongside the larger supermarkets, big and small shops appeared.

The city authorities, in order to earn extra money for the city, sold sites for the construction of shops or low-price restaurants. Banks and the khokimiyat (local administration) built hotels, business centres, supermarkets and shops, mainly for foreign investors, which they then rented out.

Banks have invested both in the materials and in the construction of houses of different kinds, from luxury houses in the central region of the city (which are then sold), to health resorts with swimming pools, tennis courts, gymnasiums and golf courses such as the National Bank centre, or the Tennis complex in Iunsabad. These new developments are geared towards maximising commercial revenue, offering their services at high prices that are beyond the means of the average citizen. They are built in areas previously occupied by sport and recreation grounds, designed for local inhabitants. Garages and car parks are also increasing. The appearance of the city is changing, and with these changes comes a division of the population along social lines: comfortable and well-equipped areas offer a scandalous contrast to the inhabited regions on the outskirts that are filled with multi-storey constructions from the 1970s and 1980s which are poorly maintained, with amenities dating back to the time of their construction.

Post-Soviet planning

Despite the lack of an enforceable General Plan, Tashkent has primarily continued to grow within the confines of previously taken decisions. Over the past few years, because of the economic downturn, the city’s growth has slowed. Special attention has been paid to the growth of the city’s transport network, to the construction of communal (administrative or commercial) buildings, and to the repair of parks, as well as to the construction of large-scale industrial housing, which was started in the 1980s and unfinished as a result of lack of materials. In a break with previous planning decisions, at the beginning of the 1990s it was decided that certain areas should be set aside for the construction of individual low-scale buildings, as opposed to the planned multi-storey industrial developments.

In the Soviet period, the areas which the General Plan set aside for the construction of housing were clearly indicated by the city authorities, and the areas were divided up for various industries and concerns, which then received construction materials for their workers through their unions. It was because of this that one of the most powerful building companies from the 1950s to the 1970s was the Tashkent Chkalov Aviation Association. On a smaller scale, construction work was carried out by the Textile Factory, the Central Asian railway group, the USSR Ministry of Defence, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, Tashsel’mash (a group making industrial machinery), the Tashkent tractor works, and other groups. The areas in which these industries built houses were not far from the industries themselves.

At present, all decisions regarding construction and reconstruction are taken by the city khokimiyat (and sometimes by even higher authorities). It is the khokimiyat
that divides up or auctions off various building sites. Currently, the most important building companies are as follows.

- The *khokimiyat* itself, which uses the city budget to build housing for civil servants called to Tashkent from the *oblast*, families who have lost their homes, invalids and veterans. (The area occupied by the construction of these homes over the past years has been between 160,000 and 200,000 sq. m.)
- Uzzhilsberbank (*Uzbekskiy zhilishchno-sberegatel’niy bank* – the Uzbek building society and savings bank), which builds so-called ‘certified’ housing, for which tenants have to pay back part of the cost over the course of a decade, as well as other banks, building luxury homes sold at commercial prices.
- Independent construction firms (not always legal) which buy up individual houses in prestigious regions of the city and replace them with new and more comfortable houses for sale.
- Individual builders who receive their plots free of charge, or who buy them at auction, and build houses for themselves.

The total quantity of building carried out by all non-governmental organisations over the past few years is between 220,000 and 300,000 sq. m.

The 1998 Scheme for the General Plan for the reconstruction of Tashkent emphasises the fact that in view of current environmental concerns (land, water, natural resources and fuel), further construction in Tashkent is possible only with more effective land use and the attendant increase in population density and provision of effective services. At the same time, it is necessary to develop the nearest outskirts of the city as an urbanised area that can support the development of modern agricultural complexes, and leisure areas. Tashkent’s new General Plan makes provision for the expansion of the city’s borders. In the north, this expansion is conditional upon the placement of numerous high- and low-rise housing developments. To the west, the addition of large areas to the city is contingent upon increased agricultural building, the relocation of the Olympic sport centre, and the provision of environmentally friendly building. The unevenness of the present southern borders, caused by the relocation of various industrial and agricultural areas, predetermined the decision to extend the borders of the city southwards to the floodplain of the Chirchik river.

*Infrastructure*

If one takes into account the fact that the largest portion of the building funds is under private control, then what is left in the control of the city authorities is the preferential relationship with the city’s engineering and technical authorities, the engineering workforce, the territory of the city itself and any wealth gained from this control.
The engineering and technical infrastructural organisation of the city continues to flourish as it rebuilds individual plots and at the same time provides for its own workforce. Recently, the water supply for the city, especially to the large-scale housing blocks, has become a serious problem. In the housing blocks, the physical upkeep of the houses is under the control of the inhabitants, but there are certain internal engineering provisions which, according to laws relating to the upkeep of city and regional structures, are under the care of the khokimiyat. Very often the municipal companies ZhEU and KEU carry out these tasks badly: roofs leak and pipes flood the entrances to buildings, which causes scandal and complaint in the media against the authorities. The conflicts have become even more heated against the background of constantly increasing plans for communal services. The authorities see a solution in the creation of housing co-operatives. But the disadvantages of this are as follows:

- the form of these co-operatives has not been fully thought through;
- there is no large-scale group of companies (firms or ateliers) capable of providing services;
- there is no tradition of independent care of houses, even though the mahalla could stand as a good example for the formation of ‘co-operatives’. (It is important to note here the two separate meanings of mahalla within the housing structures: the group of some 1,000–1,500 people, and the administrative unit.)

In the multi-storey houses, the level of privatisation has now reached 98 per cent. This is explained by the fact that if, in 1992, privatisation seemed like a good investment, then over the past few years inflation and the maintenance of prices at 1992 levels have led to ‘private ownership’ being almost the same as having a house free of charge. The new houses, built over the past few years, are sold or rented as property (for example, in exchange for other houses). The format of the construction does not allow for the creation of a municipal fund that would be used to provide housing for those who needed it. However, privatisation has been shown not to work.

Individual home ownership in Tashkent has reached 30 per cent of the total, but takes up 56 per cent of the land available for building. This factor plays a negative role in the development of the city, as it increases the cost of public transport and the city’s infrastructure. It is precisely for this reason that a ban was enforced in the 1980s on the division of land for individual housing developments. But at the beginning of the 1990s, the decision was taken to free up completely the construction of individual houses, the land was divided up for this purpose, and these divisions were handed out free of charge to anyone who was waiting for them. The annual area of construction consists of between 200,000 and 220,000 sq. m. The increase in the area of construction is connected with the economic situation of the builders, the cost of building materials, and the area’s provision with engineering and technical amenities. As well as this, a significant problem is...
caused by the agricultural character of many of the buildings on the periphery, and sometimes in the centre of the city, and attendant life style such as the keeping of animals. Further problems include the low level of amenities and funding available for building. The General Plan provides for the preservation of individual housing developments in important areas of the central and suburban areas of the city. It is proposed that the inhabitants themselves will contribute to the upkeep of the building funds, and that this will in turn add to the area’s capitalisation and level of amenities.

Once the process of reconstruction of individual houses has begun, this will provide a basis for considering reconstruction within a legal and architectural framework, and ensuring that the rights of the inhabitants of nearby houses are not infringed upon. The degradation of certain houses is a serious problem as far as the reconstruction of the city’s historic buildings is concerned: some of these are in a state of almost complete dilapidation, and in danger of collapse.

The reconstruction of this area of the city will require the relocation of a large number of families (for example, the repair of two streets alone will necessitate the relocation of 28,000 families which is not currently within the capabilities of the city administration).

The construction in Tashkent of multi-storey buildings has always been problematic and for these reasons the General Plan concentrates on the construction of smaller buildings of three to five storeys. Taller houses should only be planned in certain designated areas. Only once in recent years have large-panelled nine-storey buildings been put into construction, and this was on the orders of the khokimiyat, in accordance with its budget. Apart from this, it is only by passing laws that housing groups can be supported. The so-called ‘built-to-order elite houses’ are constructed by banks for individuals, and not as part of a city-wide project.

Of course, the peculiarities of the Uzbek climate were taken insufficiently into account in previous years when building, but now they are considered even less, for a number of reasons:

- The national building norms, laid down by KMK (according to Russian industry standards), almost completely ignore the vast experience that organisations such as TashZNIIEP have had of building homes in specific areas.
- At present, houses are being built by concerns inexperienced in the problems associated with building in Southern Uzbekistan, while local building companies remain unemployed.
- Those who have commissioned these houses, whether they are banks, firms, or individuals, often have a concept of quality based on European or Turkish models. Therefore, individual houses built along these lines are expensive not only to build, but also to maintain – the amount of energy expended on heating or air-conditioning for these houses is so vast that neighbouring houses are left without electricity or water. Multi-storey houses differ from the norm by their positioning.
There are three main difficulties that are causing the town planners deep concern. First, the agricultural buildings surrounding the whole city could curtail its possibilities for expansion. Second, if forced to withdraw from valuable irrigated lands, the inhabitants of the kishlaks will be left without work, and third, the provision of communal facilities and other services is beyond the city budget. The inclusion of the kishlaks into the city’s structure is a difficult process. The inhabitants of the kishlaks have lived separate lives for decades, growing fruit and vegetables to sell at the roadside, tending their herds on municipal fields and overburdening the city infrastructure.

Today, the Tashkent ring-road has become the border of Tashkent. Inside the city’s boundaries, almost all the available land has been built on. The few remaining fields given over to agricultural production will be built on or at least turned over to other city needs, according to the General Plan passed in 2000. But if one takes into consideration the fact that the city does not have enough funds for the continuation of large-scale building of multi-storey houses, and that the land will have to be given over to individual housing projects, then the city has to deal in earnest with the problem of the kishlaks on the other side of the ring-road. Their fate is uncertain, but the city has already assimilated the kishlak of Khasanbay within its boundaries, and a part of the land set aside for the co-operative has been given over for individual building. The kishlak of Khasanbay still holds on to its autonomy: it has its own organs of government, and considers itself to be an agricultural village.

In the post-Soviet period, when economic links were broken, and production slowed down and sometimes stopped altogether in these towns and cities, the number of available jobs was greatly diminished, not only in the area of production, but also in the social sphere. The economic climate of Uzbekistan was unwelcoming for entrepreneurs, and the decrease in capital being invested in the area led to industrial cities becoming areas of high out-migration. Economic depression saw the rise of illegal activities such as the trade in people for wage slavery or prostitution.

Certain cities in Uzbekistan, Tashkent included, are also experiencing a loss of population due to the migration of Russian-speaking inhabitants not only to Russia, but also beyond the CIS. It is for this reason that migration from the countryside to the capital is not accompanied by a severe shortage, or increase in the cost, of housing. But migration affects the appearance of the city, and is gradually extinguishing various areas of cultural life. Crime is on the increase, and the standard of living is falling.

Crises are taking place in the infrastructure of Tashkent which, as discussed elsewhere in this volume, are almost characteristic of the post-Soviet city – exacerbated in Central Asia by the arid climate. Some of these are connected with the fact that, in view of the existing capabilities of power plants, the provision of heating and water is beyond the budget of the city. Larger problems are those of gas supply and sewerage. The quality of sewerage remains low and requires modernisation. This is taking place, although on a very small scale. The gas supply network does not contain enough large reservoirs, and it is for this reason that in the
winter of 2000, when there was a break in the pipeline, the supply of gas was stopped. The system of communal repair and service is on the brink of change; the suggested increase in charges for communal services has survived its first steps, even against the background of a decrease in the general quality of life; reforms are being firmly laid down.

Alongside the new municipal funds for housing, various meters have been put into place, measuring the city’s use of water, heat and gas, and it is proposed that methods of measuring the use of communal facilities be established. In the summer-time, the provision of water to the city becomes a serious problem, especially in the areas of individual housing. The use of water is growing and is already above the world average, mainly because the water is used to feed crops in domestic kitchen-gardens. As a result, the amount of water in the system is falling, and does not reach as far as the multi-storey houses, especially their upper floors. This first started to happen in the new regions at the end of the 1980s.

The ethnic makeup of the multi-storey housing region is also changing fast. Over the course of the past decade, it has been settled by Uzbek and Tartar families. In the main, these are not local inhabitants, but immigrants from villages or settlements in the countryside. As a result of this, the appearance of this area is changing as well. It is possible even in the centre of Tashkent to observe elements of rural or small-town life. It is not only the appearance of the architecture and the interiors which is changing, but also the appearance of the city’s inhabitants and their ways of life.

Case studies: Urikzor and Aktep

As a detailed example, the group of individual houses at Urikzor-Abrikosovaya grove illustrates these changes well. This group was planned on the site of area No. 3 of the sovkhoz and is full of decorative gardens, and is situated between two large canals which flow through the town – the Boz-su and Karakamiysh canals. One side of the area runs along the ring-road, and is filled with many multi-storey houses. It appears that what nudged the area towards assimilation with the city in the 1980s was the subdivision of the sovkhoz by its workers. At first, the notion of independent land use caused conflicts. Soon the decision was taken to put the use of all the land into the control of the city authorities. The Tashgiprogor Institute carried out all the work. By the end of the 1980s, the material situation of a large proportion of the population was fairly stable, and the desire to own a house on their former land became strong. It was also possible, by leaving the queue for free state housing, to get a position in the building area at auction. The construction of most of the houses dragged on for many years because the builders experienced economic difficulties. The houses themselves were varied, ranging from luxurious marble constructions to modest houses built from clay bricks (see Buchli, this volume). But the situation became even worse with the installation of general amenities and communal facilities, such as schools, kindergartens, hospitals, and transport connections with the city, none of which were finished.
In 2003, the most prominent sights in this area were a huge market selling food, and one selling housing materials, which are situated at the entrance to the area and provide a place of work for the inhabitants of nearby regions. Even today not all aspects of the construction are fully completed.

According to the laws of the Uzbek Republic, all planned housing developments carried out by professionals need to be approved by a special commission on IZhS (individual’noe zhilishchnoe stroitel’stvo – individual construction of housing), established by the regional khokimiyats. If there is no formal plan for the construction, then the commission itself may take control of any already completed work. But often, during the building process, for reasons to do with the availability of materials, the builder may change his plans. This may result in the finished house resembling in very few respects the approved version. The amount of control which the authorities have over the building work once it is under way is very small. According to specialists, the changes made to buildings in the Urikzor area during construction have rendered many of them susceptible to seismic damage.

In general, the inhabitants of the Urikzor region use their houses as individual family homes. The size of each division (roughly 6 per cent of the total) and the corresponding area for each house of between 150 and 300 sq. m. do not permit the inhabitants to engage in agriculture, or to grow any crops for sale. The majority of the inhabitants have other houses in other parts of the city.

In the north-eastern portion of the Tashkent region, along the Boz-su canal, the kishlak of Aktep has stood for a long time. The city takes its name from a hill of clay: the ruin of an ancient town and fortress which were destroyed in the seventh century AD at the time of the Arab wars. On the spur of this hill are a cemetery and a small mosque. All the graves are those of the families of the people who live in the village and its surroundings, and the cemetery is considered a holy spot.

In the 1930s, the kishlak became the farm centre of the Stalin kolkhoz. Alongside the administrative buildings for the collective farm was built a single-storey school, which is still there. In 1942, a factory which had been evacuated from Russia (the former Abrazibniy factory) was built on the outskirts of the kishlak. Two-storey houses and barracks for Russian immigrant workers were built for the factory’s use. But all this did not affect the appearance of the kishlak, which continued to cultivate fruit and vegetables, to tend its flocks, to work in the fields which surrounded the kolkhoz, and to carry out large-scale rituals and festivals.

In 1984, work was begun on the land surrounding the kishlak. Iunsabad, a new region of multi-storey houses, was built. Some of the houses of the kishlak were requisitioned, and the inhabitants of these houses were given flats in multi-storey blocks. The various infrastructural buildings built alongside the construction works in the region solved many of the kishlak’s problems: solving communication problems and increasing amenities.

At present, the city mahalla of Aktep consists of approximately 7,000 people. The population’s way of life has altered extensively, but as before, they observe old traditions of mutual assistance. Those members of the population who were relocated to the multi-storey flats still consider themselves a part of the mahalla.
The focus of communal life, as well as the mahalla’s centre, is the rebuilt mosque. The mahalla, as an organ of self-government, provides social security for its inhabitants, especially orphans, pensioners, children and other vulnerable members of society.

Conclusion

The transitional period, through which the post-Soviet state is living, is connected to changes in the economic infrastructure. Economic management has changed the face of the country and of its capital. The transition from a command to a market economy has, it would seem, destroyed the monotony and predictability of life: features which had long seemed immutable. Formerly populous areas have emptied, but social life emerges in other areas.

The mass restoration of buildings for the administration gives the false impression that the capital is re-building. The authorities improve their houses by using credit given to the country for restoring the economy. Industrial areas are silent, factories work at a half or a quarter of their potential, and many of them do not work at all. These enterprises are necessary for modernisation. They bear witness to the fact that the Cold War has definitely ended, and that this war, like every other war, leaves ruined and dying factories. Modernisation cannot take place without industry; the city cannot live on the strength of its bazaars. A certain traditionalisation of life is taking place: the educated as well as the uneducated are working as small-time traders, craftsmen or dealers in second-hand goods. They work in the bazaar and values are changing. Economic activity is pursued at the expense of cultural activities affecting social spheres, particularly education and medicine.

In reaction religiosity is being reborn, not just as an expression of one’s identity, but also as a means towards achieving social justice. In the first years of independence about a thousand mosques were built with money from believers in the countries of the Persian Gulf and South-East Asia, and this new religious construction and the activism of the faithful have had an important impact on people’s daily life. Similarly the construction of new individual houses and their planning has become a new tradition reflecting upon the current social climate and the ambitions and demands of the person who built it. The monumental architecture of the administrative buildings, the private houses of the ‘new Uzbeks’, all testify to the appearance of a new elite. However, the majority of the population of the city continues to live in run-down single-storey houses or in flats in multi-storey buildings. The houses of Russian who have returned to Russia are bought up by rural migrants who bring country mores with them.

In Tashkent, these contrasts have started to shape the city’s appearance. In the centre of town a number of elite individual houses have appeared. In various regions close to the multi-storey houses of the 1960s, 1970s or 1980s, large, well-equipped elite houses have been built. Not only on the outskirts of the city, but also immediately outside the city centre, one comes across areas which resemble an agricultural landscape with cows and sheep, grazing in municipal parks. In the
suburbs, these parks are used to grow crops. Life here moves very slowly. Women in national costume with bundles of wedding presents; milkmaids; young boys tending flocks; country lads, hired labourers working on some ‘new Uzbek’s’ private house: these are all scenes of daily life in the Urikzor region.

Soviet Tashkent is slowly disappearing, and the features of the new Tashkent are only now emerging. Whether it will become a well-equipped and ‘European’-style city, or a city of contrasts, like the capital cities of developing countries, is as yet unclear. Whether it will become a city for people who work in industry, business, education, healthcare, culture, and other service industries, or a city of agricultural migrants chasing work, a city of the Lumpenproletariat and the dispossessed, only time and economic reform will tell.

Notes

1. The Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic was founded in 1924.
2. The Emancipation of the Serfs in 1861 resulted in thousands of Russian peasants moving east to look for lands.
3. Including veterans of the Afghan war, and people who helped after the Chernobyl accident.
CITY OF MIGRANTS
Contemporary Ulan-Ude in the context of Russian migration

Galina Manzanova

Introduction

In *The City*, Max Weber (1958) argued that there are sharp differences in the functions and structures of cities, based on the way in which they have been formed by particular cultures in specific environmental, historical and economic circumstances. This chapter seeks to clarify the character of the Siberian city of Ulan-Ude (Buryat Republic) in the context of the historically formed ‘ways of life’ of the Russian and Buryat peoples. I argue that migratory processes central to these cultures are key to understanding this post-socialist Siberian city after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

A history of urbanisation and migration in Russia

Historically, the Russian people first sustained their way of life, in the relatively unpropitious conditions for husbandry of Central Russia, by slash-and-burn agriculture. This required almost annual shifts of field sites – in other words, the continuous movement of the population. Given that virtually the whole of the territory of the early Russian state was rather infertile (Milov 1992: 39), this led to constant migration in search of the best places for agriculture. The historically formed ‘way of life’ tied to this type of arable farming had a ‘mobile, unsettled, nomadic character’ (Akhiyezer 2000: 309–10). Acquiring new lands and attracting new resources into the economic cycle gradually became a fundamental policy of the Russian state, which consequently developed mainly as an extensive type of economy. Technological innovations were relatively unimportant and labour relations remained mainly non-professional in character. The prevalence of personalised power among feudal landowners and bureaucrats, the long survival of serfdom, and the absence of alternative institutions, left the more active people hoping to improve their circumstances with few choices except to migrate. Furthermore,
the arbitrariness of local government left them always at risk of losing their property and physical security. This is why there was a tendency towards mass flight away from Russian power structures ‘beyond the Stone’ (i.e. across the frontier) to Siberia and Central Asia. However, this process only served to strengthen existing inefficient structures, as the settlement of Russian migrants in new non-Russian regions enabled the Russian state to acquire more lands and enhance its might.

Development of the empire by means of acquisition of the territories and resources of other ethnic groups required the strengthening of the military potential of the Russian state. Thus, in contrast to many cities of Western Europe, which grew up organically as centres of artisan work and trade, most provincial Russian cities were established first as military centres for collecting tribute and to enforce state influence in alien national lands. The constant outflow of more enterprising Russian citizens, who were oppressed by the militarised state and patriarchal social relations, meant that the Russian city preserved the ‘extensive’ form of social organisation characteristic of the rural commune. This was quite different from other cities in Europe, with their labour divisions, occupational professionalisation, markets, and legal traditions, all of which led to the emergence of an urban society that was quite distinct from the rural way of life.

In Russia, colonisation in difficult climatic-environmental regions took the form of small settlements of a few households, often located at great distances from one another. This dispersal of population, combined with harsh conditions and low levels of productivity, encouraged peasants to support themselves from within the locality, and this tendency promoted the reproduction of patriarchal social relations. For the same reason, the rural commune (obshchina) was maintained for a long historical period as a means of adaptation by such local settlements to their natural and social environments. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, the percentage of land in greater Russia held in communal ownership ranged from 98 per cent in the northern and eastern areas to 89 per cent in the southern and western regions (Akhiezer 2000). The obshchina was a tax-gathering unit as well as an organisation for regulating communal resources.

Social relations in the cities, I suggest, were formed on the basis of relations established in these rural communal settlements, inheriting and reproducing their basic characteristics. The provincial city was not a counter-agent to the countryside, but on the contrary was a social continuation of the village. This opinion is supported by the following facts: first, many cities were originally formed as settlements primarily aimed at the collection of tribute from surrounding villages and on this basis they gradually increased in size and transformed from small settlements to towns. Second, even when cities did develop manufacturing and trade, this was conducted through personal ties with the rural population and often was done by people who started life as peasants. And third, the juridical capability of Russian towns was underdeveloped: organs of city self-government existed for only 130 years (from 1785 to 1917, i.e. for about five generations). As a result of this weakness of independent governance, the city could not become a real force counteracting the pressure of the state.
The constant migration of the Russian population influenced the socio-demo-
graphic structure, and it also had a psychological effect. People became accustomed
to moving large distances and to living in alien ethnic surroundings, and as a result
they were only weakly oriented to seeking permanent places of settlement or
long-term employment or to improving the lands where they lived.

By the beginning of the twentieth century, when the land available for expansion
was beginning to decrease (Russia had lost Alaska, Harbin in northern China,
part of Bessarabia, Poland, etc.), this whole centrifugal migratory process was
sharply curtailed. The high point of peasant migration was the period of the
Stolypin land reforms of the early twentieth century, when the rural commune also
began to be dismantled. This last gasp of migration revealed the economic limi-
tations of the new territories, which now were seen to be either not suitable
for agriculture or already occupied by local populations. But the main difficulty
for further migration was the low level of urbanisation of the Russian Empire. To
take over new lands effectively, railways and roads would have been necessary,
along with technological improvements, water management, and much more
effective use of concentrated and productive labour. For all the belated attempts
at modernisation, a closed circle was created: the effective acquisition of new
territory was held back by weak urbanisation, and the development of the city was
made difficult by the fact that the resources of the state were still oriented towards
expansion into new lands.

**Soviet policies and the Siberian city**

The Soviet government continued the late-Tsarist policies of extensive develop-
ment of new resources, modernisation and the urbanisation of newly acquired
ethnic territories. But it was unlike Tsarist policy, and even more unlike that of
Western Europe, in using forcible administrative methods, especially the employ-
ment of Gulag prisoners for construction of important economic infrastructure
(such as Dneproges, Belomor Canal, and Komsomol’sk-Na-Amur). Directed inter-
regional population re-settlement was another such method, conducted through
mechanisms such as Orgnabor, calls for volunteers by Komsomol, and the
organised transfer of trained cadres between institutions. Thus, if previously people
had migrated on their own account, now, in the Soviet period, the state itself
allocated and redistributed the population across the widest possible territory.

The usual explanation of the explosion in urban population in the early Soviet
period is migration from the countryside as a result of collectivisation and indus-
trialisation. But in Siberia equally important was the migration of specialists from
the centre to remote ethnic areas. This was the result of three interlinked policies:
appropriation of raw materials – colonisation – industrialisation. In the first period
of industrialisation in Buryatia alone (1938–41), 96,200 specialists poured into the
Republic. The urban population rose by 43 per cent in these years.

The main focus of industrialisation was the defence industries, for which the
material inputs were also imported from central Russia. Only one major industry in
Ulan-Ude, the Meat Kombinat, used local resources. But even that was oriented towards, and sold its product to, the central regions of Russia. The result of this industrialisation-colonisation policy was that the development of the ethnic peripheries became economically and politically dependent structurally on the centre. In rural areas urbanisation was speeded up by the sedentarisation of livestock herders, the ploughing up of pastures, and the concentration of small settlements into large villages or small towns. The aim was to unify the way of life of urban and rural citizens. Thousands of activists were sent out to aid the process. This transformation of the entire economy marginalised ethnic ways of life and gave impetus to the inclusion of minorities into the Soviet system. In fact, indigenous peoples, who were disorientated and cut off from their traditional pursuits and values, were easy to cow into submission; they were brought into Soviet construction through a combination of ideology, force and terror.

For all ethnic groups, the main channel of social mobility became migration from the countryside into the towns. Ulan-Ude thus became a city with several diverse migrant inflows. Apart from the workforce from Central Russia, many rural Buryats also moved to the city, as did local Siberian peasants of Slav background. Although the socio-economic conditions were now apparently transformed by Soviet structures, I argue that the latter in fact reproduced the traditional models of behaviour and values of the peasant commune. Indeed, the whole notion of the commune was fertile soil for the introduction of the innovations of socialism, based on egalitarian distribution and bureaucratic economic decision-making.

As a result of these various processes, in one generation the national composition of Buryatia altered sharply (the proportion of Buryats went down from 55 per cent in 1923 to 21 per cent in 1989) and the occupational and social structure of the region was transformed. The newly created industries were staffed by migrants – from Ukraine, from the central districts of Russia, and from major cities such as Moscow, Leningrad and Sverdlovsk. Meanwhile the indigenous population mostly remained in non-industrial occupations. No more than 10 to 15 per cent of industrial workers were Buryats. The construction of the Baikal–Amur railway (BAM) provides a good example. Here, although workers were paid relatively well and were provided with accommodation and good social services, the flow of Buryats into the project was insignificant (85 per cent of the construction and service personnel were migrants from other parts of the USSR). Behind this was the important fact that ethnic preferences for particular kinds of work had been formed over decades in specific environmental conditions. The Buryats preferred to work in rural occupations, especially livestock herding, and also in culture and education. All this affected the character of the city, where the proportion of Buryats has still not risen above 21 per cent (as opposed to 56 per cent of rural dwellers of the Republic).

Soviet modernisation policy through urbanisation and colonisation and the extensive use of natural and human resources had an effect on the psychology of the Russian population. Under severe administrative pressure, people still preferred to seek to improve their position by moving, rather than making the best of the
situation on the spot. At present, this attitude may explain the flood of refugees into Russia from the Central Asian Republics. Under new administrative pressure in ‘nationalising’ regions, many have chosen to flee back to central Russia rather than fight for ‘social justice’ in ethnic territories.

Post-Soviet regional economic depression and its effects in Ulan-Ude

As is well known, extensive development reached an impasse by the 1980s as a result of low productivity and the exhaustion of natural resources in ethnic regions. The resulting crisis of the distributive system within the USSR led to the formation of a new territorial-administrative structure – the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States). With the emergence of the market, Russian policy became one of exploiting the most economically profitable export products (mostly raw materials) wherever these were located. In this situation, particular regions have come to depend greatly on whether or not they had raw materials for export, their distance from markets, and their transport and communications links. During the initial period of capital accumulation in the 1990s the struggle for control over resources between Moscow and the regions, and between various groups of oligarchs, became the ground for numerous conflicts, and in national regions these often had an ethnic character (Chechnya is a good example of this).

Effective use of resources required the construction of new industrial plant and services, and this gave rise to a relatively higher demand for labour in resource-rich regions such as Tumen, Sverdlovsk, the Irkutsk region, Tatarstan, Yakutiya and Khakassiya. This stimulated migration from resource-poor areas. As a result, there is now yet another new variant of the extensive type of urbanisation related to migration, whereby the trained and able people are moving to the new industrialising regions, leaving the rest of the population in depressed areas to continue to reproduce the old economic system. Certain national regions of Russia, such as Buryatia, have been left in a particularly disadvantaged situation, since the collapse of old manufacturing industries has dismantled the Soviet division of labour between Russians and indigenous peoples and has thus provided fertile soil for possible ethnic conflicts.

In the Buryat Republic, privatisation and the disintegration of Soviet economic relations in the 1990s led to the total collapse of previously dominant defence industries. These had been staffed almost entirely by Russians and with close links to Moscow. Yegor Gaidar’s programme of conversion of these industries could not be carried out because of lack of investment and credit from the centre. And the Federal Programme for development of the Buryat Republic in 1993–2000, which aimed to promote small businesses, required a complete overhaul of technology. In this depressed region such resources were not forthcoming. In 1991–1994 alone, the Ulan-Ude electrical complex closed ten radio production plants and dismissed two-thirds of the workforce, i.e. 7,500 people. Such job losses could have been compensated for by the creation of small enterprises in services and agriculture, and
this would have stimulated motivation to work and reoriented people’s attitudes towards more technologically sophisticated economic activity. This could have been achieved, as trained personnel had been produced in the Soviet period. However, because the governing powers and the new oligarchs were determined to take control over the key points of the Russian economy, these innovations did not occur. As a result, depressed regions were forced to reproduce ‘depressive’ socio-economic relations. According to data of the Buryat Ministry of Employment in 1998, of the 400,100 inhabitants of Ulan-Ude 100,000 were available for work but only 56,000 were in employment. The official unemployment figure for urban districts of the Republic was 20.7 per cent and for rural districts it was 39.7 per cent. Meanwhile, the real income of the Republic’s population fell between 1992 and 1998 by 35 per cent, and the proportion of people living below the poverty line was 59 per cent in 1992, 68 per cent in 1993 and 46 per cent in 1998.

As a result there have been negative social effects (lyupenizatsiya), such as anti-social behaviour, drunkenness and alcoholism. The diminished quality of life and lack of work caused many of the better-qualified Russians to migrate to neighbouring Irkutsk and Novosibirsk regions. Between 1997 and 2000, the number of emigrants from Buryatia to Irkutsk region alone was between 1,5000 and 2,500 a year.

Many of the remaining inhabitants have been forced into self-provisioning using natural resources. They have taken up hunting, fishing, and gathering in the forests, or subsistence farming at allotments and dacha-cottages. All this has had the effect of reproducing the ‘peasant’ way of life and patriarchal relations. The rural economy has suffered a particularly disastrous crisis as a result of the lack of demand for agricultural products and over-exploitation of pastures near settlements. As rural production fell drastically, most villages were left with no social services except schools. Kindergartens, clubs and local hospitals closed or were left barely surviving. Many Buryat settlements are distant from developed communications. Lack of access to transport and its high cost relative to rural incomes meant that many people were cut off from basic resources. Links between villages were weakened and the previous framework of population distribution was destroyed. With no rural market structure, production has turned inwards towards a ‘natural’ subsistence type. This has been accompanied by the re-emergence of traditional patriarchal relations and religious ritual (shamanic and Buddhist), which has entered ever more deeply into peoples’ daily lives, influencing their habits, decisions and goals.

**Rural migration to Ulan-Ude**

The rural population, deprived of its former way of life, has reacted by mass migration to the capital of the Republic, Ulan-Ude. After 1995, with the ending of the ‘farmer campaign’, the flow from the countryside increased from 1,800 per year to 3,100 per year. Between 1991 and 1997 the population of the city increased by 34,000, adding 20 per cent to the urban population.
In the Soviet period, migration to the city took place in three stages. First came the migrants from nearby towns and day-workers from the suburbs, then came the qualified workers going to the industrial districts, and they in turn drew in their relatives. Today we are also seeing a huge flow to the city from defunct industries located in rural areas, such as the Dzhida wolfram-molybdenum plant. Because there is little control of these various mass inflows, the city labour market and infrastructure have been overwhelmed. Around the city periphery whole settlements of ‘self-built’ migrants’ houses have appeared. The new inhabitants use the city services but do not pay for them. People build houses without even the resources to buy the land. In two out of three cases the land is simply appropriated. Most of these settlements are located just outside the town boundaries along the road to the airport. The poorest settlers bring their previous houses from their villages, log by log, and reconstruct them on the new site. They are unfamiliar with, and therefore reject, urban life in multi-storeyed houses, and so they get their kinsmen, friends and the whole village world to help them transport the village house to the town. In such ‘border’ spaces, conditions are created for maximal co-existence of rural and urban ways of life. The city infrastructure can be used, including education and medicine, as well as better pension provision and the possibility of casual earnings. At the same time, the fencing of relatively large plots of land allows people to engage in subsistence farming alongside their houses.

The migrants’ adaptation to the city, in a situation of economic crisis and unemployment, makes use of traditional social relations. Zemlyachestva (formal associations of people from one rural area) support rural migrants in the city, and they have become one of the basic channels of social mobility. They make wide use of kinship and clan relations. These associations, having human resources at their disposal along with well-worked-out mechanisms of influencing the city power structure, have gradually penetrated the struggle for political influence and administrative dominance. They recruit their own candidates and provide support during election campaigns. In this way many rural incomers to the city, who are described as ‘people of two worlds’ (in Russian, marginaly), often manage to obtain well-paid and prestigious jobs through the system of kin and zemlyachestvo relations. They then draw into the city their own rural kinsmen and neighbours from the ‘small homeland’ (malaya rodina).

The social effects of rural migration to the city

This process can be seen as a continuation of a similar type of kin-based urbanisation during the Soviet period. In those years, ‘Western’ Buryats from Irkutsk province, who were considered more Russianised and hence more ‘progressive’ than the Eastern Buryats, took up many important posts in the Buryat Republic. They then drew their kin and neighbours into their respective institutions, and as a result Western Buryats from outside the Republic headed many organisations in Buryatia. In the post-Soviet period, however, the fact that Irkutsk Buryats were already more urbanised and had less strong clan relations caused them to lose
ground. In many spheres, it was now the new arrivals from the eastern regions who took influential positions. Some of these posts are in newly created activities, such as the tax inspectorate or new business firms, but others are in the bureaucracy. In all cases, the recently arrived highly placed person collects his kin and countrymen around him as personal support and thus soon acquires full control over the internal hierarchy of a given firm or department; clients of the previous boss are dismissed, demoted, or put under severe pressure to leave. Under these circumstances, unrelated persons – i.e. those not included in the leader’s network – find working life extremely difficult and often leave of their own accord. Such is the widespread penetration of these kin networks that an independent person finds it difficult to get employment. Kinship, usually based on the system of male-line lineages and clans, prevails over neighbourhood relations. A leader will always feel that he should support a kinsman or woman, even if that person is inefficient. Someone who is simply a local friend (zemlyak) from back in the village has to work far harder than a kinsman to please the leader in order to be included in the network. The system can, however, work against the longer-term interests of such a boss. An example is the case of BAT Ltd, a large forestry company in Ulan-Ude trading with Japan. The Japanese invested high technology equipment in the firm worth US$1 million (a large sum in local terms). The directors of BAT, who were related to one another, flooded the company with other kin and zemlyaki. However, the problem was that these incomers were unreliable. Over three years around 30 per cent of the equipment was stolen by the firm’s own staff, including key elements of the production line, and the Japanese then stopped trading with this firm. The directors were unable to get rid of their unreliable kin because of the close relations established earlier. Although this case is well known, the system of employing kin continues as before in Ulan-Ude.

Today, more than half of government officials, politicians and managers in large and middle-sized business are ‘people of two worlds’, i.e. first-generation city dwellers who have not lost touch with their kin and neighbours from their rural home areas. Their domination of city life is gradually changing Ulan-Ude’s character. Rural attitudes are bringing about stagnation in economic life and increased conservatism and patriarchy in society. Shamanic and Buddhist belief has become prevalent among Buryats (see Humphrey 2002 and Hürelbaatar’s chapter, this volume). The whole process is sharpening national and ethnic divisions.

Motivations and strategies of newcomers to the city

For Russians, one of the main channels to success, when there is such competition for employment in depressed provincial towns, is to migrate to more prosperous Siberian regions. For Buryats, on the other hand, the main channel is higher education – not in the sense of qualitative improvement of knowledge but in the sense of acquiring degrees that will give a stronger position in the labour market. Ulan-Ude has seen a boom in the provision of education services. It is difficult to
calculate the number of colleges and commercial educational establishments, but it is known that the number of PhDs (kandidat nauk) per head of population in Buryatia has long since exceeded that of any other region of Russia. For the time being, the quality of education is still relatively high, and while this is the case, education will continue to be the main channel of mobility for ethnic minorities. This is recognised among rural dwellers too, so the small farmers will sell their last cow and move to the city in order to provide their children with good schooling and take them away from the economic dead-end of rural life. The Buryats’ intense striving to raise their status in this way, and acquire the accompanying privileges, is conditioned by the absence of other channels of mobility for them. However, in such difficult economic conditions, the dominance of Buryats in science, education and culture – which had begun in Soviet times and was then strengthened by the mechanisms just mentioned – has aroused discontent among other nationalities.

Ulan-Ude has seen the emergence of another type of ‘ruralisation’ of city life. The depressed economy, which has made so many people turn to subsistence strategies, has made the so-called ‘budget sphere’ particularly attractive. This comprises the jobs in government, administration, science, education and culture that still provide stable incomes from the central state. Here there is no need to put in a personal financial stake as there is in business, and yet a small regular income is guaranteed. Meanwhile, the work required is not demanding, and one’s energy can be devoted to producing extra income from the dacha or vegetable plot or some other productive sideline. People who take up such opportunities do not quit their apartments or give up their legal status as inhabitants of the city. Nevertheless, low incomes force a large proportion of urban residents, especially children and elderly people, to migrate seasonally to villages in summer in order to work to prepare foods (chiefly meat) for the winter. This process has been increasing in recent years. As Akhiezer remarks, ‘In practice there is a mass seasonal movement to the village which is not visible in any statistics’ (2000: 88). This kind of ruralisation of the city has produced a particular kind of urban population, similar to that of the villages. The process is the result of people’s strategies of coping with economic depression by creating the most stable conditions possible in an unstable society (Akhiezer 2000: 88).

Conclusion

In this way, Ulan-Ude is dominated by a structure of employment in which Buryats dominate in the socio-cultural and administrative sphere. The harshly hierarchical social relations described above, along with the absence of innovative mechanisms of development, have several negative effects: de-motivation from work, confusion over the effects of the market economy and, in effect, its rejection. These attitudes are closely related to the revival of traditional social relations and exacerbate current economic problems. It is not a coincidence that politically the Buryat Republic has for many years been a stable part of the ‘red belt’, where
electoral support for the Communist Party is strong. The economic crisis, which has now lasted for over a decade, has given rise to the feeling that there is no other way out. It has both undermined any belief in the effectiveness of reforms and discredited the values of the market economy.

The continued ‘natural resource economy’, along with the lack of any internal stimulation for innovation and continually inhibited urban development, may lead to a dire situation in certain regions. At a time when innovative technology is so important in the rest of the world, certain areas of Russia, especially the national republics such as Buryatia, are seeing a revival of the former imperial policy based fundamentally on exploitation of raw material resources, albeit under different conditions. Such regions, and cities like Ulan-Ude, may be consigned for good to the sidelines of economic processes of urbanisation and globalisation.

Notes

1 Orgnabor was the Soviet organisation for recruitment of workers and specialists for state projects across the USSR.
2 The oligarchs took control of key export resources and either used the income themselves or sent it abroad to foreign bank accounts, thus removing resources that might have been used for investment. In the Buryat Republic, the main resources are gold, coal and timber. The local oligarchs were reluctant to allow new development because that would have given rise to competition that could have challenged their regional power. Another factor in the export of capital was the lack of trust in Siberian banks, due in part to the weakness of Russian law in the finance sector.
3 The average monthly agricultural wage in the mid-1990s was 380 roubles, and the cost of a bus fare from Zakamensk to Ulan-Ude was 340 roubles.
4 This refers to the campaign to create small private farms on the West European model. Yeltsin initiated the campaign in 1992. Significant resources (loans, equipment) were given to the new farmers, but the campaign was not sustained and in Buryatia it had very limited success. Thus, despite the fact that Buryats and Siberian Russians had traditionally engaged in private farming, the majority of rural workers are now still in some form of collective enterprise.
5 During the perestroika period this was a ‘no man’s land’ area between the city territory and Ivolga District. Both authorities thought the area was too distant from their centres to be supplied with infrastructure, and therefore neither of them claimed it. In the end, the city took over administration of the area. It has told the settlers to pay for their land or leave, but such threats have had little effect. Some other self-build settlements are also found to the north of the city along the forest line.
6 These neighbourhood associations linked to a rural district tend to work through extended kinship relations. They are officially registered in the city, have premises, and hold regular meetings. They also give support to particular initiatives for their members and on the occasion of elections (they distribute pamphlets, agitate in home villages, etc.). Membership is in principle open and free to all residents of the home district, but payments are made for particular purposes. Politicians elected with the assistance of these organisations then provide help to members when they need official documents, licences, etc. Zemlyachestva are organised by Buryats and Evenks, but Russians tend to organise ‘societies’ (obshchestva) on different, non-territorial, principles, such as societies of Old Believers or Cossacks.
7 This includes the police, the FSB (Federalnaya Sluzhba Bezopasnosti or Federal Security Service), the tax inspectorate, etc.
The term ‘marginal’ is found in earlier sociological literature, but is not used here because I wish to avoid giving the impression that such people are marginal to city life. The intention is to express the idea of people who are neither rural nor urban in culture, but maintain a mixture of the two types of thought and behaviour.

References


THE CREATION AND REVITALISATION OF ETHNIC SACRED SITES IN ULAN-UDE SINCE THE 1990s

Altanhuu Hürelbaatar

Introduction

As David Harvey (2000: 74) says, ‘What is missing . . . is an understanding of the forces constructing historical-geographical legacies, cultural forms, and distinctive ways of life – forces that are omnipresent within but not confined to the long history of capitalist commodity culture and its spatio-temporal dynamics.’ This chapter is in part a response to Harvey’s call for closer attention to be paid to the historical, geographical and cultural legacies that shape contemporary urban configurations. With that in mind, the specific focus is a contribution to understanding of the post-socialist ethnic city in the Russian Federation through a brief ethnography of how Buryat Mongols create and re-vitalise sacred spaces and places in Ulan-Ude, the capital city of the Republic of Buryatia in eastern Siberia. This phenomenon can be seen as one of the most effective ways of creating ethnic spaces consciously or unconsciously, and having one’s own centres in modern Soviet-type cities, where political and economic life, language, education, social services and infrastructure are all Russian-dominated. Ulan-Ude is one such city in an ethnic Republic.

The city of Ulan-Ude was founded in 1666 as winter quarters for Cossacks; it grew in importance following the construction of the railway in the late nineteenth century and is now continuously served by the Trans-Siberian Railway with a branch line to Ulaanbaatar and Beijing. Contemporary principal industries include food processing, tanning, timber processing, and the manufacture of glass, bricks, and railway equipment. The total population of Ulan-Ude numbers approximately 386,000, of whom 21.1 per cent are ethnic Buryats (Zhimbiev 1999: 108).

My first impression of Ulan-Ude city was that it was a modern Russian city. The architectural styles, physical appearance, organisation and city structure showed no obvious significant Buryat characteristics. For example, there were no visible, traditional Buryat sacred sites in the centre of the city, but there were three Russian
churches. The city gave the impression that it was still very much both a Soviet and a Russian city: the Soviet names of streets had not been changed and the huge statue of Lenin’s head was still the symbol of the city in the central square (Figure 6.1). It would appear that Buryat ways of living in Ulan-Ude were very Russified. Even though the physical appearance of Buryats and Russians is quite different, in their everyday life they work together speaking the same language: Russian. They receive the same education and wear the same style of clothes, consumption patterns are broadly similar and they live in the same apartment houses.

However, soon after I began my fieldwork on the religious practices of Buryats, different images began to appear. From 1998 onwards, Buryats began to create or re-vitalise many sacred places around and in the city of Ulan-Ude. These are Buddhist societies organised by lay persons, Buddhist centres organised by lamas, new monasteries, including a nunnery, lay chanting groups, an association of shamans, and the creation and reclamation of sacred sites in or near Ulan-Ude. Some of these places, such as rooms in public buildings, are hidden from the public gaze; others are clearly visible. Some such sites are in the central part of the city while most others are located in the suburbs or outside but near the city. However, all these sacred sites, societies and individuals are acting in their own ways to answer the requirements, solve problems, and supply various services to the Buryats of Ulan-Ude.

At the same time, Buryats may have different feelings about the city, its spaces and services and how they connect to urban elements. This is a difficult question to address explicitly here; however, it is possible to observe the effects indirectly. For example, Buryats are willing to spend their limited money on their spiritual life in...
ways such as making donations to rituals or building temples. However, they avoid paying the costs of public utilities and services such as electricity and heating (see Humphrey, this volume). This is the background of my interest in the city of Ulan-Ude and led me to write this chapter.

The creation of sacred places since the 1990s

There is a long Buryat Mongol tradition of sacred landscape which incorporates various sacred sites and Buddhist monasteries all over Buryat-inhabited territory. This Buryat sacred landscape co-existed with the Russian trading city which developed into Ulan-Ude. As the Soviet city came to dominate the place physically, socially and ideologically it seemed that the Buryat sacred topology had disappeared. As this section shows, however, most of these sacred places continued to exist during the socialist period, fostered through individual and collective memories and clandestine practices.

Like other Mongols in Mongolia and Inner Mongolia, Buryat Mongols have different kinds of sacred landscapes. These fall roughly into two groups: the natural and the manmade. In the former, there are mountains, rivers, springs and trees in which Buryats believe their ancestors and other powerful spirits dwell. In the latter group are such buildings and monuments as monasteries, stupas (pagodas), and oboos. These objects however, were constructed not in, but outside, the city. During the Soviet period, Buryat sacred landscapes apparently disappeared, worshipping of, or in, them was restricted and many of them were destroyed, their religious values denied. Modern Soviet types of cities and towns were developed all over the Buryat territory. However, the Buryats’ practice of sacred landscape did not disappear completely throughout the Soviet period. One such example is the ‘road offering’.

In Ulan-Ude, most Buryats practise Buddhism and Shamanism while Russians mainly practise Christianity (Orthodox and Old Belief). There was no single Buryat datsan in Ulan-Ude but there were several Russian churches in the central part of the city. In the post-Soviet period, however, all three religions have been revived. Over the last ten years since the fall of the Soviet Union, the most significant aspect of the revival of the Buryats’ practice of religion has been diversification – almost creating hybrid versions of both Buddhism and shamanism, along with the creation and re-vitalisation of diverse institutions and sacred sites in and around Ulan-Ude.

First let me introduce the creation and re-vitalisation of sacred places outside the city. The nearest Buryat datsan to Ulan-Ude is Ivolga datsan; this is the largest and most important Buddhist monastery in Russia. Until it was built, there was no single monastery in or near Ulan-Ude; the Ivolga datsan was the only monastery on the territory of the Republic of Buryatia during the Soviet period. It was built in 1946 under the plan of Soviet religious policy, and organised along the line of a Soviet, as though no other model were available (Humphrey 1983: 419–20). The reason for building the Ivolga datsan close (30km) to Ulan-Ude and not as remote as monasteries had been in the past, was, as Buryats say today, to control it by
keeping it under the eyes of the government. However, it was not built in the city, because if located there the monastery would have been too significant, would have strengthened the Buryats’ belief and increased the coherence of their ethnic solidarity. Nowadays, the Ivolga datsan is the centre of Buryat Buddhism. Since it has already been well documented in the west (Humphrey 1983), I do not intend to analyse it further here.

Several Buddhist stupas have been built around Ulan-Ude. One of them, for example, called Badmalinhua Suvargan was supported by A. Zhimbiyev who is the editor of a children’s journal called Hariyachai. There is also a Buddhist temple built in the outskirts by a senior lama of Ivolga datsan.

Since the early 1990s, the number of Buryat shamans has increased very fast, and a Shamans’ Association was established for the first time in Ulan-Ude in 1993 (Figure 6.2). By 1997, there were 83 shamans from various districts who were members of the Association (Zhukovskaya 2000: 27). They bought offices in the centre of Ulan-Ude. Shamans re-claimed many shamanic sacred sites all over the Buryat territory, which included several such sites around Ulan-Ude. They organised collective rituals for the public, addressed to the spirits of these sacred sites. One of the most important such shamanic sites is in Verkhnaya Berezovka (where other religious buildings are also located). Another most important and large complex site is the Camp of Geser, which hosts a mixture of Buddhist, shamanist and other Buryat folk beliefs and customs.

Having briefly introduced some sacred places around Ulan-Ude city, I will now turn to those newly created sacred places and activities inside the city. Here I note

![Figure 6.2 Shamans’ association conducting a ritual in public](image)
the appearance of various Buddhist societies, a lay Buddhist chanting group, the lamas’ Buddhist centres, a nunnery, new monasteries, and the shamans’ association.

Since the early 1990s, many Buddhist societies have appeared. There are no statistics detailing how many Buddhist societies there are in Ulan-Ude city. Some say that, by 1999, there were 17 such Buddhist societies, the membership of which ranged from 50 to several hundred. Among these are the Society of Gelug Sect, the Society of Sakya Sect, the Society of Kagyu Sect, the Society of Dzogchen Sect, and the Society of Nyngma Sect. In effect, the Buryats have created for themselves, through these societies, branches of virtually the entire range of Buddhist traditions, which must reflect a felt need to go beyond the previous monopoly by the Gelug (‘Yellow Sect’) Buddhists. Some of these traditions are more flexible than the Gelug in social matters (for example, in relation to roles available for women and lay actors), which answers to changes in society in the Soviet period. Many of the societies have their own houses and they organise some public activities. For example, they sometimes invite famous lamas, or scholars of Buddhism to give public lectures, organise public rituals, collect funds for supporting the centre or building temples and stupas.

There are also several lay chanting groups in the city. One such group called the Society of Ariyabala is located in the centre of Ulan-Ude. The head of the society, Badma Rinchinov, is a journalist on Buryat Ünen (The Buryat Truth). The society hires a large room in a public building for its meetings. The room is full of Buddhist shrines, images of various Buddhas, bodhisattvas and deities. The members of the society gather together twice every week in the evening to chant Buddhist prayers, print Buddhist texts in the Buryat language, and as volunteers to collect funds for supporting various Buddhist activities.

The most active and influential societies are the lamas’ Buddhist centres in Ulan-Ude. It is said that there were more than ten centres in the central part of Ulan-Ude by 1999. I visited six of them as shown in Table 6.1.

Most of the lamas are young. It is noticeable that many of the centres draw lamas from specific rural districts (raion) of Buryatia. This was a traditional practice for Buryat monasteries (Galdanova 1983: 34–45), but it may also reflect the current tendency to create zemlyachestva (regional associations in cities) as mentioned by Manzanova and Humphrey, both in this volume. The pattern is for a founder lama from one region then to draw in kin or neighbours as the next lamas, and in this way to avoid the disputes prevalent between unrelated people. Furthermore, such centres serve as foci for rural people coming to worship in the capital. All this reflects the growing importance of kinship and fellow-villager relations in the city (Manzanova, this volume). In principle, the centres do not accept student lamas. One must have graduated at least three years earlier from a Buddhist monastery such as Gandan monastery (Ulaanbaatar), Ivolga datsan (Buryatia) or Aga datsan (Aga okrug). This is also one major similarity between urban Buddhist centres and monasteries: the organisation of the centres is similar to a smaller monastery. Many of them have a Chief lama, a Chair lama, a Proctor, a Cantor, and a Counter.
The hurals (public services) of the centres are quite similar to those in the datsans (see the hurals of the Dharma Centre). Every centre has a hall in which to hold public services and several separate rooms, rather like offices, for individual lamas to help with believers’ various requirements. These include, for example, leading a dead person’s soul, purification, chanting prayers for a good journey, business, or election result; luck with entering university or prayers for a person who is absent. The lamas may also make offerings to Buddhas and deities, give astrological advice and make divinations. The centres frequently invite famous lamas to conduct public rituals, such as purifying rituals and public prayer (Figure 6.3).

All of the regular hurals provide texts printed for believers; occasional and special activities are announced via the newspapers. Many of the centres have some modern office facilities such as a photocopier, computer, fax machine and telephone.

In order to explain the foundation and workings of these groups, I will now describe in some detail the Dharma Centre, which was the first Buddhist Centre in Ulan-Ude. This centre was founded in 1993 by N. Ülemkhinov, who is now its Chief Lama. Ülemkhinov studied Buddhism in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia) in the 1980s for three years and is currently the Head of the Board of Buddhism in Russia. Jirgal, the Chair Lama of the centre, said that the aim of setting up this centre for the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>When founded</th>
<th>Founder</th>
<th>Number of lamas and place of origin</th>
<th>House</th>
<th>Plans</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dharma</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Ülemhinov</td>
<td>13/mixed</td>
<td>Hiring houses in gymnasium</td>
<td>Started to build a monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zhambal (name of a deity)</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>Zhamyang, ex-Hambu Lama</td>
<td>15/Aga region (okrug)</td>
<td>Hiring a large flat</td>
<td>Plan to build a monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamrim (path to enlightenment)</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Choidorji, ex-Hambu Lama</td>
<td>12/Kizhinga raion</td>
<td>Hiring a large flat</td>
<td>Started to build a monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Itgel (faith)</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Baldan</td>
<td>7/Tungka raion</td>
<td>Hiring several houses in a public building</td>
<td>Started to build a monastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamsom</td>
<td>1990s</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>9/Yervaninski raion</td>
<td>Hiring a small flat</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zandan Juu*</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Yishi</td>
<td>6/mixed</td>
<td>Hiring several rooms in a public building</td>
<td>unclear</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* The full name of the centre (group) is ‘Zandan Juu: the international Buddhist centre’
Dharma Group was to lessen the pressure on the Ivolga *datsan* by reducing the number of believers’ visits. This idea was approved by Shagdarov Zhamyang, the Hambu lama of that time. In the beginning, the centre was closely attached to the Ivolga *datsan*, but recently it has been completely separated because of the conflict between Ülemkhinov and Ayusheyev, the current Hambu Lama. In 1996, the Dharma centre started to build its own monastery near the gymnasium. The monastery will be composed of a main temple for religious services, a temple for Buddhist training of the laity, a temple of the Buddhist Institute, and a publishing house.

All the above societies, groups and centres are for the time being invisible physically. They are ‘hidden’ in modern buildings, or tucked away modestly among them. Physically, then, it cannot be said that they actually change the appearance and structure of the city. However, they play very important roles for Buryats’ life in the city. They are providing unique and practical spatialities (ethnic spaces) for Buryats and drawing a boundary between Buryats and Russians, and, most importantly, Buryat traditions and cultures are being ‘taught’ and disseminated there.

Apart from the above sacred sites of religious societies and centres in Ulan-Ude, Buryats have also started to build monasteries in the city itself. One nunnery has been built in the centre of the city, a monastery called Duinker *datsan* (known as Hambu Lama’s *datsan*) on the edge of the city (Figure 6.4), and a monastery called Ahlar *datsan* in a suburb.
People say that two oboos existed when the city was first built. Many Buryats still remember them. The worship of one of them, called Shinggeten, which is part of the Deed Ongotstai area, began again in the last few years, started by nearby villagers.\(^{13}\)

It is worth pointing out that building a monastery in the city is quite a new thing in the Buryat tradition. In the past, Mongols usually built a monastery in a remote, quiet place, after which a kind of city or town sometimes gradually developed around it. Ulaanbaatar, the capital city of Mongolia, and Huhhot, the capital city of Inner Mongolian Autonomous Region (China), are such examples. This is also different from the pattern in the West where people usually establish a city or town first, and then a church will be built for it.

Here I introduce the nunnery (the other two datsans will be discussed in detail in the next section), which is known as Handama datsan. The appearance of women’s religious organisations and the building of a nunnery in Ulan-Ude are a completely new thing among Buryats, these being institutions that did not exist in either the Soviet or the pre-Soviet periods. Usually, Mongol lay women are more active in practising Buddhism than the Mongol lay men. In pre-revolutionary Buryat society, many women took lay vows ubashi in their old age. However, they did not have their own public organisation, and, in particular, they never had their own monastery.

Since the early 1990s, Buryat women have started to organise their religious activities; on the whole these are particularly active in the urban environment.
The first Buryat Women’s Buddhist Centre (in Russian, Buddhiskoe Zhenskoe Obshchestvo) or nunnery was founded by Darima Chenggüyeva (a married woman in her early fifties) in 1992. When Chenggüyeva told me about how it was established she said that she had met the Dalai Lama when he visited Buryatia in 1992, and had asked him about her idea of setting up a nunnery there; he had encouraged her, saying it was a merciful deed (i.e. an act of merit). In the following year, 1993, Chenggüyeva renamed the group as a nunnery, gave it the name Handama, and soon after that she successfully got from the government both permission and a place to build a nunnery datsan in the central part of the city. At this time, the Centre started hurals (religious services). There were no Buryat nuns in the Centre who could conduct hurals (by the year 1998). However, the centre has close contact with a Mongolian nunnery in Ulaanbaatar (Mongolia), and invited two Mongol nuns, who are married and have children, to manage religious services. They chant prayers in Tibetan, but they communicate with Buryat believers in Mongolian (Buryat). At the same time, the centre had started to build a monastery, and the main buildings and a pagoda were completed in 2002.

By 1998, the nunnery had about ten Buryat members. The main regular hurals are Green and White Tara (nogoon darhi, tsagaan darhi), the prayer of Narahajid who is a female deity said to be the wife of Padmasambhva who was founder of the Nyingma Sect or Red Sect Buddhism in the seventh century, the prayer of Otochi (a Buddha of medicine), and the prayer of Naidan (deity of wealth). As with other Buddhist centres and datsans, the nunnery also announces its hurals and other activities in newspapers.

The nunnery has fewer visitors than the lamas’ centres and other datsans, but several visitors come every day. I have not heard any serious criticism of the nunnery from ordinary Buryats and lamas. However, the current Hambu Lama, Ayusheyev, the general leader of Buddhism in the Russian Federation, has his own view about the appearance of a Buryat nunnery. He said:

Buryats never had a nunnery in the past. Now they [Buryat women] have started to have their own Buddhist organization and datsan. This is a heavenly time (tengger-yin chag). Nowadays, women are equal to men. There are women leaders, teachers, and scholars. But they are lacking something: religious professionals and a datsan of their own. This is nothing wrong if it is part of development of our Buryat Buddhism. However, the problem is that the nunnery is supported by the government to be independent from us. The government agreed and encouraged women to build their own datsan, but it does not belong to the Ivolga datsan which is the centre of our Buryat Buddhism. The nunnery is thus cut off from this centre. The government gave a place for building this nunnery in the centre of the city. This was not by chance. That is a Russian residential area. In fact, this is the continuation of the traditional Russian policy of dividing our Buryats. They are now successfully practising this policy among our Buddhists, and Buddhism is our only
spiritual unity. In addition, according to our Buryat tradition, it is said that woman’s character is water, man’s is fire. These two should balance: water must have fire, but if the water spills over the container, it will put out the fire. The world will be darkened and water too will lose its function.

The Hambu lama’s attitude to the nunnery suggests indirectly that the Russian government makes political use of the Buryat creation of new sacred places in the city, exploiting the social divisions that have arisen in the last ten years (see also Humphrey, this volume).

**A complex religious space: the case of Verkhnaya Berezovka**

In the late 1990s two Buddhist monasteries have been built in this northern suburb of Ulan-Ude, which is a Buryat traditional sacred place. At the same time, Buryat shamans have also been competing keenly for the place as their sacred site.

The whole area is called Verkhnaya Berezovka, which in Russian means ‘the high place with birch trees’, and it is formed by the valley of the river with the same name (the Buryats call the river Deed Ongotstai – ‘the upper place with spirits’). According to Russian statistics, in 1912, 18 Buryat households lived here, all of which were moved out by the government to accommodate a development scheme in the 1930s. However, compared with some suburbs of the city, there was little development throughout the Soviet period. Nowadays, Buryats say that such lack of progress with Soviet plans is caused by the fact that this place is ‘hard land’ (earth) (hatuu gazar) where powerful ancestral spirits dwelled. For Buryats, this is a dangerous place to live, and should only be a place of respect and worship. Usually Buryats do not cut trees or bushes and only gather dead brushwood in this area. There is a high path passing through, and, many Buryats of the city have always made offerings when they travel through this area. A Russian church was built in this valley and from late Soviet times it was used as a museum of archaeology and ethnography. Nowadays, Buryat shamans say that the museum only made Deed Ongotstai harder (hatuu) and stronger (hühtai), because so many shamans’ sacred items were kept there.

Ayusheyev, the current Hambu Lama (the twenty-fifth), bought 13 hectares of land in the area of Deed Ongotstai and started to build a monastery known as Duinker datsan or Hambu Lama’s datsan. To start with, he built a wooden temple and began religious services (hurals). But soon a tragedy happened when one night the wooden temple was burnt and three young lamas died as a consequence. Since then, people have started to talk quite differently about the reasons for the accident. Buryat shamans say that the Buddhist monastery should not have been built in that area which is the dwelling of the shamans’ ancestor spirits; further, they say that this fire is only the beginning, thus indicating that if the Hambu Lama does not stop building his monastery, more serious tragedies will happen. However, it
seems that Ayusheyev does not care much about what shamans say. He has completed all the major temples and is continually expanding the monastery. The style of the monastery and the system of hurals are basically similar to other modern Buryat monasteries of the Gelug Sect in Buryatia. The major difference is that lamas in this monastery are more focused on studying Kalachakra (known as Duinker, the main deity of this sect, among Buryats).19

The fact that the Hambu Lama has his own monastery is not a new thing in the history of Buryat Buddhism. There was a Hambu Lama’s monastery known as Hambin Hüree in Selenga Raion.20 In terms of the number of lamas and the development of Buddhist teachings, the Hambin Hüree was not the most prominent. However, this monastery was famous because it was the monastery of the Hambu Lama and thus was the centre of Buddhism in Tsarist Russia. The location of the Hambin Hüree was not close to Ulan-Ude, nor was it in the territory of the Khorii Buryats who were more Buddhist and had many lamas and monasteries, but it was in the territory of Selenga. A reason for its fame could be that it was on the way to, and closer to, Da Hüree (or Urga, or Bogdii Hüree, later Ulaanbaatar), which was the centre of Mongolian Buddhism.

This change of location of the Hambu Lama’s monastery suggests the following points. First, the remote location of the previous Hambu Lama’s monastery shows the comparative freedom of Buryat Buddhism from the Tsarist government. Second, it suggests the close attachment of Buryat Buddhism to Mongolian Buddhism. Third, the building of the new Hambu Lama’s monastery in Ulan-Ude indicates a change in the pattern of Buryat monastery building, from locations in the distant countryside to the city. Fourth, this change also indicates a significant new stage in the recent development of Buryat Buddhism: the urbanisation of Buddhism since the 1990s.

There is another monastery called Ahlar, which is being built by Lama Samayev on high ground in Deed Ongotstai.21 He is one of very few geleng (fully initiated) lamas among the present-day Buryats.22 Samayev was the vice-Hambu Lama in Ivolga datsan for several years but resigned because he had ideas about developing Buryat Buddhism which differed from those of Ayusheyev, the Hambu Lama.

I have not heard of any discussion among Buryat shamans about the building of the Ahlar monastery in the Deed Ongotstai area. However, its architectural structure and future development suggest how Buryat sacred space is being created. Built on a hill, the monastery’s temples are all designed by Samayev himself, and the styles are all characteristic of traditional Buryat Buddhist temples. On the top of the hill, there is a temple called Hi-Morin-Süm (Temple of the Wind Horse) which is a three-storey building. The ground floor is a hall where shrines are worshipped and hurals are held. The second floor is laid out as a Mongolian yurt, and the wind horse is worshipped on the top floor.

Down the hill from the Hi-Morin-Süm, several wooden houses were built (some of them were used as temples when I visited in 1998). These houses, in sequence downwards from the top of the hill, are: a traditional Mongolian felt yurt, an ancient-style Buryat wooden yurt, a nineteenth-century Buryat wooden yurt, and a
modern Buryat wooden house. The main temple will be a large six-storey building with many halls. These will be a hall for lamas for conducting hurals; a hall for studying choira (Buddhist philosophy), a hall for studying jüd (tantric), a hall for studying medicine, a hall for lay people’s practising (lecturing, studying and chanting), and a library, together with many rooms for individual lamas’ meditation.

Samayev told me that he knows well that the Deed Ongotstai is a shamanic sacred and powerful place. However, he has interesting views about building a monastery in such a place. He said: ‘Shamanically powerful land is not bad, but good for building a monastery.’ In the past, he said, powerful lamas intentionally choose such places to build monasteries. If you do the right thing in the right way, you will get support from the spirits and energy from the land, otherwise you will be punished. It is also a chance for the spirits of the land to be liberated by listening to lamas’ chanting prayers. Most importantly, my monastery does not contradict our Buryat tradition. Our ancestral (shamanic) spirits will be pleased to have such a monastery here.

I have not heard shamans attacking Samayev’s building of his monastery – perhaps because the location of the monastery is not so central in the Deed Ongotstai area, or perhaps because Samayev’s monastery is something new, combining Buddhism with Buryat traditions such as yurts and a wind horse temple.

Buryat shamans have not built their own temples yet in Ulan-Ude. However, their reclamation and construction of other kinds of sites, along with the competition for sacred sites in and around Ulan-Ude, has been active in the last ten years. The Association of Buryat Shamans was set up in 1993 in Ulan-Ude. They hired several rooms in a public building as their religious practising ‘offices’. Since the association was set up, Buryat shamans claimed that there are four shamanic holy mountains in four sites of the city. Two of them have already been used for sacrifices by the Shamans’ Association. Shamans were also allocated two offering sites (one site is for white and one is for black shamans’ offerings) in the Camp of the Geser after it was set up in 1995 (see next section). However, in the territory of Ulan-Ude, the most powerful sacred place for Buryat shamans is Deed Ongotstai.

The Association of Shamans (Böö Mörgöl Eblel) is planning to carry out a series of seasonal public prayer rituals in Deed Ongotstai. The first one, called ‘Golden Autumn Prayer’ (altan namarai mürgel), took place in October 1998 in the yard of the Museum of Ethnography located in the Deed Ongotstai area. About 20 shamans conducted this ritual together, and over 2,000 people attended. The ritual was announced on TV and in the newspapers for one week before, and was also reported in the public media. During the ritual, Nadya Stepanova, the Buryat head of the Shamans’ Association, gave a speech about the prayer ritual and the sacred space of Deed Ongotstai. At the end of the ritual, Stepanova proclaimed to
the participants: ‘From now on, Deed Ongotstai will become an even more sacred and powerful place, because all the master spirits of Buryat land and ancestral spirits of Buryat shamans have been invited to today’s ritual.’

Thus we see how Buryat lamas and shamans are creating, re-vitalising and competing for sacred places in and around Ulan-Ude. Verkhnaya Berezovka (Deed Ongotstai), as a particular case of the sacred place, is contested, but mainly by religious experts: shamans and lamas. What is the nature of the lay Buryats’ everyday practice in such contested sacred places? In the next section I will discuss this question by presenting an elderly Buryat woman’s memory of Verkhnaya Berezovka (Deed Ongotstai).

**Everyday practice in contested sacred places**

Many ethnographies and studies show that while ordinary Buryats know and talk about, as well as contest and compete over sacred places, at the same time, both in the past and the present, they do not care as much about these matters as about problems in their everyday practice (Humphrey 1983; Hamayon 1995; Hürelbaatar 2002). The same is true in the case of Verkhne-Berezovka. People participate both in sacrifices conducted by shamans and in Buddhist services (*hurals*) in the monasteries. Based on this, I would like to argue that the competition for and contestation of sacred places is limited to religious experts – broadly speaking, both Buddhist and shamanist. However, different sacred places also provide separate ethnic spaces for many ordinary Buryats. It is in this context that I present an elderly Buryat woman’s recollections of her practices at the sacred place of Verkhne-Berezovka.

Seventy-eight years old, she lived her entire life in a village house (*dacha*) in the area of Verkhnaya Berezovka. As she remembers, there was the summer pasture of a rich man called Kulakov in this region. In her view, the rich man chose this place because it was the high part of a sacred place (*svyataya mestnost’*). Kulakov asked to be buried at the foot of that hill.

According to the old woman, the mountain called Bayan Tsagaan Uula (Rich White Mountain) in Verkhnaya Berezovka is the most important. Even during the Soviet period, Buryats did not stop worshipping this mountain. As she told me:

In 1969, we started to visit this sacred place. In those days, in the 1960s, villagers from Zakamensk and Zhidinskii districts also started to come to this place to pray. They brought with them offerings of rams’ heads, coloured cloths, ritualistic scarves (*hadaks*), and silken, coloured threads, as sign of thanks to this mountain. These villagers told me that some people from the Buryat clans of those two regions formerly lived at the foot of Bayan Tsagaan mountain. Therefore, so as not to lose touch with these sacred things (*svyatyni*) they came and brought offerings at Verkhnaya Berezovka. So, Bayan Tsgaan Mountain, and I myself believe this, is a truly sacred place.
She talked about how she worshipped the sacred mountain, saying: ‘I and my husband used to get up early in the morning, when the children were still asleep, and go up to the top of the mountain.’ Later, she went for several years to this mountain together with her husband and children to collect mushrooms. But not just to collect mushrooms, she said: ‘in each corner, in all four directions, we made libations (bryzgali) with milk products. And this was a way of protecting (oberegali nas) ourselves, our luck (udacha), our children.’ She told us that recently, each summer, people held rituals (obryady) on the top of a hill which is part of the sacred mountain.

What we can see from the old woman’s memories and experiences of the Verkhnaya Berezovka is that, for her, what is important is the sacredness of nature: plants, trees, springs and the mountain. It seems that she does not care so much about the different religious experts. She said:

They say, some person lived there (kto-to zhil) – a böö [male shaman], a lama, someone special lived there. I can’t quite remember. [ . . .] Anyway, someone lived there and it’s a blagodatnyi krai [a place of good fortune]. All people are believers in the mountain, and there are many examples of them finding their lost things because of their belief in the sacred mountain . . . I am now going through my 78th year, at the end of my abilities. I am a believer. And Tsokto and his son and other people live there. And nothing bad ever happens there. So if you lose something – well, Lyassev’s son, his television was taken away [she doesn’t like to say it was stolen]. They found it! Immediately, along the Deden river There are lots of examples like that. And we all are believers, all those like me who were founders [of the settlement]. Tsedendambaev and his family. Even all the children are believers. Everything that is lost is found! You must believe! You must believe! Then losses won’t happen. You might even get a windfall. [Then she laughs.]

She talked about the building of the Hambu Lama’s datsan in Verkhnaya Berezovka. However, she did not mention the dispute between lamas and shamans, but again the importance of the sacredness of the place. She said:

When they built the new, the first, well-known Buddhist Centre of Russia, that place was not chosen by chance. It was all connected with the sacredness of the place. They gave 13 hectares of land, starting from above the Fruit Tree Station and ending near the dachas. They are all sacred places. Above, there is an underground spring, it is under the earth, and lamas used to use it for curing. Maybe that is why such a place was chosen.

This is an example of ordinary Buryats’ understanding and practices of sacred places. However, along with religious experts (dispute and competition) and
ordinary people’s practices (discussed in the two previous sections), Buryat intellectuals also have their own practice of ‘sacred places’ – creating a unified ‘sacred place’. In the next section, I will very briefly introduce this.

Sacred places and national sentiment: creating a unified sacred place

Buryat ideas and practices of sacred places are important across Buryat society. The phenomenon can be seen as part of the Buryat national character, but it has been organised and developed by Buryat intellectuals and politicians. From the local to the national level, there are many sacred landscapes and sites all over the Buryat territory, and these are not only historical, but contemporary sites as well. Thus Buryats’ discourses of sacred landscapes express their national sentiment, and distinguish Buryats from Russians at various levels.

One example is the creation by Buryat intellectuals and politicians of the Camp of Geser, a complex sacred place just outside Ulan-Ude city. Geser is popular as both a heroic epic figure and religious deity among the Central Asian peoples (Heissig 1980: 93–101; Hamayon 1998: 59–60; Humphrey 1998: 15; 1999: 6). Among Buryats, Geser is a shamanic deity for Western Buryats, a Buddhist deity for Southern (Tsongol) Buryats (many of whom came from Mongolia), and an enemy of Buddhism for Eastern (Khori) Buryats. However, all the different figures of Geser were regarded as antithetical to communism, and Geser was denounced as ‘feudal’ by the Soviets (Humphrey 1996: 117).

Since the late 1980s, Buryat intellectuals and politicians have actively worked to awaken national consciousness through encouraging the revival of national culture. The organisation of the celebration of the Geser is one such movement. The Buryat Republic claimed the festival as a Buryat national holiday. However, this continued only for five years, and it was stopped after the Republic re-elected a Russian President, Potapov, in 1995. To remember this national movement and try to continue it, Buryat intellectuals and politicians set up the Camp of Geser (in Buryat Geserei buusa; in Russian stoyanka Gesera) under the name of a non-political organisation. This is a complex site that is composed of a Buddhist offering site, a white and a black shamans’ offering sites, and several other memorial and national sites. These are shown in Figure 6.5.

Compared with the other sacred places mentioned above, the Camp of Geser is less popular with the Buryats of Ulan-Ude. Perhaps it is regarded as not truly religious. However, it is politically much more sensitive for the Russian government than the other sacred places.

Conclusion: sacred spaces and ethnic spaces

The ethnography in this chapter shows us various religious societies, associations and centres in Ulan-Ude city, many of which are physically hidden while monasteries and some other sacred sites are visible. However, they are all the same
in practice, in that they are creating ethnic spaces, boundaries, spatialities and urban centres in their own ways.

These sacred spaces are acting to provide places where ethnic Buryats can gather together and practise their own culture, customs and religions. Indeed, many revivals of Buryat traditions over the last ten years have been closely related to such sacred places.

To take a simple example, on the occasion of monastery *hurals* (religious services) and many other public rituals, or shamans’ various public rituals, both religious experts and ordinary Buryats wear their traditional clothes and cook Buryat ritualistic foods – all of which are very different from their Russified everyday practices. In this case, the Buryat shamans’ activities are most influential. Traditionally, shamanism was not urban and not institutionalised but located in the countryside and highly individualised. However, as described above, over the last ten years the number of new shamans has increased markedly in the urban environment, they have formed an association, and they have frequently organised collective, public rituals in Ulan-Ude itself. Most Buryat shamans use the Mongolian (Buryat) language when they conduct rituals. For example, they mostly chant their long and formalised callings of spirits, announcements of offerings and prayers to the spirits, and many other such utterances in Mongolian.

Figure 6.5 Map of the camp of Geser

Key: (1) Shows three tethering posts (*serge*) of all Buryats; (2) is the white shamans’ offering place; (3) is the black shamans’ offering place; (4) shows the emblem (*hüld* or the flag (*tug*) or the tethering post of Geser; (5) is the tablet (*hüshee* or *chuluum*) of Geser; (6) is the Camps of Geser; (7) is the temple of Geser; and (8) is the birthplace (*toont*) of all Buryats.
Importantly, the shamans’ rituals and other activities in the urban environment are closely linked both with the countryside (villages) and the past (history). For example, one must find out one’s ancestors’ names and the place where the ancestors lived and were buried (Humphrey 2002). Buryats are traditionally shamanists and they worship a host of deities, ancestor spirits, and supernatural beings thought to be present in mountains, trees, rivers, cliffs, marshes and animals (Humphrey 1983: 373). In this way, the new Buryat shamans are not only creating a more unified culture and ethnic spaces in Ulan-Ude city, but they also join together the city and the Buryat countryside and history.

Such traditions, connected with kinship and ancestors (see Manzanova this volume), make Buryats closely attached to sacred spaces from birth; it is important for them to remember and recognise many places and to wish to co-exist harmoniously with nature and to keep safe by respecting and making offering to these places, which are simultaneously the places where ancestors’ spirits dwell. Such values can also be seen from the fact that Buryats voluntarily pay large amounts of money for the practice of their spiritual life, such as donating to the construction of sacred places (building temples, stupas (pagodas), oboos) and making offerings, even when they are finding it difficult to pay their bills or to manage payment of everyday utilities and costs (heating, electricity, rubbish disposal).

Thus we can understand this to be a particularly Buryat sense of sacred space and place, and a unique way of remembering and ‘occupying’ their land. This can be further understood from Buryats’ ideas about places: lands have master spirits, and the land is therefore powerful, whether for harm or good. It is very easy to offend such spirits by dirtying or harming sites, or even simply by forgetting them and neglecting to make offerings. This is why roadside libations are such a common feature of Buryat life.

In their social life, the Buryats of Ulan-Ude have clearly had the intention of having their own ethnic spaces and making a boundary between themselves and Russians, even during the Soviet period. It was observed by Humphrey that, in Ulan-Ude, Buryats and Russian tended to live in different areas of the town if they could (1983: 33) and now this tendency has been greatly increased (Humphrey, this volume). That the Buryats of Ulan-Ude have long had a separate graveyard from the Russians is just another example of this wish to have a separate space in death as in life. It is particularly significant that these traditional practices of sacred spaces and places are now being related to the nationalist sentiments of a minority ethnic group in a Russian-dominated urban environment.

This may be one of the major common features of post-Socialist ethnic cities in the former-Soviet territory (see Introduction to this volume). Buryats, particularly shamans and lamas, are creating and re-vitalising sacred sites in the interstices of the centre, the capital city of Buryatia, and thus making their own Buryat contexts. The self-created ethnic spaces for Russians, by contrast, are not as visible.

It is worth mentioning here that it seems that the creation of sacred sites and institutions by Buryats is not intended to resist Russian political power nor compete
with the Russian religion of Christianity. On the other hand, there is clear competition among the Buryats themselves – between Buddhism and shamanism, between different sects of Buddhism as shown above, and even between the genders. Let me expand on this a little. Buryats have long endured Russian colonialism and have engaged in different practices of resistance over the years. However, throwing off the Russian yoke has never been very successful, occasionally ending in tragedy. What they have learned from this history is that Buryats are not strong enough to resist Russian power. This idea is reflected in Buryat prophecies. As a famous Buryat prophesier called Molon Bagshi said in the late nineteenth century:

> Are trees and woods more numerous or Russians? The Russians will be greater in number. That will be bitter. [When] the Russians come in great numbers, there will be changes. No emperor will ask you [Buryats] to move, but you will move in your own way and your own fashion. We [Buryats] will not be able to compete with the Russians in the north. 

(The orders of Molon bagshi).

Nevertheless, in the religious case, there is no practical conflict between Buryat faiths (Buddhism and shamanism) and Russian. For example, Buryat shamans have criticised Buryat lamas’ building a monastery in their sacred site, but I have not heard any criticism of the Russian church that is still used as a museum.

By contrast, Buryats have competed among themselves between regions (western and eastern Buryats) or according to clan affiliation. The same has happened in the case of religion. Such competition is particularly active in the post-socialist period. Each religion (Buddhism and shamanism), each monastery, each centre, and each society has equal power, its own resources, and is comparatively independent one from another. In other words, no one religion and no one sect can dominate over the others. Furthermore, the Russian state tolerates (under the name of democracy) or encourages (as a policy of ruling over the minority) the development of religious differentiation. In the past, the situation was different. Buddhism then was supported by the Russian state and the local Buryat leaders; Gelug Sect Buddhism consolidated power to the extent that there were virtually no other sects, and shamanism was suppressed by the state and local authorities. Now, as society has differentiated and become more varied, so has religion.

Nevertheless, all this variety is Buryat variety. The traditions of worshipping the land and maintaining sacred spaces have contributed to Buryats (whether consciously or unconsciously) re-thinking Ulan-Ude as a Buryat city on Buryat land.

**Notes**

1 I carried out three months’ fieldwork (August – October 1998) in Ulan-Ude as part of my fieldwork for my Ph.D. programme among Buryats.

2 There were a total of 47 active Buddhist monasteries in the territory of Cisbaikalia and Transbaikalia. By the end of the 1930s, all of them were closed, and Buddhism,
together with other religions (Orthodox and Old Belief, and Shamanism) became officially non-existent. Shamanism is the Buryat traditional religion, but never had institutionalised bases such as temples or churches. However, shamanists have countless sacred sites all over the Buryat territory, including some in the suburbs of Ulan-Ude city.

3 Buryat *Oboo*, lit. a heap or cairn; used for ritual cairns situated on the top of hills where ceremonies are carried out, often requests for timely rain, good luck and fertility (Humphrey 1983: 494–95).

4 See also the memories of an old woman about her practice of a complex religious space described later in this chapter.

5 Buryat *Dasan*(g), from Tibetan *Grva-tshang*, Buddhist monastery with teaching faculty (Humphrey 1983: 495).

6 James Hill, a journalist on the *New York Times*, wrote: ‘The Ivolginsk monastery is Russia’s Lhasa, attracting hundreds of believers a day to its temples and monuments’ (1 October 2002).

7 Personal conversation with L. Abayeva.

8 Avalokitesvara is the bodhisattva of compassion.

9 At that time, the Ivolga *datsan* was the only *datsan* near Ulan-Ude, and it was too much work for the monastery to satisfy the demands of increasing number of believers. Moreover, it was also not convenient for people to travel there from the city (30 km away).

10 The Hambu Lama is the head of the Gelugpa Buddhist church in Buryatia.

11 The foundations of several temples were laid, and the main temple was half completed. The construction was stopped in early 1998, lacking financial support largely due to the Russian economic crisis.

12 The regular *hurals* of the Dharma centre are:

- *Sahius* everyday
- *Three gürim* everyday
- *Otochi* every Friday, and the eighth of every month
- *Lhamu* the second of every month
- *Mandalshiba* the 30th of every month
- *Lamchig Ningbu* the 15th day of every month
- *Hog-namshil* every Friday


14 A nunnery opened in Ulaanbaatar in 1990, and its head lama is a man called Gangtemür. Recently, it has been expanded into a large monastery, and there are over 300 nuns.

15 Hambu Lama Ayushiyyev talked more about how the Russian state is trying to weaken Buryats’ ethnic solidarity by dividing Buryat Buddhism. As an example, he said: ‘Ülemkhinov and I were classmates when we were studying Buddhism in Mongolia. We had some disagreements about developing Buryat Buddhism and there was personal competition – it was a private disagreement. But, the Russian government immediately interrupted us and made us divide our Buddhism. They supported Ülemkhinov to stand against me. In order to do so, they set up a new state agency called the “Board of Russian Buddhism” and put in Ülemkhinov as leader. Traditionally, the Hambu Lama is the spiritual leader of Buddhism in Russia. But now we have two leaders. The number of agencies and leaders is no problem. The problem is that the government supports one to stand against the other.’

16 It is said that the reason for moving the Buryat households was that the government wanted to develop a berry fruit industry (Pers. com. Zhimbiyev).
17 It is Buryat popular tradition to make certain kinds of offering (for example, vodka, candy, cigarettes, matches, ribbons, etc.) on their journey when they pass by spiritual sites.

18 Conflict between the spread of Mongol lamas and shamans is not new. It has a long history from the beginning of the spread of Buddhism. A well-known example, told me by Tsereng, in his forties, Chair lama (shireet) of Aga monastery and vice Hambu Lama, is the story of building the Aga monastery. It is said that Aga datsan was built (1816) in a shamanic ‘hard’ place where there were several powerful shamans’ graves (shanda). The construction done by day was destroyed at night [by the shamans’ spirits]. Lamas had no way out but to invite local shamans for a feast for several days. The shamans were pleased and made offerings to their ancestor spirits (ug). Their spirits got drunk. Meanwhile, the monastery was completed and was animated by deities (occupied or protected). Even so, the spirits’ harm continued. Lamas of the monastery died in suspicious circumstances, and the first three Chair lamas (shireet) also died for unclear reasons. Later, a powerful lama called Namnai Lama, who chaired the monastery for 37 years, conquered the shamans’ harmful spirits.

19 Study of astrology and tantra is essential in Kalachakra. It is known as Duinker among Mongols. In the past, many Mongolian monasteries had a temple for studying Kalachakra, for example, Duinker datsan of Aga monastery. The Master reincarnation of Badghar Monastery of Inner Mongolia is Duinker Gegen.

20 Hambin Hüree has been known by several other names: Goose Lake (in Buryat Galutnurin datsan; in Russian Gusinoosersk datsan) and Tamcha datsan. It was devastated in the 1930s, but some of the old buildings of the monastery remained and have been restored recently.

21 Samayev, whose initiation name was Shirabjamsu, was in his late forties in 2000. He had studied Buddhism in the Dalai Lama’s monastery in India. Samayev also received modern higher education, and he had deep knowledge of Buddhism and its history. He worked in government for several years and also travelled in many countries. Recently, he set up a foundation for developing Buddhism and protecting ecology. Unfortunately, he died before this chapter could be published.

22 There were only four Buryat geleng lamas in the whole chapter of Russia by 1999.

23 Worshipping of the wind horse has long been a tradition among the Mongols, and is once more becoming popular.

24 Nadya Stepanova, the head of the Association of Buryat Shamans, told me that they are planning to build a multi-functional shamans’ building on the shore of Lake Baikal over 100 km from Ulan-Ude city.

References


THE HOMELESS OF ULAN-UDEN

Irina Baldayeva

Introduction

The problem of homelessness in contemporary Russia is under-researched, though there have been occasional articles in the press that have described the most obvious and glaring conditions of homeless people’s lives. Homeless people themselves affect the life of average citizens more and more, in streets, shops and the entrances of homes. This is a direct consequence of the socio-economic changes taking place in Russia. However, historically there have always been homeless people in Russia, not excluding the Soviet era. In the recent past, they were called vagrants or bichi. In urban folklore, bich was short for byvshii intelligentiy chelovek or ‘former member of the intelligentsia’. This description was tied in with a mythologised ideal of people who did not wish to be subject to the laws and conventions of regulated communal life. Tales are told of bichi – former academics, engineers, teachers – who chose a free way of life instead of what to them was a burden – submission to ignorant bosses, life with an unloved wife and so forth.

These allegedly free people, of their own free will, became prospectors, lumber-jacks, frontiersmen and surveyors. The idea was that a brief stint of work in the summer would give them the possibility of earning enough money to live well for the rest of the year. According to popular rumours, bichi always had money, were free thinkers and were constantly hounded by the police. This romanticised picture provoked interest and even a certain envy. The verb bichevat’ meaning to wander and to be dependent on nobody, acquired a twofold character. At one and the same time it implied both restlessness (homelessness) and boundless freedom of movement. In any case, bichi were viewed as being capable of returning to the same way of life as the majority of their fellow citizens, but unwilling to do so.

The fundamental changes that have taken place in Russia since the beginning of the 1990s have completely changed stereotypes about homelessness. Bichi have disappeared, to be replaced by bomzhi – people ‘of no fixed abode’ (bez opredelyennogo mesta zhitel’stva). An organic connection between bichi and bomzhi may be posited except that bomzhi are far more numerous. Terms such as bomzh, bomzhevat’ or bomzhatnik, have no positive connotations; they are inextricably linked in people’s minds with the lower depths of society, with individuals who have lost not only their home but their humanity, having sunk.
beneath society’s lowest limit, from where there is no return to a normal life. To the average person, bomzhi represent a faceless mass, almost a herd, whose members differ one from another neither in gender, nor in ethnic background, nor in social position.

The bomzhi of Ulan-Ude

Homelessness in Ulan-Ude now occurs on a fairly large scale: bomzhi are visible both in the central areas of the city and in its suburbs. At the time of my research in 1998, there were 203 people known to be homeless in the city. All of these were questioned in interviews and with questionnaires, but this chapter relies primarily on interview data rather than questionnaires; because of the extreme vulnerability of this group, I have tried to be particularly careful in anonymising both people and places, other than the main city dump which is a well-known spot.

The data afforded a range of conclusions about the way of life of this particular group of Ulan-Ude’s inhabitants. The initial research was followed by additional fieldwork in July 2001, which allowed me, on the basis of a sample of 26 people, to form a more detailed picture of the way of life of homeless people. In the course of my research between 1996 and 1998 I established how these homeless people lost their homes and arrived at their current position; where they had lived formerly; their links (or lack of links) with friends and relations; and their means of survival. Although it was impossible to establish the veracity of answers given from other sources, I nevertheless was able to establish a number of facts, which are summarised here. Most of the homeless people had lost their jobs following the closure of their places of work as a result of state cuts; most of them had worked in the industrial sector, in service industries or in the transport sector. All were poorly qualified, had low levels of education and had problems with alcohol consumption – but despite this, almost all considered themselves qualified workers. Almost all had a family (wife/husband, children) with whom they had lost contact and almost all (197 – 95 per cent) came from poor families of lower social status. The overwhelming majority (179 people, or 87 per cent) were men, and only 24 (13 per cent) were women. With regard to ethnic background, out of 203 people 198 were Russian, four Buryat, and one Yakut. Up to one half of the homeless people were former prisoners. Only 66 people (30 per cent) were lifelong inhabitants of Ulan-Ude. The rest were immigrants, and of these, 41 people (20 per cent) came from rural areas of Buryatia and 102 people (50 per cent) came from neighbouring or distant regions; 165 people (80 per cent) were aged between 40 and 50, 36 (19 per cent) between 30 and 40, and two (1 per cent) were older than 50. Everyone I spoke to expressed a more or less negative attitude towards the contemporary situation in Russia and desired a return to the established socialist order. In the same vein, all considered that they had been cheated when housing was privatised, as a result of which they had not received money that would have allowed them to set up another home. All declared that they wished to work should the opportunity be given them.
While conducting informal conversations with them, I could observe their activities in their makeshift dwellings and in the places from where they obtained their means of survival. It became clear that this group of homeless people was far from being homogeneous. This was evident in the different ways they lived. Despite external similarities, they chose very different ways of life. I established a fairly clear differentiation of this population of homeless people into three groups.

The social structure of the homeless (1998)

The first group, conditionally called ‘the elite’, contained those homeless people who lived in former military dugouts in the woods next to the city dump (the Glass Factory region of the city). In 1998, 56 people (22 per cent of the whole homeless population) lived in 13 dugouts, one family in each one. Of these people, 55 were Russian and one was a Yakut. At this time there were no Buryats in this group. All declared themselves to be Christians. The settlement had electricity. In almost every dugout there were refrigerators, radio sets, homemade electric heaters, electric stoves and electric kettles. In one dugout there was a television and a brick stove. All families possessed their own crockery and bed linen. In addition, there were a few bathhouses. Water was brought in from outside and stored in a cistern. All of the inhabitants of the dugouts considered their situation to be pleasant, and declared that they were significantly better nourished than when they had had their own homes.

Over extended periods I observed them at work, which centred upon refuse brought to the city dump. They referred to their trips to the dump as ‘setting off on the BAM (Baikal–Amur Railway)’. Practically the whole population of the dugouts would surround the fresh refuse and start to sort it, removing bottles, tins, metal and clothes. In general, food was obtained as leftovers from markets or food-handling businesses (meat-packing plants, bakeries, cafés, restaurants, etc.). However, many people declared that they did not eat food from the dump, but had a large enough income to get food from shops. I personally observed that this group ate good-quality food. They earned money through the sale of glass and scrap metal to dealers in second-hand goods. On average they worked three to four hours per day. This was enough to satisfy their demands for food, alcohol, tobacco and soap. They spent the rest of the day enjoying themselves: drinking, smoking and chatting. Towards evening almost all of them found themselves in a state of drunkenness.

A definite social organisation existed among these homeless people. Their elected elder N.P. exercised the most power: he would pass judgement on the frequent disputes that arose, and also acted as spokesman when the police or other officials visited. This particular group of homeless people was disdainful of others who did not live near the dump and would not permit them on to their territory. Up to the middle of 1998 the life of the dugout dwellers was to a certain extent a stable one. It is interesting to note that occasional relatives who came from outside the dump would settle in the place, seeing that life was better there than in their native villages.
The second group was made up of those bomzhi who spent the cold periods of the year in cellars, hallways and attics throughout the city. Some of them occupied dachas, which had been left empty for winter. Their primary means of support was salvaging glass and general refuse. I questioned this group and observed them as they carried out their work during their daily round of the rubbish bins in courtyards. Each person had a clearly defined territory, from which he or she would, if necessary, expel intruders. They subsisted exclusively on the food they found in bins. Occasionally they were able to steal food or other goods from the market. They carried out their work alone, although as a rule they lived in groups of two or three people. As opposed to the homeless people of the first group, members of the second group eschewed personal hygiene and grooming. They changed their clothes only when they could find (or steal) something a little better. This group was by far the largest – 126 people (62 per cent of the whole). Of them, 117 (93 per cent) were male, and nine (7 per cent) were female, while 122 (97 per cent) were Russian, and four (3 per cent) were Buryat. There were no female Buryats in this group. This group was exposed to certain life-threatening risks – dying of cold-related and other illnesses, being beaten up or killed by their peers or so-called ‘hooligans’. For this reason, the turnover of this group was more pronounced. In the main, the negative public opinion of bomzhi is directed towards this group, as they slept in the entrances to blocks of flats, destroyed flats and storerooms, and stole washing and anything else that was left unguarded. They caught and ate domestic cats and dogs, as well as feral animals. Research among these homeless people was made harder by the fact that they were almost always intoxicated and incapable of understanding my questions.

The remaining homeless people (21 people – 16 per cent) were assigned to the third group. These are the people who exist almost exclusively by begging, being either incapable of or unwilling to gather refuse. Of these, 19 (90 per cent) were men, and two (10 per cent) were women. Twenty of them were Russians, and one man was a Buryat, from the Irkutskaya oblast. They hung around in the populated areas in the centre of town. Aside from begging, they would also steal and ask for food from traders. Occasionally they would look for food in rubbish bins. Each of these people had his or her own ‘pitch’, from which he or she would exclude other beggars. Like the second group, these homeless people slept where they could, and in the summer months they slept in the open air.

Three years on: changing social structures among the homeless

I was interested in whether any systematic measures were being taken to help the homeless and, most importantly, whether it was possible to reintegrate them socially. The state, through the Committee for Social Security, initiated a programme whereby homeless people are given tokens valid for meals in cafés or the purchase of food. Unfortunately, this measure was limited in its effects and could not materially alter the actual situation of homeless people in the long run. They are
helped more regularly by the International Red Cross and by religious organisations. Until 1998, there existed no programmes designed to help homeless people reintege into society: neither state nor community organisations attempted to provide housing, work or treatment for alcoholism. Those measures which were enacted had a negative effect, as they merely reinforced people’s existing conditions. This problem can be illustrated by an incident when the Committee for the Homeless and Unemployed donated a wooden house to be dismantled and rebuilt at the city dump. The leader of the committee, together with his ‘helpers’, sold the wood and appropriated (‘drank’) the money.

The situation clearly changed as a result of the Russian financial crisis of August 1998. With the decline of the rouble, the previous small measure of socio-economic stability was replaced by a sharp decline for the majority of the population. Consumption patterns changed. The population as a whole bought less food and fewer manufactured goods, and as a result there were fewer waste products. It had previously been possible to find slightly spoiled food and perfectly serviceable clothes in the rubbish bins, but now the population in general bought less food and wasted less. Before, low-quality fruit and vegetables had been taken to the dump – now they were sold to normal market customers, but at a lower price. Insofar as the inhabitants of the city spent most of their money on food, families started to economise as well and grow their own food. Many people started to keep bottles and jars, rather than throw them out. These new practices significantly affected the situation of the city’s homeless inhabitants.

Under the auspices of the ‘Reconstruction of City Life in Post-Soviet Asia’ initiative, I continued my research into homelessness in July 2001. Using methods established earlier, I questioned representatives from all groups of homeless people. As well as this, I received new information as to the numbers of homeless people in the city – approximately 800 people (data provided by the Centre for Social Security). In comparison with 1998, the number of homeless people had increased almost fourfold. My impression that there were more homeless people even than this was reinforced by seeing that many people who would be considered housed did not differ in behaviour from bomzhis: they too gathered bottles, were poorly dressed, dirty, and regularly intoxicated. Research into the different social groups of homeless people (as defined above) took place in the same locations as in 1996–1998.

At the city dump by the Glass Factory, the situation had changed fundamentally. Two factors influenced this: the economic crisis of 1998, and to a great extent the actions of the city administration. The new mayor of Ulan-Ude, Genadii Aidayev, elected in 1998, took an uncompromising position towards homeless people, most likely as a result of the failure of his attempts to get them to work. He had applied to the Committee for the Homeless and Unemployed with a proposal that homeless people should participate in the construction of a new road. He promised in return to provide work and housing. Not a single homeless person responded to the mayor’s appeal. In the middle of 1999, a German television company shot a programme at the city dump, as a result of which the area became an object of
interest to the major Russian television company, NTV. In their programme about Buryatia, ‘Waiting for Genghis Khan’, they exposed hidden aspects of social life in the Republic. In the section of the broadcast dealing with Ulan-Ude, the focus was on the inhabitants of the dump, and their conditions. After the film had been shot, but before it was shown on the NTV channel, the question of homelessness was taken up by the city administration. At a meeting, transmitted on local television, the mayor declared the need for a grassroots solution to the problem of homelessness in the city. He spoke of several planned measures, among them the forcible expulsion by the police of bomzh from other cities to beyond the city limits. The decision was taken to evict all the dwellers of the city dump. The people who still lived there told us how this took place. The regular tractor driver whose job was to level off the piles of rubbish (an employee of the city) refused to dig up the dugouts. Therefore a temporary driver was found, who was facing a two-week prison sentence for minor offences. As compensation for this work, he was exempted from his punishment. The destruction of the settlement took place while the homeless people were still present. They were removed from the dugouts by police special forces (OMON – Otryad militsii osobogo naznacheniya) on 31 October 2000. Information from the former inhabitants about what happened next is contradictory. It is possible that all the homeless people were taken that day by force to the city’s detoxification centre and night shelter. The Centre for Social Security found it difficult to reply to my question about the fate of the former inhabitants of the dump.

Of those inhabitants I worked with during our earlier research, 11 were still alive. Two former inhabitants and six newly homeless people now live in four identical hovels next to the dump, where they settled after the events of 31 October (see Figure 7.1). A little distance away from the site of the dugouts, in a dump connected to an abattoir, live the N. family: a couple of dump-dwellers originally from near the Mandrik railway station. In the most active part of the dump, in the open air, live seven people who were there before 31 October, and a further 31 who moved there after the destruction of the dugouts. Several months later, in July 2001, the number of inhabitants of the dump was 42. It should be noted that many more people were gathering refuse on the dump. I was able to speak to some of them and they said that they only worked on the dump, and lived in houses and flats in the city.

The clearing of the dugouts in 2000 had far-reaching effects on the homeless population of the city. In danger of persecution and eviction, they now refused to be named or photographed in their makeshift dwellings or to have their interviews recorded. Despite limited interview data and empirical observations, I was nonetheless able to form a sufficiently coherent picture of this group of homeless people. When compared with my research in 1996–1998, the situation of these homeless people had significantly declined – living conditions degraded further while fear of the authorities had risen. The means of survival had become even more restricted as the homeless competed with poor citizens with homes for access to refuse, which is considerably less reusable and contains little if any food. As before, the homeless people hoarded scrap metal and glass from the dump, but
the money they obtain is now scarcely enough to satisfy even the most minimal needs (there are, of course, certain exceptions). Now, in addition to the traditional materials, homeless people also gather empty plastic bottles and cardboard. In 1998, none of the homeless people lived in the dump itself. Now the majority of the homeless people who live in and around the dump do so: 33 people in all. It is difficult to describe adequately their abject conditions, squatting on top of the rubbish piles. According to the most long-established inhabitants, they no longer leave the dump, as the scrap-metal and other waste merchants pay them directly with ersatz vodka (*katanka* or ‘knock-out juice’). In the winter, the homeless people live around stoves that are fuelled with burning rubbish. The overwhelming majority of them no longer welcome visitors, and make no attempt to engage with them, as in the case of my earlier contact, the N. Family. Three years earlier they had been the most prosperous family in the dump, with a brick stove and a television. Z.N., who was 50 years old, proudly demonstrated her way of life, boasted about the food on her table and declared that her family’s situation was better now than it had been when they worked in a brick factory outside Ulan-Ude. Now I hardly recognised her, as she looked very old and had completely retreated from the outside world, suffering from the effects of alcoholism. In response to almost all my questions she could only mutter her name. The same is true of her husband. He still attempted to gather waste, but his movements were disorderly, confused, and he fearfully avoided conversation. Easier conversations on the dump were with two comparatively young Russian men. I spoke to one young man I called O., who

---

*Figure 7.1 Dwelling at the rubbish dump of Soviet District, Ulan-Ude, 2001*
was 42 years old, and N., who was 39. They had lived on the highest point of the
dump since 1999. O. claimed to have a wife and two children, who lived in a flat in
an oblast' outside Ulan-Ude. However, he lacked the means to return home, and
had 'hung around the dump since 1999'. He said he was an excellent fisherman
and a lover of the taiga. According to him, he had arrived in Ulan-Ude after gather-
ing berries and nuts to sell, and hoped to return to this trade and thereafter return
home to his family. He said he was to be a factory watchman. N. told us how he had
a family with three children in another part of Buryatia, and would soon return
home. He claimed to be a specialist cutter, and a qualified carpenter with a building
company. He answered questions about his family vaguely and evidently he had
lost contact with them a long time ago. The mannerisms and tattooed bodies
of these men (both were naked from the waist up) clearly showed that they had
recently been prisoners, and moreover their responses were a form of personal
mythopoeia which helped them cope with their conditions. Their way of life, in
their own words, gave them the possibility of feeding themselves adequately
and not having to depend on anyone. They viewed their current predicament as
the result of corrupt state authorities, chance, and the president of Buryatia,
G. Potapov, who had caused them to lose their jobs, their homes and their papers.
They saw themselves as victims of the current situation in Russia. Next to them
were a heap of sorted metal and a stove for melting plastic from cables. They traded
this metal not for alcohol, but for money: approximately 80 roubles a day. They
were convinced that the scrap-metal merchant cheated them, buying the metal
for three times less than the amount for which he then sold it on. They told us of
their plans: for the future; for their return to their families, who were waiting for
them; for their work, since both of them were ‘specialists with a technical educa-
tion and work experience’. They showed that they were not uninterested in politics
and proposed their own solution to the problem of homelessness, which boiled
down to a single statement: ‘give us a place to live, work and papers, and we will
immediately set to work’.

Out of the 42 people who now more or less permanently lived on the dump,
29 were Russian, one (a person who had lived there for more than ten years) was a
Yakut, one was a Tartar, one was a Gypsy and 10 were Buryats. V. D., a Gypsy to
whom I had also spoken in 1998, told me this. She evidently had a more thorough
knowledge of her ‘neighbours’, since she had filled the role of group leader after
the death of P. and was, furthermore, the only person who could coherently describe
conditions and events. It was from her that we learnt about the events of 2000,
although she admitted that she herself had not been on the dump at the time. She
had come from an oblast' outside Ulan-Ude and had lived on the dump since 1992.
Previously she had worked as a projectionist, a librarian, a club manager and a
stoker. As before, she refused to answer questions about how she had ended up at
the dump. She told me at length about how she had been very ill (two heart attacks,
a brain tumour, suffered from clinical obesity and was bedridden), but now she
was completely healthy, and even occasionally enjoyed a drink on holidays. Her
mother still lived in the homeland oblast' and she claimed to be in touch with her
by letter. Her daughter, married and with a child, lived in the same oblast’ as well, and allegedly sent photographs of the family. V.D. told me how she had tried (unsuccessfully) to arrange an audience with the President of the Republic in order to solve the problem of her ‘neighbours’, the N. family, who had had a child. She also spoke about the iniquities of the Centre for Social Security, which had offered her a job cleaning public toilets, which she had refused as being beneath her. Near the entrance to her lean-to I could see equipment for washing clothes and a stove, on which were heating two pans of griddle-cakes. On the chest of drawers her crockery was laid out upside down to protect it from flies. A little further away were containers for water: tanks, milk pails and galvanised tubs for washing bottles and jars. She and her husband bought water from the water-seller. According to V.D., work – that is, gathering waste and preparing it for sale – takes up all their time, for which reason they ‘don’t let themselves go’. Her husband, A.D., a Tartar, told me that in two or three days they would probably go to a village outside of town in order to gather berries, mushrooms and nuts in preparation for winter. He said that he had always earned everything for himself, as he was ‘unaccustomed to stealing things’. He gave no further information about himself. V., a Buryat, lived together with this couple. The three of them worked together to some extent and maintained a communal budget. The men gathered jars and the woman cleaned them. As well as this, V.D. spoke with pride about her support for other homeless people, who came to her for help and shelter after long struggles with alcoholism. Representatives of the Russian Orthodox Church come to the dump and to talk with the bomzhi, as well as to bring them food and clothing. Referring to this, V.D. spoke about the extent to which a cultured life was available to the homeless people of the dump: for example, how she herself personally observed religious festivals, and never drank alcohol at Easter or on her birthday. All the while a radio played loudly under the lean-to during our conversation.

V. was born in 1954. He told me that he had been born in a tiny village on Lake Baikal. His parents, both pensioners (his father had been a mechanic, his mother a radiologist), used to live there, but they now lived in the city with V.’s sister. V. also said that his son worked in Ulan-Ude in a casino and earned enough money to help his father, but V. himself refused help, as he ‘did not want to be in debt to his child’. V. said that he had graduated from a technical college as a decorator, and had worked in construction works in Ulan-Ude. He was married, but his wife had left him, and he had then lived with his mistress, but she had sold his flat while he was in hospital. He had already lived at the dump for two years. He could not speak Buryat. He hoped to change his fortunes by travelling with the Gypsy and her husband to the taiga.

Another respondent, who was male, Russian, 52 years old and possessed basic education, said he had worked as a driver at a factory, and had lost his job when it closed. He had taken on casual work and had become homeless as a result of being cheated over the sale of his dead father’s house. He had lived on the dump since 1999. He had no family. He attributed his troubles to the loss of his documents, which he could not get renewed, and therefore he had no propiska (certificate of
residence). He claimed to be qualified in the maintenance of household appliances and showed off an electronic watch, which he had mended after finding it in the dump. He expressed the desire for work of any type. He asked how he could get his passport renewed. He lived with a middle-aged Buryat man, who insisted that he was not a *bomzh* and that he had a house in a village outside the city. He claimed that he was not working at present because glass production had ceased, and that he was taking unpaid leave. However, it was visibly evident that he was homeless. He gathered metal, especially empty cans.

As mentioned above, the second group of homeless people consisted of those who gather waste from rubbish bins near shops and in the streets. They exchange the glass bottles and tins at special locations in different areas of the city. In the cold season they live near heating systems and in entrances to blocks of flats, cellars, derelict buildings and abandoned garages. In the summer when it does not rain, they sleep in the open air. Their new trade is gathering plastic boxes. A.I., a Buryat, born in 1962, a native of a rural village with a basic education, had worked as an auxiliary worker at an industrial enterprise. He became homeless in 1992 after the death of his sister. He has a family; his daughter is now grown up and he has lost contact with her. In the winter he sleeps in various doorways and cellars. At the moment he, along with a couple of other homeless people, sleeps in a derelict former sports hall. He does not speak Buryat. Yu. G. who was born in 1951, is a Russian from outside Moscow, a former convict, and he used to work on the packing line of a factory and once lived in a hostel. He has been homeless since 1994, after the factory’s closure. He sells packaging and looks after a half-paralysed woman, S., so as to keep her from begging. He does not wish to apply to any social organisations, as he does not believe that they can help him. He calls the night shelter ‘the second prison’. He has close relatives who still live outside Moscow while his brother, allegedly, is the head of a military school. His son is grown up and has no contact with him. M., a Buryat, born in 1958 and an orphan since birth, a native of Ulan-Ude, was evidently mentally ill. Unable to speak Buryat, he did not reply to our questions, but meandered in conversation. He used to live with his aunt until she got married. He was convicted and sent into forced labour on construction projects. He now lives in an abandoned garage. He gathers glass to earn a living. He claims not to use alcohol at all. The fact that he does not work he puts down to the consequences of his childhood illness.

A teacher who lived nearby provided many details about the homeless people who live in the central region of the city, and showed me the hidden places where they live. She said that *bomzhatniki* (‘squats’) exist in every well-equipped house. For example, a *bomzhatnik* has been set up in a flat belonging to a homeless alcoholic, where the electricity, water and central heating have been cut off because of non-payment. The inhabitants of the flat survive by stealing potatoes, vegetables, glass vessels and so forth from cellars, snatching drying washing from courtyards and occasionally ransacking flats that have been left unwatched. Furthermore *bomzhi* have occupied an empty wooden house on N. Street, as well as others in various parts of the city. An employee of the local newspaper provided further
information. He told me of a *bomzhatnik* in a former bomb shelter. A large number of *bomzhi* lived here, five of whom have recently been killed by other vagrants. According to my informant, it is mainly middle-aged and elderly *bomzhi*, most of whom receive a pension and have a *propiska*, who live in the bomb shelter. I was also shown the area near the instrument-making plant where these *bomzhi* live during the winter. It is possible to include in this group of homeless people the women who occupy the unfinished and abandoned railway offices near the station on Revolution of 1905 Street (commonly called ‘Sex Revolution Street’). According to rumour these women are prostitutes from nearby villages, who offer their services to less demanding clients.

The unfinished four-storey block of flats on B. Street has attracted the very worst reputation among the inhabitants of the city. Since building work was stopped for technical reasons, the whole block of flats has become a large *bomzhatnik*. It is believed at least 50–60 *bomzhi* live there during the winter. These are people who cannot get into the heating ducts or who have been forced out by regular police round-ups. These *bomzhi* keep themselves warm with bonfires, and eat stolen food and domestic animals. All in all, the second group of homeless people contains more than 700 people, or almost 90 per cent of the total.

I was able to interview the homeless people who lived in the heating ducts on K. Street. At the time of my research (July), these people slept outside among the weeds next to the main building of the Technological University. I was able to learn about the relationships within groups of *bomzhi*, and their relations with the police. It emerged from these conversations that homeless people from all areas of the city, even at times considerably distant ones, have considerable, albeit incomplete information about one another. For example, one homeless man told me about his relation N.P., who lived on the city dump and had, he heard, died. He was very surprised when informed that N.P. had been killed. This anecdote is fairly suggestive: it seems that those homeless people who maintain contact are from the same social group (often kin). However, being based in separate areas, or rather ‘confined’ to a particular territory, prevents close relationships from being maintained. Homeless people do not have accurate information about the fate of their peers from other areas of the city, although some of them were in fact certain that they were well informed about the numbers of homeless people in their area, and, more importantly, where they lived, even if in the most distant parts.

One of these homeless people told me heatedly and at length about the difficulties of his life, which arose not from the fact of homelessness, but from the depredations of the police and university officials. In the course of their clean-up operations against *bomzhi*, the police, as mentioned above, round up homeless people, evict them from the heating ducts, take their photograph and fingerprint them. These actions are, of course, completely lawful, but these homeless people told me that in addition to this the police restrain them, search them and take away their money. In addition, during ‘breaks’ between operations, while the police do not disturb the homeless people, they are instead persecuted by employees of the university, who do not like having such neighbours. And this even after, one
homeless man added, he himself had informed the university about a corpse the three of them had found in a shaft in the heating ducts: an action which he considered should have convinced university officials of his law-abiding and loyal nature. These three homeless people, questioned on K. Street, seemed healthy and fit and comparatively young. Only the woman, however, clearly trying to ingratiate herself, claimed that she would go to work. The men said without hesitation that they did not want to work and would not work. They made enough money to support themselves by selling bottles.

The third group of homeless according to my classification consists of people who live by begging and are unable to gather waste. There are by my calculations no more than 20 of them. It should be noted that the number of people who beg in the streets and outside churches is significantly higher than this, as many beggars have a place to live and receive a pension. Many of these latter people are not professional beggars, but beg from time to time, usually when in need of alcohol, and they regularly ask for money from drivers on public transport and from shop assistants. Full-time beggars are mostly invalids. They gather around markets and churches. For example, five beggars – four men and one woman – generally sit or lie in the gutter by the gates to the Holy Trinity Church in the centre of the city. Of these five, only two are capable of moving freely. Three of them served sentences in local prison colonies and could not then return to their home region, and two are inhabitants of Ulan-Ude who lost their homes. They spend the winter living in the heating system. Their terrible situation compelled me to ask the Centre for Social Security if they could be taken into a refuge or a hostel. The response was that until recently such a course of action was completely impossible, as such social aid was not provided for former convicts. A new shelter in the Khorinskii region of the Republic has recently been opened, where they could plausibly find shelter. The situation was complicated by the fact that the Centre does not actually move beggars to this shelter: they have to travel there themselves. In the case of the church beggars this is clearly impossible, as they are incapable of moving even small distances. Another three beggars were sheltering in the church itself. These were young people, no older than 17 or 18. They carried out simple tasks for food. Since they are not entirely mentally capable, many believers help them willingly, as this conforms to the Orthodox tradition of caring for iurodiviye (‘holy fools’) and blazhenniye (‘simple people’). One of these boys, seeing that I had brought something for the invalids, followed me very closely for a long time, telling me about himself and persistently asking for money. I also spoke to a beggar of pensionable age next to the central market. He said that he had started to beg after breaking his leg when descending a shaft in the heating system, as a result of which he was temporarily unable to gather bottles. His story is fairly typical. He had been sentenced to forced labour, then lost his place in a house owned by the aircraft factory, and became a bomzh in Ulan-Ude, although he himself was born in another city.

With regard to the attitude of bomzhi to the social services, the general opinion is that it is better to live in the street than in a night shelter. We were informed by
homeless people in the centre of the city that this negative attitude among bomzhi was a result of restrictions imposed on those admitted. The shelter does not admit those with tuberculosis, scabies and other infectious diseases, from which 90 per cent of bomzh suffer. Those homeless people who do manage to get into the night shelter (there are at present six of them in the recently repaired hostel) offer a fairly typical picture: one of them could be described as homeless, but not a bomzh – this is a man of 69, who receives a pension and who formerly worked as a metal-worker at the LVRZ. His documents are at his stepson’s house, but he cannot get them. He plans to travel to the countryside and live with a certain single woman he knows, helping her around the house and catching fish. The second person questioned affirmed that most of his life had been spent in prison camps, and that for this reason he had no family, no trade, no home, and lived in cellars and hallways. The third inhabitant of the night shelter was a young Buryat man who had no fingers because of frostbite contracted while sleeping drunk in the streets during the winter. He was a former soldier and had graduated from a warrant officers’ school, where he had had a flat until his divorce. Born outside Ulan-Ude, he did not wish to return to his home town, having lost all touch with his family. Judging by his speech and external appearance, he was not a convict. He was very frightened of the approaching winter, as he was in no condition even to gather refuse or rummage for food. These three people exemplify the social stratification of their group: the first has experience of work and is possibly capable of returning to it, despite his age; the second is a former convict who has never experienced workplace demands and who will most likely never be able to, preferring to live as a bomzh (or return to prison); the third is an invalid, who hopes that somehow society will care for him (house him in an invalids’ hospital).

The major areas of concentration of homeless people in the city are the Sovietskii region and the adjoining part of the Zheleznodorozhnii (Elevator) region, as these are the areas of the city with the largest population, the most markets, and the most places where refuse can be exchanged. In the Oktyabr’skii and Zheleznodorozhnii regions of the city, homeless people live near the markets and sleep during the cold months in the shafts of the heating system. I carried out inquiries in more distant regions, such as the aircraft factory and Vostochniy village. The inhabitants of these villages confirmed that recently they had seen no bomzhi during the summer, but they had seen them during the winter. I was shown an abandoned shed in the courtyard of a block of flats, where the homeless people lived during the cold season. Its inhabitants had most likely moved to the centre of the city, where there is more ‘loot’: production at the aircraft factory is practically at a standstill; the quality of life for inhabitants of these areas is very low.

The number of homeless people and bomzhi in Ulan-Ude for the first half of 2001 is 734, as estimated by the Committee for Emergency Aid of the city Centre for Social Support of the Population. Of this figure approximately 600 can be called bomzhi, and around 130 homeless. This confirms the estimate that I established over the course of conversations with colleagues at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Although it is fairly difficult to draw a line between homeless people and
bomzhi, specialist social workers or members of the law-keeping forces are required to do so in the course of their professional duties. An official definition is that homeless people are those who have lost their home but who live with friends or, with the agreement of the owner, in dachas. A more meaningful criterion for the differentiation of bomzhi from homeless, is that homeless people wish to find suitable work (as a watchman or a property guard or similar) and observe relatively basic hygiene and grooming. Of course, someone who is ‘only’ a homeless person can quite easily become a bomzh: alcoholism quickly removes any difference between the two.

The mortality rate among homeless people is very high, up to 40 per cent. The major causes of death are hypothermia, illness and murder. Some homeless people try to spend the winter in prison or in hospital. An analysis of our data by age, gender, ethnic and national background and education, produced the following statistics:

- Approximately 70 per cent are between 40 and 60 years old, approximately 10 per cent are younger than 40, approximately 20 per cent are older than 60.
- 95 per cent are men, 5 per cent are women.
- 20 per cent are Buryat, 80 per cent are Russians and other ethnicities.
- 30 per cent have basic education, 45 per cent have basic technical education, 25 per cent ceased education in the eighth grade or earlier.
- Fewer than 1 per cent have higher qualifications, up to 15 per cent have basic qualifications, about 80 per cent are poorly qualified (excluding work in prisons), approximately 4 per cent have never worked.

As far as the families and close relatives of homeless people are concerned, some of those younger than 40 still have parents, or less than 5 per cent of the total; approximately 90 per cent have either been married or cohabited. Of these, around 30 per cent have never officially been divorced. Homeless women, even the seriously ill, always have a close friend or a ‘husband’ among the homeless population. Almost all of the previously married men have grown-up children, although connections with them or their former wives are not maintained. The majority of homeless women have children, either abandoned when young or now grown-up.

The social background of homeless people divides as follows: fewer than 20 per cent are from a peasant family; more than 70 per cent are from workers’ families with low qualifications; approximately 10 per cent are orphans.

Few of the homeless people in Ulan-Ude are natives of the city, and of those who claim to be so (approximately 10 per cent), more than half lost their home while in prison, or sold their home to a broker. The majority of homeless people complain that they were cheated by former wives, mistresses, relatives and friends. I explained, however, that cases of actual deception during the sale of houses were few. It is a regular occurrence for homeless people to sell their homes very cheaply, in order to get money for alcohol.
Approximately 30 per cent of the homeless people come from regional Buryatia. Many of them are not convicts, but lived in town in hostels or with relations. Regularly, people from rural regions do not change social status when they arrive in the city: they did not work in the country; engaged in petty theft there as well and suffered from alcoholism. These people lost their homes and their work because, as they say here, they spilis’ (loosely translated as ‘took to drink’).

Natives of neighbouring and distant regions of Russia make up approximately 60 per cent of the homeless. Of this number the majority, according to the police, are emigrants from areas lying to the east of Buryatia: the Chitinskaya oblast’ and the Khabarovskii and Primorskii regions. The geographical distribution of emigrants from western regions is wider: people come from Podmoskov’ye, Ivanovo, the Sverdlovskaya and Irkutskaya oblasti and other areas. This category of homeless people mainly consists of former prisoners in Buryat prisons who never returned home.

Among the homeless people in Ulan-Ude, there were no ‘eastern Buryats’, while the ‘western Buryats’ were deracinated – they could not speak their native language and had lost links with their relatives. It is interesting to cite here a conversation with a local scholar, Dr Yu. B. Randalov: ‘Buryats are connected more closely to tradition, and therefore find it harder to break their family ties. The support of their people is felt more strongly, as is the sense of shame. This explains the small number of homeless people among them.’ However, such an explanation is inadequate. The percentage of criminals is not smaller among the Buryats than among people of different nationalities. It makes more sense to suggest that, having received sentences in different regions, Buryats do not try to return to their homeland, and instead wander elsewhere, as the ‘immigrant homeless’ have done in Ulan-Ude. Familial and ethnic ties are not adequate to prevent homelessness. For example, consider this fact: no homeless people in the city claimed to be from a semeiskii (Siberian Old Believer) background. However, this by no means implies that such people are incapable of becoming homeless. Evidently, representatives of the older generations in such rural families are distinguished by their sober way of life, their propensity for hard work and their mutual assistance. However, the younger generation, especially those who live in the city, are more vulnerable. It is only logical therefore to assume that having undergone sentences outside Buryatia, Buryats will remain in other places and regions of Russia, swelling the ranks of the homeless there.

In addition, one should note that obviously homeless Buryats whom I met claimed that they had homes. As a rule, they would doggedly insist that ‘I live in a flat,’ which is very important for someone who has only recently come from the country, and they were very reluctant to engage in meaningful exchanges. I emphasise this as I myself am Buryat, increasing the stigma of homelessness for my Buryat informants, and thereby exacerbating their reticence. It is worth mentioning that all the while, I never met, either in the heating ducts or in the street, a homeless female Buryat, although dishevelled male Buryats suffering from alcoholism were not uncommon.
When questioned as to the cause of their homeless situation, the responses were various, but consistent in one respect: the respondent was not to blame. Although all homeless people suffer from alcoholism, they do not acknowledge this, but insist that they occasionally drink because of their difficult life. This implies that they confuse cause and effect.

A plausible picture of how a person may become a bomzh, homeless and unemployed, begins to emerge from my research. Almost all of them were employed in poorly qualified, low-paid positions that they maintained with difficulty, for a variety of reasons such as temperament or the effects of alcoholism. At this point, petty criminality or other more serious offences ensue. However, in the Soviet period, a person did not lose his or her job even for such behaviour: there were ‘allowances’ for what officials then called ‘parasitism’, and for this reason even the most ostensibly unemployable people were provided with a job and housed, at a minimum with a room in a hostel. This created a predominant culture of dependency on state social provision, which is particularly evident among the population of homeless. An initiative by Mayor Aidayev illustrates this point. The mayor offered to pay the costs of food and accommodation in return for helping to build a road, for which no one volunteered. Homeless people still actively use the social services: the majority of them receive tokens for free food at Café 14 of the Agricultural Academy, and for accommodation and food for 10–20 days at the night shelter. Along with this, they undergo a medical examination, before which they are washed, de-loused, have a haircut and a shave, and are given free second-hand clothing. It is worth pointing out that the financial provision for the Committee for Social Problems which does not come from the city administration is provided by the Roman Catholic Church, notwithstanding the fact that the number of Catholics in the Republic as a whole is very small, and none of the homeless themselves are Catholic. A representative of the police told us that homeless people are freely given receipts for their lost documents, which they can use to obtain new documents and a six-month temporary propiska, which will allow them to find work through the city employment office. The number of homeless people who take advantage of these ‘opportunities’ is unknown, but I suggest that it is very low (gaining exact details is difficult, as it requires special permission). In manufacturing plants where it is difficult for even able-bodied, young and qualified workers to find a job, employers are unlikely to hire a homeless person. On the other hand, the persistent desire not to work, which is characteristic of almost all homeless people, leads to their refusal to do any work at all, and the majority of them never visit the employment centre. For example, V.D., known as the Gypsy, described with indignation her visit to the social services, where she was offered a job cleaning public toilets. V.D. heatedly refused, and suggested to the social worker that she should exchange jobs with her.
Conclusion

In the course of my first period of research, I came to the conclusion that homeless people from the first group (the population of the city dump) differed from the remainder on account of their capacity for reintegration and socially productive and useful work. However, the changes which have taken place in the country over the three years between the periods of research have altered both the situation and my opinion. Formerly, I considered the first group to be ‘better-off’ insofar as the dump provided them with an actual income (up to 80 roubles a day). But their way of life has, since the destruction of the dug-outs, become indistinguishable from the situation of the rest of the homeless people. For the majority of them the situation has become even worse, as they sleep in the open air by bonfires made of rubbish even at temperatures of minus 40–50°C. They cannot get to the heating system in the outlying regions of the city, they lack the physical power to walk there because they are frequently drunk and they are not allowed on to public transport. It is easier to hunt for bottles and refuse in the city dump than in rubbish bins. If previously the members of the first group (the inhabitants of the dug-outs) felt superior to the remaining homeless people because of their better situation, now they are indistinguishable. As a result, previously suggested measures for the possibility of rehabilitation (resocialization) of the ‘best’ bomzhi now seem unrealistic. The bomzhi from the dump have squandered their possessions and are almost amalgamated with the second group, even though they still have a higher income. However, limited as they may be, there are some potential avenues out of these dire conditions. For example, the inhabitants of the city use bomzhi when they need to clear their apartments of construction debris after decoration (this is called ‘running for bomzhi’). Sometimes, homeless people are permitted to live in dachas, as we have seen, and even cultivate gardens (a significant number of bomzhi look after dachas without the supervision of the owner), and so-called ‘new Russians’ (among whom are people of many nationalities) sometimes even employ homeless people for long periods to clear and guard the courtyards around their private homes. There are even cases of homeless people being employed as shepherds in distant regions, such as the Aginskii national okrug in the Chitinskaya oblast’, where there is a shortage of workers. Thus a portion of the homeless people can secure useful work, even if only for brief periods, and can be employed in some fashion depending on their individual capabilities. This is all the more important because there is a real danger of the appearance of a sizeable ‘second generation’ of bomzhi: children born to homeless mothers and brought up in children’s homes where their fate is to travel down the same path as their parents.

Bomzhi have become a real cause for concern for city officials and the general population. Complaints from residents and public workers have risen to such an extent that the city authorities have been obliged to institute special measures for the eradication of homelessness. Unfortunately, in practice this does not mean struggling with homelessness, but hunting the homeless. Using the framework of regular clean-up operations, the police evict the homeless from the heating system, transformer boxes, abandoned houses and cellars. Having taken their
fingerprints and forbidden them from returning to their former dwelling-place, the police return them to the streets and the process begins once again. Finding the means to survive has become more difficult, the main reasons being the decrease in reusable refuse and the rise in the number of homeless. These factors combine to increase competition over fewer resources.

Are there any ways in which the problem of homelessness can in reality be solved? It seems that society is capable of helping only those who became homeless almost by accident, as a result of worsening circumstances; who do not suffer from chronic alcoholism although they may regularly ‘go on a bender’; who value themselves and wish to raise their social status; and who, most importantly, want to work and are capable of working. I met such a person, a former bridge engineer, in the Centre of Social Support. He had ended up on the street after the death of his common-law wife, who left their home to her daughter. He had come to the centre not for a handout, but in order to find work, any work, which would get him a ‘place of his own’. This case offers the possibility of defining the line between a homeless person and a bomzh: the former is able to work and the latter is unable. This is a seemingly sharp divide. However, it is not just the homeless person who risks becoming a bomzh, but any ostensibly enfranchised citizen.

At present, when the powers-that-be cannot ensure housing even for those who have waited in a queue for ten years and who cannot afford to buy or build, and when there are a large number of internal migrants, it would be utopian to think of providing the homeless with housing in the city. The homeless will not themselves travel to agricultural areas, where there are lots of empty houses, as there are no opportunities to gain an income there. Evidently, the problem is almost insoluble and will become aggravated. A radical solution to the problem of homelessness is possible only in a climate of economic growth and social stability in Russia.

Notes

1 This research in 1996–1998 formed the basis of a dissertation for a sociology doctorate entitled ‘The status of homeless people during the transition to a market economy’, Ulan-Ude, 2000.
2 An ironic reference to a major Soviet-era development project.
3 This phrase is in English in the original Russian version of this article.
NEW SUBJECTS AND SITUATED INTERDEPENDENCE
After privatisation in Ulan-Ude

Caroline Humphrey

Introduction
This chapter discusses the consequences of privatisation in the city of Ulan-Ude, the capital of the Buryat Republic. It focuses mainly on the tense interplay of innovation and resistance to innovation as this affects social and political relations, but it also attempts to assess the broader sweep of themes covered in the previous chapters – religious revival, the rural influx, and the emergence of an underclass of homeless people.

The salient feature of Ulan-Ude is its relative poverty and its dependence on Moscow for subsidies to manage the local budget. At the same time the Republic is politically conservative, repeatedly electing a former Communist as president up to the present day (2006). The practical actuality of privatisation in the 1990s was therefore entangled with the previous Soviet habits of government and has to be understood as developing from them. Nevertheless, far-reaching changes have occurred – in the economy, social relations and the conceptual world of the citizens. Privatisation throws up new objects in the city. That is, it re-inscribes with new meaning the apartments, factories or enterprises that now appear as ‘private’ and differentiated from those that are ‘public’. Meanwhile, the same process creates new human subjects, the individuals and organisations that now consider they are independent ‘owners’ as distinct from users or receivers of state allocations. This chapter takes up two key themes of this book mentioned in the Introduction: it posits connections of mutuality between human subjects and artefacts such as buildings, urban spaces and transport, and it also attempts a preliminary social ‘mapping’ of the new subjects in the particular post-Soviet city (Pile and Thrift 1995: 11). This specific case may be characteristic of many towns in Asian Russia, where the emergent political economy of the confused and contested formations of the 1990s is beginning to harden into recognisable patterns.

The delineation can only be preliminary, however, since in provincial Russia ‘privatisation effects’ are incomplete and ongoing. They are still not clearly
supported by law, either federal or regional (Skyner 2001, 2003). Large numbers of older and poorer citizens have only a dim conceptualisation of privatisation and many try to ignore it. The result is that Ulan-Ude has become a space of contradictions and even more so of silent emergent processes that even the citizens do not fully comprehend or categorise. Yet some transformative processes are obvious. The Republic’s president and government, both now elected by popular vote, operate with the voice of accountancy and attempt to ally themselves with the new local economic potentates. The old town Soviet has disappeared and been replaced by the new institution of the municipality (the mayorate). I shall argue that this city, already geographically and socially dispersed because of Soviet planning policies, has been subject to further dis-aggregation as a result of the combined effects of economic collapse, privatisation and loss of the overarching Soviet identity. Increased tension between Russians and Buryats, mentioned by Hürelbaatar, friction with in-migrants, discussed by Manzanova, and marginalisation of the homeless, analysed by Baldayeva, are some of the major symptoms. The mayorate in particular is attempting to counteract this process. Most overtly, this attempt at integration is being performed ‘ideologically’, that is by positing symbolic identities or ‘ideas’ of the mayorate itself and the city as a whole, and by marking with a rhetoric of ‘social concern’ the attempt to shore up the infrastructure and support the disadvantaged. If we compare Ulan-Ude with the other cities discussed in our book, we see a common concern to elaborate the metaphors of a new post-Soviet ‘idea’ of the city (particularly evident in Astana), and yet in Buryatia, unlike elsewhere, the ‘social concern’ of the municipality seems like a Soviet discourse transposed to a new era. Herein lies the source of many of the contradictions mentioned earlier.

In Ulan-Ude lack of resources causes the various actors in the shoring-up process to fall into debt with one another. Ultimately, the ordinary citizens are involved too, since the privatised parts of the mayorate are operating in a market of sorts – a market of jobs, utilities and services. It is in this complex arena of mutual indebtedness between citizens and administrations that distinctive new kinds of relations are beginning to appear. Some have crystallised into forms that could perhaps be called ‘institutions’, but others are manifest as shadowy, nameless and constantly transforming networks. It will be argued, however, that although particular networks may collapse, a specific type of network intersecting personal and functional activities constantly re-arises. Ledeneva (2006) has suggested that such entanglement of the personal and the institutional is characteristic in general of ‘how Russia really works’. My research attempts to assess this as an urban phenomenon, detailing its reproduction of a variety of multifaceted and dispersed ‘subjects’ specific to the city environment – in this case in a depressed provincial city characteristic of many in Asian Russia.
Uncertainties of privatisation and new appropriations of space

Privatisation has been, among other things, a process of ‘objectification’ (Miller 1987; Myers 2001), whereby the values and meanings of objects embedded in earlier social relations are externalised and suddenly made visible in a new light. If objectification perforce also produces new human ‘subjects’, the way subjecthood is understood has been extended in recent anthropology (Butler 1997a, 1997b; Battaglia 1999; Mahmood 2005). Here I take up the one theme from a large literature, the way the field of subjectivity is increasingly seen to embrace ‘the object world’, translating between and cross-cutting human and material categories rather than distilling within them (Pile and Thrift 1995: 11; Humphrey 2005). In this light it is relevant that moralising was a fundamental feature of the Soviet socialist economy: the ‘bad’ was activity directed only to ‘selfish’ individual interests, while the ‘good’ was that done for public benefit. Colouring objects, the official understanding was that everything in state ownership was ‘ours’ in the sense that its value would be potentially available to the whole society. Abruptly with privatisation, however, public identification with such objects as ‘ours’ (belonging to the people) has been eclipsed. A privatised company, for example, now appears as ‘theirs’. For the owners of private property, on the other hand, the objects in question are now available for new kinds of action by themselves as subjects. In an anthropology no longer tied to the idea of the disengaged, self-bounded Cartesian subject, the question then becomes – in what practices, positions, movements and projections is the new subject engaged?

Practical invention has become virtually a necessity. Not only is private property in productive assets something quite new legally, but in conditions where even a few people are alert and rapacious, all potential owners are jolted to compete and to consider undertaking actions they had previously hardly thought of (underbidding, insuring, mortgaging, engaging real estate agents, making complicated part-payment deals, and so forth). Alexander (2004) has shown that while privatisation in post-socialist societies can be technically accomplished amid profound uncertainties, it remains unclear both exactly what the ‘property’ is and what are the rights of the ‘owner’. In other words, the new property-owning subjects may come to understand their new subjecthood only in a piecemeal manner, through taking some action or another. Simultaneously, they become aware that becoming an owner brings liabilities as well as rights (Verdery 2004), and in the conditions of legal disarray of Russia, exactly what these liabilities might be has been unclear and disputable. Furthermore, the process of extracting private property from state ownership is not just an economic transaction. It is also a ‘political’ act in the sense that it entangles the buyer with local government networks. This particularly applies to land. As Skyner has described (2001, 2003), despite the passing of an all-Russia land code in 2002 by the Duma, land purchases in the provinces still require permission from local administrations. In Ulan-Ude the Committee for Management of Property, which is under the mayorate, regulates all conditions
of sale and rent, and as of September 2004 was still issuing new resolutions (postanovleniya) concerning the documentation citizens are required to produce in order to have the right to own property. This committee is also the ‘seller’ of all property to be transferred from public to private ownership.¹ The granting (or not) of permission to buy by particular officials hooks purchasers into ‘informal’ relations that continue well beyond the transaction itself. A quality of anxiety-making, unpredictable expansion of the self into uncertain arenas seems to characterise the new property-owning subject.

For most people, this whole process is particularly disturbing when nothing much has changed on the surface. In comparison to other cities in our study, Ulan-Ude is a poor city. Its income, derived mainly from the Republic’s budget, is sourced in great part from subsidies provided by Moscow. In Ulan-Ude there are few major new developments in the built environment of the city centre. The massive blackened bronze Head of Lenin monument still presides over the main square, which is still called the Square of the Soviets. Everything looks more or less the same as in late Soviet times, and yet, it would not be an exaggeration to say that everything – as far as urban sociality is concerned – is different. It is not just that the same building, once a plain state-owned food-shop, say, is seen differently now it is in private hands; even the remaining public spaces are available for new activity. Such appropriation is like a corollary or analogy of privatisation, when post-Soviet subjectivity tests the space of its expansion.

The area in front of the Lenin monument shows how space may be re-imagined. Cleared of gardens in the 1970s to enable the erection of the Head and to make space for mass marches, this paved expanse together with the raised platform behind (from which the mighty Head rears into the sky) was formerly a quasi-sacred space. It was certainly State-Party space, ringed by government and KGB buildings, lying mostly empty in wait for official events. Ordinary mortals would normally walk around the edge, crossing if necessary somewhat nervously, anxious not to attract the attention of guards at the adjacent government buildings by inadvertently infringing some rule or other. But in post-Soviet times, this space came to have a night-life. After midnight, boy-racers, the gilded youth of the city, screeched up and down in Western cars, exhibiting their handbrake turns. Passers-by loved these shows, though some said the boys are crazy. The police simply watched – ‘This is not our business,’ they said – and a guard from the Ministry of Internal Affairs remarked, ‘So what? It’s beautiful!’ (Tolstonogov 2002: 11). In daytime, the space has recently been re-configured by the mayor’s office as a proud historical heritage site. The Head of Lenin – which ten years earlier had been boarded up to forestall demonstrations and graffiti – has been spruced up in the expectation that tourists will take photos of one another there. Flowerbeds and seats now attract people to the foot of the massive pedestal. And Lenin has been symbolically counterbalanced, as it were, by a new large statue of ‘Mother Buryatia’, located on the other side of the square.
The economic context of privatisation

Privatisation in Ulan-Ude is an ongoing and incomplete process. In October 2000, 71 per cent of registered economic organisations were privately owned, 10 per cent communally owned, 5 per cent owned by the city municipality, 5 per cent owned by the state, and 9 per cent in some other form of ownership (Gos. Kom. 2000: 64). These figures require some explanation. The state enterprises may be few but very large, while private trading firms are numerous but often tiny. Many organisations are still part-owned by the state. Some ‘private’ enterprises, especially those ‘closed’ types where the shareholders consist entirely of the managers and employees, tend to operate with a rationality that is close to that of Soviet times (Humphrey 1998: ch. 10). Finally, and confusingly, many enterprises under the city municipality (the mayorate), called by such terms as bureau, directorate, or office, are in theory private but employ an economic rationale and rhetoric of social responsibility as if they were public services. Yet, even in Ulan-Ude the basic infrastructure (electricity, heating, petroleum) is privatised, as are transport, construction, and repair services, and much of housing. Ulan-Ude is not very different from most Russian cities in this respect. But what is distinctive about it is that this city is the capital of one of the most economically depressed provinces of Russia, and it is also politically more conservative – more Soviet-like – than the other main cities in our study.

Let me briefly elaborate on these two features. The consequences in Ulan-Ude of the economic collapse of the 1990s have been drastic. The city has seen the closure of major industries, the breakdown and decrepitude of urban infrastructure (Humphrey 2003), a spurt in unemployment and under-employment, a negative demographic shift such that the death-rate now exceeds the birth-rate, an increase in rates of infectious disease, a yawning differentiation of the wealthy from the poor, an inflow of rural migrants and outflow of professionals, an increase in alcoholism, crime and drug-taking, and the continued dependence of city-dwellers on subsistence production of food. Manzanova (this volume) describes these phenomena as together amounting to a process of de-urbanisation, while Galdanov writes of a ‘town without townees’ (2002: 58). As for political attitudes, the President of the Buryat Republic, Leonid Potapov, elected several times by popular vote, is a communist who has been in power in one post or another since the 1970s. Commenting on the fact that Buryatia voted communist in the 1996 Russian presidential elections, a headline in a local newspaper ran: ‘If only Buryatia were independent, we could have built communism!’ Zhirinovsky, the state chauvinist, is popular among the working class of rural background (Galdanov 2002: 61).

It is important to note that the initiatory political impulses for reform of the Soviet system came from above and outside the city, both as regards the fissile effects of privatisation and the integrative ones of mayoral and governmental activities. It was Gorbachev who first made privatisation possible, Yeltsin who invented the first ritual celebrations of the ‘Day of the City’ in Sverdlovsk, which was then copied all over Russia, and Nemtsov who toured the provinces instructing...
officials about municipal rationalisation and accountability. For this reason, even now there is a tendency, even a preference, for the ordinary people of Ulan-Ude to see themselves in Soviet mode as ‘acted-upon’, and not responsible for the changes that befell them. They are right, in a sense, in respect of the major policy directions of the 1990s. And yet it is all the countless particular decisions of people as active subjects that constitute the actual shifting patterns of relations that are coalescing through time. In the end, I shall argue, the actions of citizens – in particular, what they will and will not pay for – have had a defining impetus in shaping the political economy that we can begin to see emerging in this city.

To provide sufficient information to support this argument and make it understandable I shall have to put several building blocks in place. I start with a sketch of the history of Ulan-Ude and a description of the kind of city it is. This is not meant to provide a definitive account, but rather to suggest its quasi-colonial character as an essentially Russian town turned into the capital of a national (Buryat) Republic. I then describe the military and industrial settlements built by the Soviet ministries. The point here is to show that ‘objects’ in public ownership were not for that reason homogenous, as is often supposed, but rather had intrinsic and substantive variety. Privatisation therefore does not create differentiated character, but transforms it.

A description of Ulan-Ude

Ulan-Ude historically was Asian only in its geographical and strategic position. It originated in the seventeenth century as a Cossack military base and tax-gathering fortress for the expanding Tsarist Empire. By the late nineteenth century, the town, then called Verkheneudinsk, was still a Russian settlement planted in the land of indigenous peoples. The Tsarist government regarded the Trans-Baikal region as both a frontier and a gateway to ‘the East’. While Cossack cantonments continued to guard the international border with Mongolia, Verkheneudinsk developed as one of the main marketing, storage and transit points for the trade between Russia and China. Here goods were unloaded from the long camel caravans that trudged through Mongolia, and were stored, assembled and sold to merchants who traded them on to Russian cities. The hub of the city was the Gostinyy Dvor, a caravanserai-like square of ‘trading rows’, which was fronted by the broad Bazaar Square where horse-carts, sledges, buyers and sellers thronged. Twice a year the city held month-long fairs (yarmarki), which drew traders from all over Russia. In the late nineteenth century, the population of the town was dominated, unsurprisingly, by trade and military interests (see Table 8.1).

Several items in Table 8.1 are significant. First, note the relatively large number of peasants. These would have been Russians or other Slavs, who had been settling in Siberia increasingly after the end of serfdom, and their presence inside the town reflects the rural character of Russian-Asian cities at this period. The presence of exiles is also important. Trans-Baikal was a traditional destination of exile, and the work done among local people by intellectual political exiles, such as the
Decembrists, has often been regarded as formative of the high educational aspirations of the population of this region. Finally, the relative absence of Buryats in the town is striking, given that they were the major indigenous inhabitants of the area. The Buryats lived scattered across distant steppes, pushed out from much of the best agricultural lands by Russian settlers. They were grouped, if anywhere, around the numerous Buddhist monasteries that formed economic as well as religious centres across their lands. The monasteries were sited well away from Russian towns, and the social base of their ‘parishes’ was made up of Buryat clans, or the territorialised versions of clans, that formed the framework of the Tsarist administration of the Buryats. What this means is that Ulan-Ude, unlike Tashkent, has no ‘native quarter’, or historical layer of Buryat cultural construction. It is now the capital city of an ethnically titled Republic, but without a core of buildings that embodies the culture of the native inhabitants of the area. This characteristic of the Russian colonial city in northern Asia is found in several others towns, such as Yakutsk, Khabarovsk or Kyzyl.

In 1926, the town contained around 22,400 inhabitants, of whom 83.25 per cent were Russians, 6.76 per cent Jews, and only 2.94 per cent Buryats. After it became the capital of the Buryat ASSR in 1923, the population grew steadily, as did the proportion of Buryats (reaching 10 per cent by the end of the 1930s). Its trading function having fallen away after the Revolution, Ulan-Ude metamorphosed to become a characteristically Soviet industrial city. The population grew three times, from 41,770 to 127,190 between 1931 and 1941, due mostly to the influx of factory workers sent from western regions of the USSR (see Manzanova, this volume). After the Second World War, the same process continued, along with a further influx of rural Buryats. By the end of the Soviet period, in 1989, the population stood at 351,806, of whom 71.7 per cent were Russians and 21.1 per cent Buryats (Imetkhenov and Yegorov, eds. 2001: 140-58). This was a city dominated by the great industrial ministries, which built their own plants and associated housing, culture clubs, kindergartens, etc. on the outskirts (for analysis, see Zhimbiev 2001). Some of the main industries were machinery and aircraft manufacture, railway carriage building, electrical goods, woollen cloth, ship-building, and food

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nobility, officials, clergy</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Merchants</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Petty bourgeoisie, traders</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peasants</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exiles</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreigners (mostly Chinese)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natives (Buryats)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Imetkhenov and Yegorov (2001: 148)*
processing. The city was also a centre of administration, culture and education, and Buryats as the titular nationality tended to be employed in these spheres, while Russians dominated in manufacturing. Education proliferated, with two universities, several institutes of the Academy of Sciences, technical and medical colleges, and an agricultural academy.

What does Ulan-Ude look like today and what has it physically preserved of its past? The wide Square of the Soviets dominates the town, with its elegant, grey, modernist government buildings, its ministries, KGB building, Central Post Office, and the Stalinist eclecticism of the Opera and Ballet Theatre just off to one side. The old fortress with its wooden turrets disappeared long before the Soviet era. From the Square the main shopping street, Lenin Street, with façades almost unchanged from late Tsarist times, runs down to the Gostinny Dvor, which also still stands. During the Soviet era it was used for state storage and retail outlets. Now, taken over by the agency for the Preservation of Monuments, it is leased to private shops. Nearby are the few remaining streets of pre-revolutionary wooden merchants’ houses, among which is hidden the former synagogue, now closed. The towers and cupolas of the Russian Orthodox Odigitrievsky Cathedral (used as a museum store during the Soviet period) rise above this district of the town. The use of religious buildings for storage and other functions during the Soviet period is similar to their usage in Tashkent, as is the physical destruction of many of them (in Ulan-Ude several Orthodox churches, a Catholic church and a mosque). The three main Orthodox churches still standing have now been reclaimed for religious use, and some small Buddhist temples and Christian chapels have been built recently in outlying areas (Hürelbaatar, this volume). Also dominant in the centre of the city is a massive memorial for the ‘Fatherland War’ (the Second World War), and just over the Uda River is the economic hub of the ‘Collective Farm Market’. The latter is a large covered market for fresh produce, surrounded by an area of densely packed kiosks selling drinks, cigarettes, clothes, sweets, etc. North of the Square of the Soviets, in the ‘Elevator’ district, lies a popular open-air market selling clothes and domestic goods.

Beyond the central area, extending for several kilometres along the hills and banks of the rivers Selenga and Uda, are the industrial and military settlements that make up most of the city. Factories were built at a considerable distance from one another and were surrounded by the low wooden houses and barracks of the workers, each complex giving rise to a separate settlement (poselok). Only gradually, and still not completely, were the makeshift houses replaced by ranks of multi-storey housing blocks. The housing blocks consist of several numbered ‘types’, built during the period from the 1950s to the 1980s and grouped into estates. These former settlements are now called kvartal, and each in principle has its own shopping centre, kindergarten, park, and so forth. Yet now the factories that were their raison d’être are mostly abandoned, picked bare to their skeletons, even roofing and windows having been taken away for illicit sale. The kvartals are divided from one another by empty expanses. Some of these living districts are separated off altogether by forest or steppe.
Soviet Ulan-Ude was in effect a city of industrial villages (Galdanov 2002). The ministries built their factories and housing estates at a distance from the city centre for a particular reason, such as access to water, or secrecy (many were engaged in defence work for the Soviet military-industrial complex). Certain military cantonments, now included within the town boundaries, were developments of pre-revolutionary army bases located several kilometres from the centre. For the citizens, each settlement had its own character and mood. As Galdanov, a native of the Railway Stock Building settlement, recalls,

The Sotsgorodok of the Railway Workers and the Aircraft Factory settlements made a rather sad impression on me. But at the same time they were interesting. Even today when you happen to find yourself in one of these settlements you feel as though you are in a different town. There is a different organisation of space, different field of communications, different people, and different relations. The Aircraft Factory is very distant, but the Sotsgorodok is part of the city centre and you still sharply feel you are crossing some invisible boundary when you step into its territory. [...] People living in these townships (poselok) had their own internal interests. They all worked for the one enterprise and they left the area only rarely for special shopping and even more rarely for cultural pursuits.

(2002: 59)

Interspersed between the concrete housing settlements there are occasional clusters of other humbler dwellings. These are the peasant-type log houses inhabited for the most part by poorer people. For decades they were the only private dwellings in the city. As in Tashkent, the Soviet prohibition of individual house building was ineffective. Many of the log houses began as illegal squatting during the 1950s–late 1980s – they are known as nakhalovka (‘Impudent’) and have only gradually been legalised. Others are older and date from pre-Soviet times. These cottages have a cosy if shabby appearance, with their gardens, apple-trees, chickens and sheds. During Soviet times most people wanted to move out of them into apartments as soon as they could, because they usually lacked some (or all) amenities, such as running water, central heating, internal sanitation or a telephone. These incrementally built districts have their own character too. For example, when the inhabitants of one disorderly area were moved into high-rise flats, the new buildings were termed ‘the roaring 40s’, because the blocks had numbers in the forties and the inhabitants were as noisy as before (Galdanov 2002: 59). In recent years many more nakhalovki have been built on the outskirts (see below, and Manzanova, this volume).

Finally, in certain areas near the town centre, but also extending in their hundreds for kilometres along the main roads, we find the dachnye uchastki – allotments for vegetable and fruit growing. Some settlements allow a dwelling, varying from a tiny hut to a comfortable, two-storey wooden house. They grew in number during
the Soviet period and further expanded during the 1990s. Now almost all city families have at least one plot. High fences surround the allotments where there are houses, but further unfenced acres of potato plots stretch out from housing areas far into countryside (Humphrey 2002b).

The first impression of Ulan-Ude is of a spacious, even comfortable city. Yet evidence of the economic crisis of the 1990s is everywhere. In the last ten years only a few buildings have been thoroughly renovated, such as some prominent sites converted into banks. Also relatively scarce are the examples of completely new construction. Unlike in Tashkent or Almaty, there are very few international commercial developments, hotels or new leisure centres. The only local company to open anything like a Western supermarket, Motom, went bankrupt. The great mass of the city is Soviet, built over the decades, and in each case showing its age. A close look reveals crumbling plaster, broken piping or cracked walls on all sides. Rusting remains of machinery, half-finished constructions, and disused factories line many streets. Only after 2001 have there been small signs of investment.5

Despite these problems, Ulan-Ude is a bastion of prosperity in relation to the even greater deprivation and poverty of the countryside, with its bankrupt collective farms and subsistence smallholdings. The city’s status as capital has produced an increased sense of spatial closure – entering from the airport one now passes through a Welcome Gate where the road crosses the city boundary. This boundary is more than symbolic. Anyone living inside it must have a propiska, i.e. be legally registered for domicile there. The propiska existed in Soviet times, but is said to be more difficult to acquire now, it being one of the main official weapons against the hordes of rural incomers.

This is the city whose changing social life I shall now attempt to analyse. The next section gives an account of the process of differentiation among citizens attendant on privatisation of housing. The shift in sensibilities of the new ‘subjects’ it describes will be taken up again in the final section of the chapter.

Privatisation, social separation and lack of trust

‘Since the Industrial Revolution began,’ wrote Nicholas Schoon about Britain, ‘the history of most of its cities has been one of desertion by people with choice and money. The cities are where our wealth was created, where the middle class was formed and grew. But even as their populations exploded, as they sucked people from the land into their stinking, lethal centres, most of those who succeeded in life were getting out’ (2002: 26). One does not find quite this phenomenon in post-Soviet cities, but nevertheless the rapid industrialisation in the twentieth century suggests that some broad comparisons may be illuminating. Schoon is particularly concerned with the processes of social separation in British cities, arguing that what the prosperous are fleeing is not so much density as such but particular kinds of other people and the problems associated with them (crime, sink schools, immigrants). ‘The greatest shortages in the city are not of space and greenery, clean air and quiet, but of trust and security, of earned incomes and self-
esteem’ (2002: 26). Many respondents in Ulan-Ude speak in just these terms. The issue of where people live and who lives there is intimately related to privatisation of housing, since there are few reasons to privatise except to move place and to ensure inheritance.

In Soviet times, the great mass of people had no choice about where they lived. They were allocated housing, usually by their place of work, or otherwise by the town Soviet. This meant that there were no opportunities for ethnic or class-based enclaves to develop. The kvartals described above were distinct as work-based groupings. People lived in the same multi-storey blocks and neighbourhoods as all the other employees in their enterprise, from managers to manual workers. There were only two exceptions. Top Party functionaries and politicians were allotted larger apartments in the centre of town, and, at the other end of the scale, a fairly stable 25 per cent of the population lived in workers’ barracks or log cottages at various sites around the town.6 Ulan-Ude is a particularly clear example of the Soviet pattern of planned dispersal, common in many provincial cities of Russia. I argue here that that type of social dis-aggregation is being overlaid by a new divisiveness caused by privatisation, this time certainly based on economic inequalities. In other words, Soviet subjecthood, defined in this context principally by occupation, is being metamorphosed into a subject status differentiated by wealth.

The economic crisis of the 1990s is one major cause of changing subjecthood, if only because so many people have shifted their occupations, or, if they have remained in the same posts the conditions have altered under their feet. Teachers, unpaid for months, became petty traders, qualified factory workers lost their jobs and turned to building, academics became bankers, and so forth. The political practice of ‘shaking down’ the administration is another. When a new leader (minister, mayor, director of an enterprise) takes over, the entire personnel associated with the previous boss may be dismissed. As Galdanov remarks, this practice has deprived many bureaucrats of work, while drawing new people into the apparatus (2002: 62). Manzanova, who is also a native of Ulan-Ude, describes (in this volume) local fears that the whole urban character of the city is being lost as bosses employ rural relatives and friends. In short, the city’s population has been stirred up. The previous social closure of the settlements is being breached. The inhabitants of one kvartal no longer work for one enterprise, as I now describe.

In a situation of poverty and uncertainty, privatisation of housing is not necessarily an attractive option. When people privatise their flats they are not required to buy their accommodation. But the legal fees can be high and unpredictable, and another disincentive is that the kvartplata (monthly payment for services) goes on being payable at the same rate as before, or an increased one. Private owners also have to organise and pay for maintenance that was previously carried out by the municipality. Ownership of a flat leaves several areas of unclarity, such as responsibility for stairwells, lifts, roof and basements. In the case of houses, the building can be privatised but the land it stands on may still be in public ownership.7 Finally, sales and purchases of already privatised property are cumbersome and
risky. Real estate agents are regarded as unreliable, and even in the best of circumstances hard cash (bundles of notes) usually has to be handed over.

In this situation people tend to privatisé only if they think they might want to move – i.e. to be able to sell in order to buy – or if they want to ensure that relatives can inherit their home. Older and poorer people who anticipate staying in place often react by asking, ‘Why bother?’ In 2000 around half of the fully serviced apartments in Ulan-Ude had been privatised (Imetkhenov and Yegorov 2001: 226). But the activity among those who have privatised is intense. There are around 10,000 sales/purchases per year (i.e. up to about one in four households of private owners), according to one estate agent. Meanwhile, rather large numbers of people who have not privatised also move. They may be expelled from their homes by the public owner (the municipality or the enterprise) for non-payment of rent, tax or other debts and re-settled in the less desirable kvartals. Alcoholics and drug-takers, even if they own their homes, are frequently put under harsh pressure to move out. Family break-ups may leave one or more members homeless. As Balandayeva describes in Chapter 7, these processes have given rise to a homeless underclass, some of whom have made underground hovels to live in at the town rubbish dump. A whole new vocabulary has developed to allude, often in euphemistic terms, to these shifts. The rubbish dump is known as Yeltsin City.

Many people leave the city altogether, for various reasons. There was a period in 1993–4 when urbanites hit by unemployment left to try their luck as farmers in the countryside, but this process has slowed to a trickle. Now most of the people leaving are the young, well-educated and enterprising, who go to larger cities for better opportunities. Older, less-qualified people know they have little chance of getting a job in such places. An estate agent recounted that the bankruptcy of an enterprise, with the debts that then arise, is the main reason for mobility: people privatisé, sell up, buy a cheaper flat and then attempt to use the money gained to start a new life. Thus the greatest demand is for cheap, small flats. Meanwhile, even if they pay rent regularly, ‘socially inappropriate’ people who live in desirable residences are pressurised by an unholly alliance of estate agents and the ZhEK (local housing bureau) to quit. The result is that there are now virtually no multi-storey blocks where rich and poor live together. When asked by a sociologist whether in certain parts of the city there is a process of ‘self-cleansing of downward mobile (deklassirovannische) elements’ (here we see the new vocabulary in use), the estate agent replied as follows:

There is differentiation. There are non-prestigious districts like Kirzavod (Brick Factory). It’s the ecology most of all, and the ‘social character’. It’s clear that poor, unfortunate people move there. To Steklozavod (Glass Factory) too. Distance from the centre is not so important – the 11th kvartal, for example, is far away, but it was built by MZhK and you don’t find the newly poor people there like at Kirzavod. Even though it has a huge factory right in the middle and it is very remote, it is still O.K. Kirzavod is a dreadful place, with lots of unemployment. But you can’t
conclude that the centre of the city is cleaning itself up socially, because there’s a continual reproduction of these people. Someone takes to drink, someone starts to take something stronger. A percentage does move out, but the people (narod) is taking to drink very actively. Some parts of town are getting far worse than 15 years ago, but the centre hasn’t become much better because of that.

This statement chimes with our chapter by Baldayeva, which notes that the majority of down-and-outs (bomzhi) squat near the economic hubs in the town centre.

Another respondent spoke of certain distant outlying estates, particularly those with barrack accommodation or a military background, as ‘bandit places’, places you would never want to go to. Related to this is the fact that Ulan-Ude never entirely ceased being a place of exile and, more recently, a settlement of former prisoners. During Soviet times ex-prisoners were settled in outlying districts such as Aviazavod (Aircraft Factory) and Soldatskii (Soldier), where they still live. These people are known as ‘khimiki’, perhaps because they were initially given work in chemical plants. At any rate the districts associated with khimiki now are the same as those linked with especially strong criminal gangs, and many of them are in the region across the Selenga known as the Left Bank. Each of these townships has its ‘mafia’ boss (avtoritet), whose main source of income into the gang treasury (obshchak) is racketeering and the regular ‘dues’ (vnosy) extracted from traders and shopkeepers. The police avoid such places (Baduyeva 2000: 12). In several districts armed vigilante groups have emerged with the aim of countering the criminal racket.

Meanwhile, the prosperous people are renovating apartments in ‘elite’ areas (this is another term that has acquired a new currency, for example in descriptions of houses as ‘middling in eliteness’ (srednaya po elitnosti)). They move to areas with infrastructure in good working order and close to the best schools. The top politicians are still allotted apartments in the centre, in the ironically termed ‘courtly nest’ (dvoryanskoe gnezdo) near the Second World War memorial, but both they and other successful people have also built themselves villas on the outskirts. Known as kottedzhi, these large separate houses are located in developments at strategically advantageous sites. Many of these new rich are managers in the infrastructural companies (e.g. central heating, electricity) or officers in the proliferating city bureaucracy. They thus know all too well what constitutes the crucial blessing for a new dwelling – to be linked up to all utilities. Meanwhile, some of the outlying Soviet kvartals are still lacking some amenity (heating, proper sanitation, telephone). Even several of the less advantaged villa estates are hardly habitable, being not yet supplied with electricity, running water, tarmac roads, sewerage system, or street lighting. Because of these difficulties, the middle classes are gradually giving up on building villas. Many have withdrawn to their flats as a result of unfortunate experiences. They often pay a contractor in advance to have some amenity attached, only to find the money has been used up (literally ‘spun’, pokrutit’) for some other purpose. They are forced to spend inordinate amounts of
time overseeing contractors or to leave their new houses half finished. The truly successful and powerful can over-ride such problems, however, and they now have built certain estates that are well provided for. The most expensive of these, called Svetlii, is set up almost like an American gated community: it has its own security service and is located so that it has easy communication to the town centre yet is screened by trees from idle and curious people. Most people in the town hardly know it exists and it is not marked on the town map.

In sum, Ulan-Ude is experiencing a geographically marked wealth differentiation on top of its geographical-social dispersion, and in many ways this process is similar to that in West European cities. The entailments are also similar. Apartment prices rise in areas near the good schools, and the opposite is the case in the newly poor neighbourhoods. The rest of the town then shifts extra problems into the disadvantaged areas – this is where prostitution is allowed to flourish, where drug-selling takes place, and where the rubbish is left uncollected. The better-off are creating their own new institutions. Service associations based on the apartment block, called Fellowships of Housing Property Owners (Tovarischestva Sobstvennikov Zhil’ya, TSZh), have emerged. The wealthy have also started to set up restricted entry clubs. An ‘international VIP club for super-rich men’, for example, was founded in 2000. As in Britain, such people tend to avoid social contact with the poor. But the disconnections are crystallised more sharply in Ulan-Ude, and with greater negative effect, at least economically.

Schoon writes (2002: 29–30) that even if the rich and the poor avoid one another socially, benefits to the poor can accrue from their close proximity. He calls this the ‘money-go-round.’ The argument is a reversal of classic urban studies that emphasise the negative social effects of a burgeoning service sector in de-industrialising cities. In cities such as Baltimore (Harvey 2000) or New York (Sassen 1990), the service sector is huge and has adapted to the constant influx of immigrants. The negative aspect of this is the lack of rights, security and dignity for the people engaged in it, though it does give them work. Let me briefly outline Schoon’s argument, before exploring the significant divergence of the Ulan-Ude case – a comparison that is worth making given that this city has also experienced rapid de-industrialisation. Districts of the poor-only cannot support a service sector of any size, so maintain fewer jobs. People are more likely to have to leave the area to buy goods, and so the little money coming in as wages and benefits tends to leak out instead of circulating. Fewer houses are privately owned, so less is invested in their maintenance and improvement, and there is little employment for painters, plasterers or plumbers. The money-go-round isn’t turning. In a mixed district, on the other hand, the presence of wealthy families sustains numerous jobs locally, in shops, restaurants, pubs, leisure centres, dry cleaners, etc. Others are employed domestically as nannies, cooks or cleaners. With more money generally in circulation, some people will have the skill and enterprise to set up local small businesses, creating yet more jobs. This kind of economic mix is better, Schoon argues, than the gentrification that has overtaken many districts of cities such as London. In that process, professional and prosperous people entirely take over a
run-down neighbourhood, raising property values and eventually displacing the poor. Not only is this socially uprooting for the people squeezed out, but it also simply moves the problem of the low-income district to another part of the city. So Schoon suggests that cities benefit *economically* from the geography of kaleidoscopic mixture, and this argument seems sound – even if we acknowledge that domestic service in particular can create grating conditions of sour, subtle inequalities.

The issue of equality is crucial in Ulan-Ude, as I shall now explain. In the city each housing block now accommodates more or less homogenous inhabitants, and neighbourhoods also infrequently contain a wide social mix. But even in those places where rich and poor live close together, there is no ‘money-go-round’ of the kind envisioned by Schoon. This is partly because restaurants, bars, small shops, ateliers, garages, etc. are subject to municipal planning and cannot emerge simply where there is a demand – this applies especially to kiosk-selling, one of the thriving economic sectors of the town. Kiosks are sited, and limited in what they can sell, by strictly applied municipal rules, and this means that whole neighbourhoods may lack them. More important, however, is the fact that the ‘rich’ and the ‘poor’ mistrust one another. Despite high unemployment, domestic service of all kinds (cleaners, cooks, drivers, housekeepers, nannies) is rare. As one Ulan-Ude resident said, ‘That strange economic culture you have in the West, when people who do not know one another exchange personal service for wages, well, we just don’t have it.’\(^{18}\) The rich suspect potential employees of being thieves, and they assume that no-one can be trusted to care for another’s property. ‘There’s no point,’ one person said. ‘If I employ someone they’ll just break things and I’ll have no means of redress.’ (Another consequence of this attitude is that renting out privatised apartments is also avoided, since owners fear that their property would be damaged and lose value. A rental market in Ulan-Ude exists, but it tends to operate illegally.\(^{19}\) For their part, the ‘poor’ – that is mostly people who are *newly poor* and whose self-image is likely to be that of an upstanding, self-respecting industrial worker – say they are as good as anyone else and that it is shameful to work for a private person. Few people are prepared to wait on the personal requirements of another, and thus even the millionaires of the city cannot find drivers or cleaners.\(^{20}\) As for small enterprise, ‘I could have been rich too, I just didn’t want to get involved in all that dishonest wheeling and dealing,’ is the idea expressed by some people. As one local sociologist put it, the idea of equality (*ravestvo*) has penetrated deeply into people’s consciousness. Everyone knows the dictum attributed to Lenin, ‘Each cook can rule the state’ (*kazhdaya kukharka mozhet upravlyat’ gosudarstvo*). With this in mind, it seems that the ‘cooks’ prefer not to cook. As it is almost impossible for prosperous people to find domestic employees in the urban neighbourhood, what they often do instead is to invite kin (i.e. trusted people) from the villages – and payment is minimal since the situation is thought of as ‘helping’ rather than ‘work’.

As for the homeless, new subjects *par excellence*, although they often live adjacent to relatively prosperous people, the factors just mentioned – mistrust,
increased pressure on household budgets, and unwillingness to work for others – combine in particularly acute form to exclude them from any money-go-round, as Baidayeva describes.

**Privatisation, infrastructure and the mayorate**

It was possible to imagine, with some degree of realism, the Soviet political economy of Ulan-Ude in terms of a unified, hierarchical structure. This is no longer an option. Instead, we must envisage a transforming terrain of domination and restless competition. Within this field, the municipality is constantly attempting to assert authority and gain income by concentrating resources in its own hands. But at the same time, the strategies of its officials result in periodic break-ups and new alliances. The information to provide a complete picture of the situation is not available, but I hope to illuminate the common processes involved by means of examples.

After privatisation most of the previously monolithic industries of the city were split up into a number of joint-stock companies. To take the example of the building industry, the previously state-owned construction yards and heavy equipment were divided up between such firms. Many of these companies experienced difficulties, because the poverty of the city was such that only a few organisations could afford to place orders. The only ones to survive were those with links to ministerial structures ‘financed by the budget’. With these words we find ourselves deep in the post-socialist world, where ‘the budget’ is understood to refer to state funding, ultimately mostly from Moscow. Thus, the ‘Zhilgrazhdanstroi Company’ was one of the most successful because its director was able to elicit orders to build housing for the state-financed Buryat Scientific Centre, the Government of the Buryat Republic, the Buryat State University, and the Academy of Culture. Similarly, ‘Ulan-Ude Transstroi Company’ survived thanks to orders from the East-Siberian Railway and the Buryat State Agricultural Academy. Other construction companies meanwhile worked with banks and estate agents to build houses that were ultimately to be financed by the residents. But these tended to run into problems. In the conditions of the 1990s, when money was extraordinarily scarce and bank interest rates reached 250 per cent, for a company to source money from the population was a bonanza, an interest-free loan. There was no effective legal regulation and many individuals and even organisations acting on behalf of their members lost large sums. The construction companies often played with the money, ‘spinning’ (pokrutit’) it in hopeless ventures, with the result that the buildings were only half-finished or even only just begun. On the other side of the coin, city residents and firms also defaulted: they ordered buildings, signed contracts, and then were unable to pay up.

So if the message is that ‘the budget’ (the state) saved the construction industry, how was this done? The answer lies in continual loans and subsidies from the Russian Federal Budget to the government of the Buryat Republic, and the transfer of funds from the latter to the city budget. The Republic has been in permanent
financial crisis. According to a newspaper report of June 2001, its annual income including the financial help from Moscow was 5.5 billion roubles, while its planned expenditure to ‘maintain minimal social norms’ was 8.9 billion roubles (Kaleidoskop 2001: 1). Furthermore, accumulated debts from previous years were outstanding, especially from the disastrous 1992–1994 period. The government does now regularly pay its employees (teachers, doctors, and so forth) and people on benefit (pensioners, invalids, the registered unemployed, etc.). It also finances the city to carry out certain major investment, such as renovating the TETS-1 central heating plant of the city (see Humphrey 2002b). But to do all this, the government not only has to engage in constant manoeuvring – to extract new state-funded loans, reschedule debt for payment later, plead for lower interest rates, etc. – it also has to borrow from private banks, not all of which are reliable institutions themselves.

The budget negotiations between the Republic government and the mayorate used to be conflictual, as in so many Russian cities. Recently in Ulan-Ude, a modus vivendi has been reached. The government now sets an annual budget that includes a portion for the city, and there are no further discussions. The municipal budget is formed from three major parts: the government transfer (subsidy), the taxes and rent paid by the citizens, and the loans which the mayorate independently raises. After the visit of the liberal politician Nemstov in 1997, the municipality was instructed to balance its budget, pursue accountability, rationalise use of resources, and put the construction and maintenance of housing and infrastructure on a competitive basis. The mayor at the time seems to have pursued these goals energetically, raising tariffs and rents, with the result that he was soon voted out of office and disappeared to Moscow. The next mayor, Gennadi Aidayev, had a different policy, which still remains in place. To quote from a recent official history book (which has the purpose precisely of providing the new ‘idea’ of the city):

It was opposition to the unreasonable, exorbitant housing reform that became the main slogan of Gennadi Aidayev’s election campaign and made him popular with thousands of residents. [...] Practically up to recent times Ulan-Ude has been one of a few cities of Russia with a mild, liberal tariff on housing services. [...] This mild social policy for many disadvantaged families who needed social protection was beneficial. But the policy badly affected the city budget, a large part of which was spent on compensation of growing expenditures on heat and electricity.

(Imetkhenov and Yegorov 2001: 227)

Not only is the mayorate a new ‘subject’ in the era of privatisation – it encompasses an agglomeration of municipal enterprises (MUP21) that are also new kinds of organisations. These are companies that provide services in engineering, transport, infrastructure maintenance, housing, environment, sanitation, sewerage, etc. The municipal task is gigantic, partly due to the extravagant planning of the Soviet era. A complex structure of pipelines with hot and cold water, steam, and sewage
spreads over a vast area. There are 611 electric sub-stations in the city, and 38 central-heating furnaces. Most of these were privatised, but not quite all. A great deal of the activity of the mayorate consists of holding all this together, indeed of further uniting the separate parts. One can see much of this work as heroic, since without it the life of the city would collapse. I provide two examples, to demonstrate the contradictory forces the municipality has to juggle with.

One of the main tasks has been to include outlying housing estates into a unified central-heating system. Until very recently many manufacturing townships were heated by their own furnace systems, and these could have ‘ill-founded’ tariffs and provide unreliable heating for the residents, since the main function of the plant was not domestic but industrial. An example was the settlement of Meat Kombinat, serviced by a privatised company called ‘Buryatmyasoprom’, where the housing estate and School no. 12 were chilly, and despite high tariffs hardly ever had hot water. In 1999 this settlement was included in the unified town heating system, and the same was done with the housing belonging to Flour Milling Kombinat (Imetkhenov and Yegorov 2001: 235–6). This is an example of the centralising, economically homogenising, and rear-guard ‘socialist’ activity of the municipality. It is probable that these take-overs were loss-making, for reasons that will become apparent in my next example.

The thermo-electric stations that supply the city with power and heat are run by two major companies, ‘Buryatenergo’ and ‘GRES’, and both are fed with coal produced by mines in the south of the Republic. In 1996 a disaster threatened, since the electricity companies had not paid the mining company for months and debts had built up over years. The mining company was near bankruptcy anyway: its profitable mines did not cover the costs of the unprofitable ones. For the miners, life without wages became intolerable and they picketed government and municipal buildings. They threatened a strike, but they did not carry it out, because they – and everyone else – knew that the electricity and the central heating were completely dependent on the coal supplies without which the city would collapse. There was a stand-off for weeks. The government and municipality could exert pressure on Buryatenergo to pay up, as it was a Buryat company, but GRES was a much wider Siberian group over which they had no control. In the end, the mayorate was ordered by the Republic government to pay large sums directly to the mining company (not that this covered the huge debts by any means), and most of the miners’ back wages were paid this way. The government financed the municipality to make this payment by means of a special grant obtained from Moscow (Nikolayev 1996: 1).

Now this whole situation was to a great extent provoked by the fact that the electricity users (firms and individuals) did not pay their bills to Buryatenergo and GRES. As a newspaper report put it, ‘Understanding the crucial character of this sector for the economy, the President of the Republic issued Ukaz no. 206 according to which users who did not pay were to have their electricity and central heating supplies cut off. But each time such moment arrived was a tragedy. The authorities were ready to take the “extreme step” of “going to the collectives”
(i.e. factories, etc.) and telling the workers, “If you cannot pay [for your utilities], you have no right to produce” (Nikolayev 1996: 1). What is evident from this is that the entire productive economy was operating beyond its means – and yet not to do so would cause further mass unemployment. Rather than face up to this crisis, with its potentially disastrous electoral consequences, the government and mayorate backed down and patched up the crisis financially.

Nevertheless, a battle is ongoing between Buryatenergo and the municipal companies (MUPs). Buryatenergo, owed millions, accuses the latter of incompetence and even ‘sabotage’. Accusing the MUPs of being extravagant, hopeless at collecting debts from the population, complicit in stealing electricity, and unable to create even a simple business-plan, Buryatenergo ordered the dismissal of all the directors of MUPs and nominated new leaders to take their place. This plan was stymied, however, by ‘bureaucratic barriers erected by some officials of the Ulan-Ude administration’ (Pasternak 2004). We can deduce from this that the municipal companies, privatised though they may be, are evidently still acting in such a way as to protect the poorer citizens.

It is not possible, however, to make a clear distinction between ‘socialist’ endeavours (financed by debt, government grants, etc.) and ‘private’ financial flows. This is because the social network of municipal officials works as a suction mechanism for absorbing a proportion of the funds that appear in the utility sector – especially the ready cash that is paid by individual users, as opposed to government drafts. The suction effect is partly due to bribery and partly to the practice of ‘purchasing’ official posts. Ulan-Ude residents tend to be deeply suspicious of officials’ motives. The rumours that circulate are impossible to prove, but to give a flavour of the climate of accusation, here are the words of one citizen:

> With the privatisation of state property each official of high rank strains to tear off a fatter piece for his client, in order to ensure himself a constant source of income. So after each election, when the new Mayor appears with his new team, there are always fights (razborki) and privatisation of the most ‘bread-producing’ (khlebnyye) organisations still left. That’s why scandals constantly arise around the privatisation of property, and the ‘servants of the people’ are always crawling into them. For example, the municipality split off a company of their own from ‘Buryatenergo’ called ‘Gorodskiye Elektricheskiye Seti’. It was headed for a time by the former chairman of the town soviet, but when Aidayev came in, he put in his own protégé.

In other words, in exchange for orders, privatised contractors give kick-backs to municipal officials, part of which then filters upwards as ‘tribute’ to post-giving patrons in the bureaucracy. One must suppose that there is a rather large leakage of funds in such ways. However, it should not be forgotten that the mayorate cannot afford its administration of the infrastructure to fall into complete disarray – because the mayor is directly elected by the citizens. To this end, the mayor also
engages in activities to raise his own popularity, generate participation in the elections, and create identification with the ‘idea’ of the city.

The city as ‘idea’ and the setting-up of symbolic beacons

With Yeltsin as exemplar, a new cycle of city-based festivities was created, notably the annual Holiday of the Day of the City (*Prazdnik Dnya Goroda*). This is particularly lavishly celebrated every five years on the anniversary of the founding of the city. Inventing this ritual involved objectifying the city as having a particular Asian character or ‘idea’. A historical date was selected for its ‘foundation’, and suitable events, buildings, social groups and traditions were adopted to celebrate. In 2001, the 335th anniversary, the festival started with religious services in the churches and Buddhist temples of the town. Then the mayor opened a newly built memorial to the hospitality of the city, a large sculptural complex called Mother of Buryatia (a Buryat woman in traditional dress standing on a pedestal, making a welcoming gesture with a ritual scarf) sited near the Opera and Ballet Theatre. To cater to the Russian community a small copy of the Nikolaevskii Arch was built and Russian folk dances were held in front of it. (The Nikolaevskii Arch, demolished after the Revolution, had been built in 1891 to welcome Tsarevich Nikolai, the heir to the throne, on his journey through Siberia.) On Lenin Street there was an exhibition of Merchant Goldobin’s House, illustrating the life of nineteenth-century merchants. A stage was erected on the Square of the Soviets for sportive presentations by children’s troupes, called ‘We Live in a Wonderful City’. Speeches were kept to a minimum. The festival continued with various entertainments such as chess matches, a dog show, a book exhibition, the awarding of prizes to eminent citizens, an army band, a sandcastle competition, a ‘who has the largest waist?’ competition, a carnival with 30 floats, several concerts, and a sports competition with horse-racing and archery.

We see that the Day of the City aims to replace grey Soviet speechifying with a cheerful inclusivity embracing many aspects of the city’s history. For each of these events the municipality also renovates certain ‘objects’ such as street façades or bridges. In fact, the timing and tempo of work on such projects recalls the Soviet practice of the *shturm* (assault), whereby dates in the ritual calendar were set for the accomplishment of some task. The Day of the City is also the occasion for the mayorate to revive the ‘gateway to Asia’ theme by giving public support to trade links with China and Mongolia. Recently, for example, a particularly elaborate and oriental-looking Mongolian Consulate was built, and in 2000 the mayor opened a Buddhist nunnery (see Hürelbaatar, this volume). However, as regards major, long-term and expensive projects the municipality provides support only if it obtains specific funds from Federal sources. Ongoing subsidies for public cultural organisations, such as the Opera and Ballet Theatre, have been cut altogether, with the result that they can barely function. In other words, the festivities are the occasion to shift support from old purposes to new ones embodying the new idea of the city. Undoubtedly the mayor is also aware of the social differentiation...
described earlier in this chapter and the idea of the ‘Day’ is employed to counteract it. Throughout the year public ‘Days’ are held to celebrate particular professions and award prizes to their workers (e.g. the Day of the Journalist, the Day of the Forestry Worker, the Day of the Agricultural Worker, the Day of the Fisherman, the Day of the Electricity Worker, etc.).

All of this is organised by the city administration, which gains publicity and popularity thereby. It is significant that unauthorised exhibitions and suchlike are cracked down on. An example is the popular exhibitions and sales of paintings by local artists on Lenin Street. The mayorate insisted that they be removed to a distant site next to some kebab sellers. This recalls the punitive actions taken towards ‘disorderly’ kiosk traders (Humphrey 2002a) and it reflects the conviction of officials that money-generating sources should be under their control and somehow accessible to them. Such policies have caused a shift in the use of previously popular – but now defunct – communal social sites such as the town swimming-pool, the Dinamo stadium, and a sports complex. They have become shopping malls, and some of the profit can be appropriated because these sites remain in municipal ownership. The same rationale explains the war of the mayorate against the spontaneous ‘container trade’ that has spread for kilometres along roads in the north of the city. Here bankrupt factories have tried to make money by renting their land to wholesalers and retailers. A newspaper article commented in a pseudo-shocked tone,

> It has become apparent that the city receives almost nothing from the exploitation of these land plots and the lion’s share of the rent sits in the pockets of private persons. […] There will be a long legal wrangle between the mayorate and the owners of these plots. Social opinion will certainly be on the side of the mayorate, because city land should work for the benefit of citizens and not for a bunch of entrepreneurs.

(Angotkin 2000: 3)

The whole cycle of festivities in fact seems to involve a contradictory malestrom, pitting profit to the municipal officers against benefit for the citizens. The evidence for this is apparent from press reports on the colossal amounts spent. An acridly written, though still tactful, report on the 2000 Day of the City informed readers that 51,800 roubles were listed as payment for wages, while the actual wages were taken from various other headings. Also, 100,000 roubles were listed for fireworks! And 50,000 roubles for building the temporary stage, when surely the stage from previous years could have been used – and in fact, perhaps was used. A further 20,000 went on ‘clothing and shoes’, when in this case too new items were not strictly necessary. As for the 7,780 spent on renovation of the Head of Lenin, should this not have come from the Republic budget? Particular scorn was poured on the accounting for guests’ expenses and gifts, amounting to 367,565 roubles. Over 300,000 roubles were apparently spent on guests of the city from Chinese, Mongolian and Russian towns, while only 51,000 went on the delegates
from the Buryat regions. Even this last sum was queried, since the Buryat delegates were actually funded by their own sponsors. If the city has so much money, the article concluded, why not use it for child benefits or to give homes to people who have been queuing for apartments for years? (Kislov 2000: 7). ‘Even if only half the money is spent on its designated purposes, this is expenditure on a Tsar’s scale’, as one resident put it.

Many of the events at city festivals are not paid for by the city budget but by sponsors from private firms. Residents suspect that these flows, as well as the sums on the city budget, can be occasions for part of the money to be ‘written off’ and salted away (spisat’). ‘After all, who is going to check how much was actually spent on fireworks?’ one resident said. Charitable events (for the elderly, for orphans) are suspected of being occasions for money-laundering and making a quiet income in the same way. Since most of the sponsoring firms are subordinate to the municipality or dependent on it, this is an opportunity for general pocketing across the board, to which the city’s police close their eyes.

So in Ulan-Ude the municipality creates and controls its own festive money-flows, and attempts either to get a grasp on new entrepreneurial activities that arise or to suppress them. However, outside the ritual events the mayorate is not always successful, either at maintaining control or at ensuring an income to itself. As in cities all over the world, the preservation of ancient buildings tends to be a victim of this situation. For example, the mayorate could do nothing when a number of historical wooden houses it had attempted to preserve from the attention of developers were burnt to the ground ‘by accident’. And it was also stymied by its own profiteering in the case of a handsome nineteenth-century villa on Lenin Street. The place lies half-restored and derelict because no-one can be found to take it over on the city’s exorbitant terms. Meanwhile, ‘lacking resources’, the municipality shelves gloom-laden reports that hectares of housing estates are likely to collapse in the next serious earthquake for lack of maintenance (Ulan-Ude is in a seismically dangerous zone).

This section has examined the activities of the municipality in the political economy. But what of the citizens? How do their decisions affect the overall pattern of the political economy?

The actions of citizens

In the introduction to this chapter I suggested that we can discern a tension between the disintegrative effects of the economic collapse/privatisation and the centralised shoring-up of the infrastructure. Here I argue that this contradiction is to a great extent generated by the fact that the new freedoms of ordinary citizens – to build houses, engage in trade, start small businesses, and so forth – were not foreseen or catered for. In particular, no-one anticipated that citizens would be so reluctant to pay for something they had always received practically free. As a consequence the infrastructure companies, and behind them the municipality and the government, have been forced to subsidise provision of necessary utilities in a ‘Soviet’ manner.
Try as they might to convert to rational ‘capitalist’ accounting, generalised non-payment forces them to employ another logic – existence in perpetual debt. Let me briefly discuss the case of electricity. I have already described how electricity companies held off paying their coal suppliers and are currently battling with the MUPs. Here I move on to discuss the individual citizens, who do not pay the companies. In effect, there is sporadic but constantly renewed war between the electricity companies and the population. Energy bosses angrily announce through the press that the proportion of energy used by individual citizens is increasing, but the amount they pay is going down. These bosses are caught in a tricky situation: they know it is unfair to cut off a whole housing block or street when some people will have paid their bills. One boss complained:

People won’t let us into their flats to check. It turns out that 10 to 100 non-payers hide behind one payer. Let’s take Meat Kombinat – only 3–5 per cent of people pay, and in the Fur State Farm and Forest districts it is only 10 per cent. And it seems the residents of Yuzhnyi don’t pay on principle! Furthermore, there are many organisations that are trying to get out of their responsibility for paying for housing attached to them, like the Pensionat in Verkhnyaya Berezovka, which has a whole street for invalids and old people. They would like to get free of these ‘blood-sucking ticks’ attached to them. But we cannot take them on either. And then, let us take the Left Bank, there are all sorts of new houses there. Some of them are often flooded so people only use them occasionally, others filled with all kinds of people. There are no registration books – we have no way to charge them.

(Dasheyeva 2001: 3)

In 2004, the tirades continued, now addressed to ‘theft’ of electricity (tampering with meters, illegal tapping of current, bribing officials to doctor bills, etc.). Buryatenergo even resorted to raids on people’s apartments together with operatives of the internal police (Pasternak 2004: 5).

Of course, what is unsaid in such attacks is that many citizens cannot pay. In 2000, 49 per cent of the Buryat population had an income below the minimum subsistence wage (912 roubles per month). Even on an average monthly income of 1,184 roubles (US$42.3) the decision to buy a winter coat was not taken lightly (Gos. Kom. 2000: 68–72). By September 2002 incomes had started to rise but utility payments did not rise with them. People who can pay electricity and heating bills often avoid paying for years, until they are actually disconnected. One widespread rationale for this is: ‘Why should I pay if no-one else does?’

People are prepared to pay, on the other hand, for their own health, education and religion. Often these three go hand in hand. Religious schools abound. Both shamans and lamas devote much of their time to curing physical and mental illnesses. Teachers at state schools hold classes in indigenous religious traditions. As Hürelbaatar mentions in Chapter 6, ordinary people, even the very poor, are
prepared to put aside a regular proportion of their income for religious purposes. In the built environment of the city, perhaps the most noticeable innovations are the chapels, Buddhist temples, and religious study centres that have been constructed. This flow of money is wholly separate from the municipality or the state, and deliberately so.\textsuperscript{29} The head of the traditional Buddhist hierarchy, Damba Ayusheyev, commented, ‘According to our way of thinking, we do not ask the Government to allocate resources to help build monasteries, because this is our religion and we ourselves should revive it. To artificially construct buildings with the help of the Government would be dishonest – those would be artificial structures, built without the soul of the people.’ It is significant, as Hürelbaatar argues, that the impetus to spend on what is ‘one’s own’ has resulted in the break-up of previously monolithic religious organisations. New, diverse, more personalised religious and educational ventures are springing up across the city. Meditation lodges have been set up in remote valleys of Buryatia where urbanites can go for retreats. In the heart of the town former socialist clubs have been transformed into Dharma centres for lay Buddhists. All these can be seen as conceptually innovative arenas carved out in the spaces of the city, sites that both situate and engage the emerging subjectivities of these times.

Yet it would be absolutely incorrect to deduce from this that social life in Ulan-Ude is contracting and shrivelling into individualism. On the contrary, the exigencies of making a living (at whatever level) – and particularly indebtedness and ‘shadow’ economic practices – impel people into forming ever denser skeins of relations. I shall suggest, following Romanov (2002) and Shteinberg (2004), that several different kinds of network, as well as institutions, are involved. If we are to ‘map’ the new subjects after privatisation, it is useful to sketch in a preliminary way what can be discovered about these networks in relation to the changing spaces of the city.

\textbf{Situated interdependence}\textsuperscript{30}: networks, lobbies and hierarchies

The Soviet structure of working settlements (\textit{poselok}) in so many Siberian cities gave rise to dense clusters of sociality. I have described elsewhere the local youth gangs of Ulan-Ude (Humphrey 2002a). On the basis of his own experience, Yurii Romanov (2002: 72–5) depicts another, more long-lasting, type of sociality, the ‘interlacing’ (\textit{perepleteniye}) of families in the Aircraft Factory district of Irkutsk. In this account, Romanov’s own family is tied together with three other families by kinship, friendship, neighbourhood (living in the same block of flats), common workplace, education (being in the same class, teacher/pupil relations) and life-events (the wife of the eldest son of the neighbour acts as midwife to the wife of the author). This kind of cluster evidently survives in cities such as Ulan-Ude, even if the settlements are now more socially disaggregated than in Soviet times.

More pertinent to the ongoing transformations of the city are the networks that link rural districts with the city and the peripheries with the administrative structure.
‘The rich have friends, the poor have kin,’ is a saying common in these parts (Shteinberg 2004: 55). When moving into the city, country-folk will try if possible to obtain a propiska. With such a residence permit one is entitled to a school place, one has access to doctors, hospitals and other services of the city. The easiest way to get a permit is to register in the flat of a relative already in the city. This is frequently done even if there is no intention actually to live with the kin (and so officially such apartments can seem to be extraordinarily crowded). Who are the relations involved? A propiska is easily obtainable for ‘immediate kin’ (husband/wife, mother/father, son/daughter) but to secure one for a sibling is more difficult, and for a niece, cousin or uncle there is some tricky explaining to do. But links with the officials involved can smooth the way. And the ‘classificatory’ nature of Buryat kinship, whereby whole categories of people are called ‘mother’s brother’, ‘sister’s son’, etc., supports a generous inclusiveness in those who count as close kin, which can be useful in pulling the wool over officials’ eyes. Sometimes, a propiska is simply bought from an indigent citizen and the papers falsified.

Nevertheless, large numbers of rural people cannot get a propiska and they move to the city all the same. Certain areas, especially in the Left Bank region, are colonised by squatters’ houses. The most frequent practice is not to build a completely new house, but to take the village cottage to pieces, log by log, transport it to the city and rebuild it there. The die is cast – there is no house to return to! How do people find land? They simply take it. Often a large plot is staked out by the first migrant, and the area is then filled in with the houses of relatives. The neighbourhood is then often named after the clan in question. This is why the new squatters’ colonies are often called ‘ulus’, the Buryat word for a village of kin. We thus observe the incremental formation of new ethnically distinct residence patterns that are quite different from the work-based settlement of the Soviet period.

The municipal official with responsibility for combating this kind of encroachment is the chief architect. It is he who used to be in charge of implementing the long-term General Plan (genplan) of the city (Zhimbiev 2001), the legally binding instruction that determined the relation between industrial and residential areas. That document is now under revision every year, but it is only just enforceable even within the city limits. The chief architect commented that he is able to combat squatters on the northern side of the city. To the south, however, he has no powers. Because of the zig-zag of the boundary, people are able to settle on land that is close to city townships but technically belongs to the neighbouring district of Ivolga. The centre of Ivolga is a long way away and its authorities do not concern themselves with infringements on the edges of their domain. Two out of three of all individual houses constructed in the city are now illegal and many of them are in this ambiguous zone. But the authorities do not have the heart to tear them down and throw people out on the street, and in-migrants take advantage of this fact. It is much cheaper for them to pay the fine for residence without a permit (1,000 roubles in 2001) than to buy a land-plot legally (9,000 roubles for a standard plot of 800 sq. m.). Once living on site, they challenge the authorities to provide them with water, electricity, sanitation, etc. Many of the incomers, especially young
people with no training and no work experience (even on collective farms), cannot
find employment in the city. They live on food provided from the village and/or
theft and other illegal opportunities, or they reproduce the rural subsistence econ-
omy in the margins of the city, as Manzanova mentions in Chapter 5. Many citizens
resent the presence of the rural poor, whom they call golovary (hicks) or gaskontsy
(perhaps referring to the natives of Gascony who flooded into Paris).

Galdanov predicts an end to the rural influx, as all those with the ability to
survive in the city move in and urban rhythms and ways of life become unattain-
able for people with little education (2002: 63). Manzanova (this volume) might
disagree. Whatever the future holds for rural migration, Shteinberg (2004) draws
attention to a particular type of network that seems set to constant replenishment –
that which accretes around an official position or new wealth. This kind of net-
work arises at the point where the ‘vertical’ line of the official hierarchy intersects
with the ‘horizontal’ line of personal and familial relations. Geographically, such
networks criss-cross the city from periphery to centre, just as they link people in
radically different economic and status positions. Characteristically, ‘exchanges’
in such networks are non-equivalent: not measuring the gift or the return is intrinsic
to the ethics of the relation. Someone may have fallen on hard times, someone else
may have got a plushy job. But what unites people in such relations, Shteinberg
writes, is not so much the present as the past. That shared past enables people
to establish the quasi-fictive notion of timeless ‘normal human relations’, accord-
ing to which services are given ‘for thanks’ (za spasibo) and not for an expected
return. With the sensitivity now attending sharp changes in status and fortune,
the fate of things (property) in such networks differs according to relative wealth.
The rich woman, according to Shteinberg’s ethnography, will avoid handing on
clothes or household equipment she plans to throw out, for fear of offending the
recipient. Instead, still-useful items are quietly jettisoned in second-hand shops
and leave the network. Among the hard-up, on the other hand, the ‘poor’ objects
of ‘poor’ families are handed on quite matter-of-factly, and thus continue their life
in social networks (Shteinberg 2004: 55).

Formal institutions to exert influence have also developed. These are the
zemlyachestva (associations based on particular rural districts) and the rody (clan
societies). The latter are organisations of the larger and more powerful Buryat
clans, such as the Khongodor and the Khorii. They maintain registers of mem-
ers, publish genealogies, promote the history and legends of the clan, and hold
ceremonies – gathering people together from all over Russia – at villages in the
traditional centres of clan settlement. The zemlyachestva are oriented more towards
business and career, dedicated to promoting the interests of their members in the
battleground of the urban economy. However, since the clans are associated with
particular rural regions and inter-marry, urban residents say that the zemlyachestva
are dominated by clan as well as territorial interests. ‘I do not know another town
in Russia,’ writes Galdanov of Ulan-Ude, ‘where kin relations exert such an
influence on political, economic and social life’ (2002: 60). Both kinds of organ-
isation support the social links through which rural people try to obtain jobs, school
places, residence permits, etc. But in fact, the urbanites employ the same techniques of kinship-clientship to get ahead and this applies even at the very top of ‘elite’ circles. ‘So whose nephew are you?’ was the pointed question asked of someone with no qualifications who was recently appointed to a ministerial post.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has tried to provide a guide to the socio-economic processes and new subjects emerging in the city after privatisation. In brief, I have described three important processes.

1. Through privatisation of housing and ad hoc new housing, the citizenry is separating out into economically differentiated groupings. This process is superimposed on the previous geographically dispersed settlement structure of the city. The result is that poverty is reinforced in outlying peripheries. There is relatively little income-generating economic interaction between disparate actors even within mixed urban districts. This is partly due to zealous municipal regulation of the petty trade and service sectors, and partly the result of an absence of general social trust. This lack of trust must have several causes, but one of them derives from attitudes to privatisation: when an organisation is privatised it becomes categorised as ‘theirs’, as oriented only towards ‘their’ profit, and thus not an object towards which any civic responsibility is due.

2. The new institution of the mayorate counteracts this dis-integrative tendency by attempting to unify the infrastructure of the city and provide adequate and equal basic services of heating, light, transport and sanitation to its scattered estates. Maintaining a boundary to the city, and controlled development within it, are central operative principles for the municipal chief architect. Parallel to this notion of the patrolled domain is the promotion of the symbolic ‘idea’ of the city by the mayor. Ulan-Ude stands once again for the idea of the ‘gateway to the East’ (entrepôt for trade with China and Mongolia), a place of Russian civilisation (prosperous merchants, dignified Orthodox cathedral, advanced educational establishments), and as the capital of the Buryat nation (hospital, welcoming). The city itself is reified as an object of devotion. Buildings within it are set up as objects towards which funding flows should be directed.

3. Knitted among these processes of dis-aggregation and unification are the networks of inhabitants attempting to secure their own life paths. Even the most distant and deprived have to construct some kind of link with officialdom because of the need for permits and suchlike. Most of the rural inflow is Buryat, and their kin ties are more extended and active than those of Russians. Among Buryats many kin networks cross-cut divisions of occupation, locality and education, yet these webs of relations do not make for increased overall unity. Diversity among Buryats is mirrored in the varied
religious organisations they have set up. More generally, there is a mutual turning-of-backs between established residents and the in-migrants. The influx contributes to the sense of competition and being under pressure, both of which feed into clientelistic (rather than openly public) modes of recruitment, obtaining orders, etc.

In this complex situation, there are several different kinds of flows of resources. Taxes, rents and payments for utilities certainly exist, but they do not cover the expenses of running the city. To compensate for the gaps, and in particular for the inability and/or unwillingness of residents to pay for the cost of maintaining the infrastructure, the government and the mayorate draw on large loans from the Federal budget and private banks. The spirit of operating with these loans draws on the rhetoric of social responsibility for ‘the people’, which has been carried forward from the Soviet era.

This rhetoric sits uneasily, however, with the multitude of interlinked ‘objects’ and ‘subjects’ that have emerged after privatisation. If the town swimming-pool as object has become a slightly sleazy shopping-mall, its transformation is both the effect and the origination of new subjects (stall-holders, wholesalers, etc.). Ulan-Ude has seen the emergence of numerous subjects, the ‘official unemployed’, the homeless, business firms, ‘oligarchs’, proud owners of villas, the mayorate and the MUPs, housing associations, clan societies, and nascent religious organisations, none of which existed in Soviet times.

The mayorate finds itself operating in a schizoid manner. Together with the government, the municipality is the only political subject to proclaim general social concern. Yet its officials, and all the myriad bureaux and firms that work under it, are no different from any other citizens. They too experience the uncertainty of the law and the absence of generalised social trust, and they too employ the financial techniques of ‘writing off’ (spisat’), ‘spinning’ (pokrutil’;) and defaulting (kidat’) that perpetuate and enhance lack of trust. The paradox of the municipal operation is that it constitutes the moralising bulwark against economic collapse and social disintegration – a bulwark that is itself riddled with pockets for personal gain. Perhaps it is the dense interactivity of the city itself that maintains paradox as its mode of being. ‘The city is a frightening force,’ writes Galdanov, a resident of Ulan-Ude. ‘The larger it is, the more terrible. It sucks you in. Only the very strong can climb out. Even the powerful can become weak. And the city gathers strength’ (2002: 63).

It would not be correct, however, to conclude that trust is consolidated only in the underpinning of personal networks, though part of my argument may have given this impression. The entire complex ‘system’ rests on the debt economy, and that ultimately depends on a broader and more diffuse sense of trust – that the administration will not pull the plug on the whole city. People will vote for political actors such as the mayor or the president not because they think they are honest people, and certainly not because they support their reform policies, but because citizens know from examples like the miners’ uprising that these individuals have
the ability to negotiate the debt economy. In Buryatia the debt economy is what the Soviet redistributive ‘economy of scarcity’ has become. In this situation, the new subjects cannot be fully fledged, or, to put it another way, they are locked in to self-undercutting activities that derive from previous rationales or ultimately ephemeral immediate benefits. Carrying on mining coal without wages, not paying the electricity bill, or carelessly spinning the money meant for a necessary repair – all are paradoxical economic acts that would be unwise indeed without the presence of this deep-seated sense of diffused reliance on the state. It is as though this profound assumption splits the enactment of privatisation in two. A subject can over-privatise (taking on the persona of the over-greedy capitalist) or under-privatise (e.g. continuing to operate a bankrupt company) – in both cases privatisation and ‘the market’ are not taken seriously as the only economy there is. What this means for the city is not altogether bad. It has been able to continue living above its means and even slightly improve its economic situation – albeit with a sense of dependency, competitiveness and unease.

Notes
3 The term indigenous is controversial in Buryatia. It is argued that since the Buryats came from Mongolian areas to the south they are no more indigenous than the Russians who arrived from the seventeenth century onwards.
4 Unlike Tashkent, Soviet Ulan-Ude did not incorporate neighbouring Buryat villages and collective farms. The only Buryat settlement to find itself within the city boundary, Ongotstei, had its population expelled in the late 1930s when a Fruit and Horticulture Station was sited there. Otherwise, planned Soviet settlements by-passed native villages, leaving them outside the city boundary (which consequently had a zig-zag form). This applied to the land liable to flooding on the far side of the River Selenga (locally called the Left Bank), which was used by Buryats for pasture and which had a number of Buryat collective farms on its higher reaches.
5 By mid-2002 the economy began to improve: large firms were able to open subsidiaries in the ruins of bankrupt companies; inter-enterprise debt was brought down; money incomes began to rise, and arrears in wage payments were reduced (Buryatiya, 29 August 2002, p. 3).
6 Ulan-Ude, unlike Moscow or St Petersburg, had a relatively small prosperous class before the Revolution and therefore in the Soviet era there were only a few kommunalki (apartments shared by several families, mostly created by splitting up previously bourgeois homes).
7 Only with the recent (2002) ratification by the Federal Duma of a Land Codex are people being encouraged to clarify this situation by applying either to buy or rent the land. Clearly this cannot happen quickly, as the size and boundaries of most plots have yet to be legally fixed (Komitet 2002: 6).
8 In the case of a non-privatised home only a close relative such as a son or daughter can inherit and otherwise it is taken over the by municipality and re-allotted. In the case of a privatised house or flat, the authorities are obliged to search for distant relatives before sequestering it. People are often caught out on this point. Someone may think he has purchased a flat, pay the money and arrive to take possession, only to find some third cousins of the previous owner have turned up to claim the right of inheritance.
There are some 50 estate agencies in Ulan-Ude, many of them fly-by-night operations that rapidly fail. However, the opportunity to make profits ensures that new firms are constantly being set up.

The ZhEK (Zhishchno-Ekspluatatsionnaya Kontora) consists of an office, staffed by managers, accountants, and engineers, which covers several streets, around 30 multi-storey blocks. The ZhEK collects the rent (kvartplata), part of which it is entitled to keep, and is responsible for the maintenance, repairs and plumbing for the buildings. The ZhEK also includes a passport office and issues residence permits. Its functions allow many opportunities for corruption and malpractice.

In 1917 around 1,000 of the 20,000 population were exiles (Semina 1996: 3).

One such organisation is made up entirely of Buryats and called Khara Moriton (Black Horse). Well-armed, it trains young men in military skills in the forests and mountains near the city. The group refers to its origin in the border guard traditions of the Khongodor clan and indeed claims to train boys in the cavalry, hunting and survival techniques of Chingghis Khan (Nomer Odin, 19, 11–17 May 2000, p. 5).

School places are given according to the district of the parents’ residence permit. Officially, only rather small numbers of kottedzhi are registered (59 in the first half of 2000), but the actual number is several times this. People avoid registration, as this requires proof of the origin of the funds spent on construction as well as the payment of taxes (Nomer Odin, 28, 13–19 July 2000).

The 101 kvartal, for example, is situated near the old city graveyard. It is locally called Zagrobniy (‘the Grave’) partly because of its site but also because it is periodically cut off from electricity for as long as a month. The inhabitants themselves collected money and built a sub-station and connected the area to the electricity network, but the electricity companies demanded another massive payment for a fully serviced connection. The residents have no more money, the municipality has refused to help, and as a result these citizens are regularly cut off as before (Inform Polis, 21, 24 May 2000).

These are associations for the provision of maintenance, plumbing, etc. and designed to by-pass the municipally organised and inefficient ZhEU. As the regular charge for such services (kvartplata) is an important element of municipal income, the mayorate has tried to hinder the development of these groups.

This club was founded, for men only, to exchange information and ‘propagate the business, culture, and art of Buryatia on an international level’, according to the organiser. The tax inspectorate reports that there are eight legal and around ten ‘shadow’ super-millionaires in Ulan-Ude (Savchenkova 2000: 25).

The accompanying social understanding of domestic service conditions (minimal and normal wages, insurance, holiday-benefit, references from previous employers, etc.) also does not exist. There is only one small domestic employment agency in the city, and no-one advertises in newspapers either offering or requiring services.

A model rental contract does exist for accommodation in public ownership, but its tenets are rarely adhered to, and private rental agreements are a law to themselves. One estate agent said that respectable agencies do not deal with rented accommodation. ‘Among us,’ he said, ‘that whole market is not legal. It’s badly organised and in the hands of people who are not law-abiding.’ Another citizen said she thought that rented flats were used mainly by prostitutes, of which there are now a large number in the city. ‘Artists, students, dancers – all go into this. They do it just for things like buying a return ticket to Yakutsk to visit a friend.’

‘Higher’ services in which the provider can regulate the conditions on an equal basis are advertised, however, such as extra school tuition, repair of computers and televisions, English language lessons, interior decoration, and IT courses.

These are called Municipal Unitary Enterprises (munitsipal’noye unitarnoye predpriyatiye).
Government transfers are targeted to specific purposes and hence are more difficult to access.

When previous personnel are cleared out and new people take their place, the incomers commonly pay the new boss for the privilege of having been given a post. The usually have to borrow money to make this payment, expecting to pay off the debt by ‘income-generating opportunities’ in the job. There is thus a systemic impetus that pushes officials to line their pockets.

Of course, other aspects of the city’s history, such as its role as a place of exile and imprisonment, are not emphasised. Even the Soviet glorification of the Decembrist exiles seems to have faded away recently. Another aspect still kept shrouded is military history.

Spisat’ is the slang term used when a budgeted sum is mostly used for some other purpose while the work is done in a much cheaper way.

In 2000, the proportion of electricity used by individual consumers rose from 47 per cent to 53 per cent of the total. In Soviet times, the amount of electricity allocated to each category of user was regulated by plan and strictly enforced through the powerful energy lobby. The 1996 Grazhdanskiy Kodeks (Bill of Citizens’ Rights) removed these restrictions, but did not impose any corresponding duties on users (Dasheyeva 2001: 3).

The money income of the population rose by 17.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2002 as compared with the corresponding period in 2001, reaching 2,134 roubles per month. According to the state statistical survey, personal income was spent as follows: 74 per cent on food and services; 8 per cent on taxes and fees; 4.5 per cent on savings and investment; 2.7 per cent on buying foreign currency; 11 per cent remained as ‘free’ money in the hands of citizens. Goskomstat. Buryatiya, 3 September 2002, p. 3.

One woman described how, in a panic she rushed to the office of the electricity company, only to find a massive crowd of other disconnected consumers. She queued for several hours, paid up, and was reconnected the next day.

Religious donations cannot escape the pervasive practice of ‘spinning’, however, and funds to build new temples, etc. frequently go astray.


References


INDEX

agriculture 125
Aidayev, Gennadi 191, 193
Aktep 122–3
alcoholism: homeless people 161, 163, 170, 171, 172; Ulan-Ude 130, 179, 187
allotments 183–4
Almaty 1, 6, 19, 33, 70–101; bureaucrats 89–90, 91, 92, 93; capital moved from 31, 73, 91, 94; familial metaphor 21, 93–6; history and geography 4, 75–8; local pride 31; migrants 13, 30; population growth 9; privatisation 22, 26; sacred sites 28–9; Soviet bequest 79–81; Soviet planning 32; studies 12–13; transitional events 90–2; urban networks 28; water case study 81–9
anomie 24
anthropology 3, 4, 10–13, 177
archaeology 34n4, 59–60
architects 28, 31, 199, 201
architecture: Astana 45, 50; Kazakhstan 61–2; Tashkent 102, 106, 109, 111, 112, 114–15, 123
Astana 1–2, 6, 7, 19, 33, 40–69; elite settlements 26–7, 58–9; familial metaphor 21; history and geography 4, 43–5; imagining the city 30–1; material form 23–4, 45–9; material instability 49–51; migrants 13; new vocabularies 29; political and geographical imaginary 25; preservation 59–64; privatisation 26; ruralisation 30; Soviet planning 32; temporality 21; urban networks 28
Ayusheyev, Damba 142, 144–6, 154n15, 198
begging 160, 168
Bellamy, Edward 8
black market 113
bomzhi 157–74, 187
bribery 193
Buddhism 5, 17, 19; funding for temple construction 198; migrants 132; sacred sites 29, 137, 138–47, 149, 150, 153
budgets 93–4, 190–1
building materials: Astana 23–4, 47, 48–9, 51–2, 56; stigma of poverty 30; Tashkent 106, 109, 112
bureaucrats 89–90, 91, 92, 93, 185
Buryatenergo 192–3, 197
Buryatia 1, 4, 5, 14, 19; communism 133–4, 179; debt economy 190–1, 202–3; economic collapse 129–30; education 132–3; history and geography 17; industrialisation 127; national composition of 128
Buryats 19, 26, 128, 131–3; homelessness 160, 170, 171; kinship networks 199, 200, 201; relative absence from Ulan-Ude 181; religious organisations 201–2; sacred sites 136–53
Camp of Geser 139, 150, 151
capitalism 7, 8, 197
Caspian Sea 10, 18
Central Asia 1, 6, 12, 13; history and geography 14–19; housing shortages 9; ‘international’ style 31; Russian Empire 103; sacred spaces 28; water resources 81–2
Central Europe 12, 13
Chicago School 10, 11
China 28, 194
Christianity 6, 28, 138, 153; see also Russian Orthodox Church
banks 116, 117, 119, 191, 202
bazaars 105, 107, 108, 115–16, 123

208
class 70–1, 184, 186; see also social differentiation
coopératives 118
collectivisation 17, 18, 43, 127
commercial development 116, 184
Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) 129
communes 126, 127, 128
Communist Party 114, 133–4
community studies 11
construction industry 23–4, 109, 116, 117, 190
‘container trade’ 195
continuity 42, 52–3, 61, 62, 64
contracts 91, 93, 96
corruption 31, 114; Astana 23, 65; Ulan-Ude 193, 196, 204n10
Cossacks 16, 19; Kazakhstan 47, 65; Tashkent 105; Ulan-Ude 136, 180
crime 71, 89, 120, 187
culture: socialist cities 8–9; Tashkent 6, 102, 108, 110; Ulan-Ude 182
day of the city 194–5
de-industrialisation 188
de-urbanisation 179
debt 191, 197, 202–3
Deed Ongotstai 143, 145–6, 147–8
Dharma Centre 141–2
domestic service 189
earthquakes 109, 110, 196
Eastern Europe 9, 12
economic depression 120, 129–30, 133, 134, 176, 179; see also financial crisis
economic development 123
education: homeless people 170; socialist cities 8–9; Tashkent 6, 108; Ulan-Ude 132–3, 182
electricity: Almaty 72, 73, 86; Ulan-Ude 138, 191, 192–3, 197, 204n15, 205n26
elite settlements 26–7; Astana 58–9; Tashkent 123; Ulan-Ude 187–8
employment: Almaty state sector employees 95; homeless people 164, 172, 173, 174; shadow economy 113; see also labour; unemployment
Engels, Friedrich 3, 7–8
equality 189
ethnic groups 18, 19, 33; Almaty 86–8; Buryatia 128; homeless people 158, 159; Tashkent 108, 112–13, 121;
tensions 176; Turkestan 106; Ulan-Ude 136, 152, 181
Eurasianism 2, 31, 32, 61; ‘Kazakhstani’ state 19; Kurokawa’s architecture 45; proto-60
exiles 180–1
factories 182, 183
familial metaphor 21, 93–6
farmland 108, 109–10, 111
festivals 150, 194–6
financial crisis 161, 184, 185; see also economic depression
foreign investment 30–1, 83–4, 96
Fourier, Charles 7, 34n11
Frunze 9
Garden City Movement 3, 8, 10, 77
gas supply 120–1
gated communities 26, 188
General Plans 10, 20, 32; Astana 62; Tashkent 117, 119, 120; Ulan-Ude 199
gentrification 188–9
Geser 139, 150, 151
globalisation 134
Gorbachev, Mikhail 70, 179
Hambu Lama 142, 144–6, 149
Handama datsan 143–5
heating 23, 33, 120, 138, 191–2
home ownership 118, 185–6
homelessness 20, 157–74, 186; Almaty 90; eviction from the dugouts 162–3; exclusion of the homeless 25, 189–90; interviews 162–8; marginalisation of the homeless 176; number of homeless people 169–70; shelters 168–9; social structure 159–61
housing 9, 26; Almaty 77, 79–81, 90; Tashkent 107, 108–9, 110–11, 116–17, 118–20, 121–2; Ulan-Ude 182, 183, 184–90, 191, 201
Howard, Ebenezer 3, 8, 66n5
incomes 197, 205n27
industrialisation 3, 7, 8, 18, 127–8; building industry 112; heavy industry in Almaty 76; industrial materials 52; Ulan-Ude 181–2
infrastructure 22–3, 32–3; Almaty 75, 78, 79, 89, 97; Astana 58; migrant settlements 131; social 84, 96, 97; Tashkent 107, 117–21; Ulan-Ude 179, 196, 201; see also utility networks
INDEX

internationalism 32, 45
Islam 6, 17, 19; mahallas 29, 114; Russian settlers in Kazakhstan 47; Tashkent 111; Turkestan 16
izba 51, 55, 61, 63, 64

Jadid reformers 16, 18, 47, 48

Kazakhstan 1, 3, 4–5, 6–7, 42; architectural traditions 61–2; collectivisation 17, 43; history and geography 14, 17; housing shortages 9; ‘international’ style of architecture 31; internationalism 32; Islam 19; material instability 49–51, 52–6; mineral resources 18, 22; privatisation 26, 72; refugees 30; religion 29; shanyrak 33; urban networks 28
Khrushchev, Nikita 13, 44, 70, 79

kinship relations 21, 27, 58, 95–6;
Buddhist associations 140; migrants 131, 132; neighbourhood associations 134n6; residence permits 199; Ulan-Ude 200–1

Kiosks 189
kishlaks 105, 107, 110, 113, 120, 122
Kurokawa, Kisho 32, 42, 44, 45, 58, 62, 64
Kyrrgyzstan 14, 17, 30

labour 7, 113, 129; see also employment
land reform 127
legitimacy 20–4, 45
Lenin, V.I. 178, 189

mahallas 5, 29, 105, 106, 113–14, 118, 122–3
Malinowski, Bronislaw 10
market economy 72–3, 123, 134
markets 182; see also bazaars
Marx, Karl 3, 7–8, 82
materiality 23–4, 40, 42, 45–9, 62–4, 65
maupa 105
mayorate 21–2, 176, 179, 191–2, 193–6, 201, 202
micro-regions 78, 79–81, 85, 86, 96
migrants 2, 33; Almaty 6, 86–8, 89; Astana 7; rural habits 30; Ulan-Ude 22, 125–35, 176, 179, 199–201, 202
migration 6, 13, 125–9; Almaty 86–8, 89, 91, 96; Astana 43; homeless people 158; social effects of 131–2; Ulan-Ude 24, 130–3; Uzbekistan 120
Miliutin, Nikolai 3, 44, 66n5

Modern Movement 3
modernisation 18, 82–3, 123, 127, 128
modernity 2, 3, 25
monasteries 138–9, 143, 153, 181; comparison with urban Buddhist centres 140; Deed Ongotstai 145–6, 147; Dharma Centre 142; funding 198
Mongolia 17, 19, 28, 138, 143, 194 monogorod (single-company cities) 9–10
monuments 59, 111–12
mosques 28, 29, 113, 123; mahallas 106, 114; Middle Eastern funding of 6 municipal companies (MUPs) 191, 193, 197
museums 60, 115

nakhalovka (illegal housing) 183
nation-building 64, 65
nationalism 16, 19, 61
nationhood 19, 46–7
nature 46, 149, 152
Nazarybaev, Nursultan 19, 44–5, 47, 50, 59
Nemtsov, Boris 179–80, 191
networks 27–8, 176, 198–201
nostalgia 27–8, 112
‘nothingness’ 48, 59
unnernries 143–5

objectification 177
oil 18, 22
Owen, Robert 7

peasants: izba 64; Russian settlers in Kazakhstan 16; Tashkent 103, 113; Ulan-Ude 126, 127, 130, 180
perestroika 18, 83
personhood 46–7
police 167, 173–4
politics 179, 202–3
pollution 26, 75, 76, 82
population growth 9; Almaty 79, 80; Astana 43, 44; Tashkent 103; Ulan-Ude 181
Potapov, Leonid 179
poverty 30, 130, 175, 201
preservation 59–64, 196
private sector 71, 72–3, 84, 91, 92–3, 97
privatisation 2, 3, 12, 25–7, 71; Almaty 22, 26, 72–3, 74, 81, 84–5, 89–92; Astana 26; economic context of 179–80;
housing 26, 158, 184–90, 201; Kazakhstan 6; Tashkent 118; Ulan-Ude 210

Downloaded by [Universiti Malaysia Sabah] at 08:29 15 December 2012
INDEX

21, 25–6, 175–207; uncertainties of 177–8
property rights 22, 23, 72, 177–8
propiska (residence permit) 75, 165–6, 184, 199

refugees 30, 129
regulation: housing in Almaty 77; land ownership 177–8; petty trade 201; sanitation 82; Soviet Union 92
religion 5, 130; mahallas 114; payments towards 197–8; sacred sites 28–9; Uzbekistan 123; see also Buddhism; Christianity
relocations 119
rental market 186, 189, 204n19
residence permit (propiska) 75, 165–6, 184, 199
rituals: shamanism 139, 147–8, 151–2; Ulan-Ude 21, 194
rody (clan societies) 200
rubbish dump 159–60, 161–4, 173, 186
rural areas 6, 126, 128, 130, 131
ruralisation 28, 29–30, 132, 133
Russia 4–5; Astana 61, 62; Buryat Buddhism 144–5, 153; history and geography 14–19; homelessness 157; migration 125–7; Tashkent 103–7; Tsarist material instability 51–2; see also Soviet Union, former
Russian Orthodox Church 5, 6, 28–9, 51, 138, 165, 182; see also Christianity
Russian Revolution 43

sheltered sites 24, 28–9; Tashkent 111; Ulan-Ude 136–56
Saint-Simon, Henri 7, 34n10
samannyi structures 48–9, 51–2, 55–6, 57, 60, 64
Samarkand 107
Samayev, Lama 146, 147, 155n21
segregation 26
self 3, 25
service sector 188
sewerage 79, 81, 82, 84, 120
shadow economy 113, 198
shamanism 29, 138, 139, 150; Buryat migrants 132; conflicts with Buddhism 153, 155n18; public rituals 147–8, 151–2; shamans’ opposition to Deed Ongotstai monastery 145–6
Shangin, Ivan 43, 46, 48, 59, 60, 62
shanyrak 24, 33, 52–5, 56, 62, 64
shelters 168–9
Siberia 3, 9; history and geography 14, 16; Soviet policies 127–9; trading networks 28
slums 7, 10
social contract 20, 21, 22, 70, 71, 72; fieldwork 74–5; impact of market principles on 83, 92; rejection of 97; water supply 83
social differentiation 26, 184, 186, 188–9, 194–5, 201
social networks 27–8, 176, 198–201
social relations 21, 126; Astana 42, 45–6, 47, 49, 59, 64, 65–6; building materials 49; migrants 131; Ulan-Ude 133, 198, 200
social services 168, 172; see also welfare provision
socialism 62, 128
socialist cities 3, 7–9, 12
sociology 3, 10
soviet Union, former 2–3, 4, 33; Almaty 79–81, 91; Astana preservation 60; constraints on city studies 12; core values 70–1; familial metaphor 95; General Plans 10, 32; housing allocation 185; housing shortages 9, 111; Kazakhstan’s independence 72; patrimonial structures 18–19; Siberia 127–9; socialist cities 8; trading networks 28; urban regulation 92; water services 81–2; welfare provision 85; see also Russia
squats 166–7, 199
state 21, 70–1, 72, 90, 92–3, 97
state-owned enterprises 179
statues 178
sustainability 65
symbolism 54

Tajikistan 14, 30
tall buildings 58–9, 119
Tashkent 1, 5–6, 19, 33, 102–24; Aktep case study 122–3; ethnicity 112–13; General Plan 117, 119, 120; history and geography 4, 13, 14–16; housing in the Soviet era 110–11; infrastructure 117–21; labour and the black market 113; mahallas 113–14; money spent on government buildings 31; monuments and sacred places 111–12; population growth 9; post-Soviet planning 116–17;
INDEX

ruralisation 30; sacred sites 28; social dissolution 24; Soviet planning 32; Urikzor case study 121–2
temporality 21, 61, 62–4
timber 51–2
trade 28, 106, 180
trust 74, 97, 201, 202
Turkestan 14, 16, 103–7
Turkmenistan 14

Ulan-Ude 1, 5, 14, 33; citizen actions 196–8; description of 180–4; festivals 194–6; General Plan 199; heating system 23; history and geography 4; homelessness 157–74; kinship relations 27; migrants 24, 125–35; networks 27–8, 198–201; new vocabularies 29; privatisation 21–2, 25–6, 175–207; sacred sites 24, 29, 136–56; Slavic population 19; Soviet planning 32, 73, 176

uncertainty 2
under-urbanisation 13
unemployment: Almaty 91; Ulan-Ude 130, 131, 179, 186, 189, 193

uniformity 25, 109
urbanisation 3, 125–6, 127, 128, 129, 134
Urikzor 121–2, 124
utility networks 23, 81, 97, 187, 191–3, 196; see also electricity; water
Uzbekistan 3, 4, 5–6, 14, 107; city dwellers’ tolerance of ethnic difference 112; economic climate 120; house building 119; Islam 19; mahallas 29

Verkhnaya Berezovka 145–8, 149, 197
Virgin Lands Campaign 13, 44, 45, 47–8, 50, 60, 82

water: Almaty 72, 73–4, 79, 81–9; Tashkent 118, 120, 121
welfare provision 22, 70, 71, 85, 95
women 143–4

Yeltsin, Boris 179, 194
Yeltsin City 29, 186

zemlyachestva (rural associations) 131, 134n6, 140, 200
zones 10, 26, 31, 66n5