

University of Tartu
Faculty of Art and Humanities
Department of Estonian and Comparative Folklore

Yanjinkham Dashtseren

**Migration, Memory, and Post-Memory: Experience
Narratives of Buriad Peoples of Mongolia**

Master's thesis

Supervisor: Alevtina Solovyova PhD.

Head of the Centre for Oriental Studies

Tartu, 2025

Orthographic Note

In this thesis, I use the Mongolian official transliteration standard of MNS 5217:2012 when I am transliterating Mongolian or Buriad words into English. A sample table is below:

Кирил үсэг		Латин үсэг		Хөрвүүлэх жишээ	
Том	Жижиг	Том	Жижиг	Латин үсгээр	Кирил үсгээр
А	а	A	a	Avarga, khalbaga, aav	Аварга, халбага, аав
Б	б	B	b	Baga, sambar	Бага, самбар
В	в	V	v	Avarga, vagon, sav	Аварга, вагон, сав
Г	г	G	g	Gazar, geree, khereg	Газар, гэрээ, хэрэг
Д	д	D	d	Dadlaga, akhmad	Дадлага, ахмад
Е	е	Ye	ye	Yeeven, yerööl	Еэвэн, ерөөл
Ё	ё	Yo	yo	yorool, oyodol	Ёроол, оёдол
Ж	ж	J	j	Juulchin, ajil, Jon	Жуулчин, ажил, Жон
З	з	Z	z	Zam, azarga, baaz	Зам, азарга, бааз
К	к	K	k	Kino, kilometr, akademi	Кино, километр, академи
И	и	I	i	Ishig, bichig, khani	Ишиг, бичиг, хань
Й	й	I	i	lim, eejiin	Ийм, ээжийн
Л	л	L	l	Lam, alag, mal	Лам, алаг, мал
М	м	M	m	Mal, khamar, nam	Мал, хамар, нам
Н	н	N	n	Nar, khana, үnen	Нар, хана, үнэн
О	о	O	o	Oron, bolovсроl, тооно	Орон, боловсрол, тооно
Ө	ө	Ö	ö	Ödör, öнööдör, öörööсöö	Өдөр, өнөөдөр, өөрөөсөө
П	п	P	p	Puujin, aparat	Пуужин, аппарат
Р	р	R	r	rashaan, radio, sar	Рашаан, радио, сар
С	с	S	s	Sar, asar, etses	Сар, асар, эцэс
Т	т	T	t	Tamga, tatlaga	Тамга, татлага
У	у	U	u	Uran, nuruu	Уран, нуруу
Ү	ү	Ü	ü	Ünen, түrgen, tergүүn	Үнэн, түргэн, тэргүүн
Ф	ф	F	f	Foto, fond	Фото, фонд
Х	х	Kh	kh	khavar, nökhör, ekh	Хавар, нөхөр, эх
Ц	ц	Ts	ts	Tsatsag, tsetseg	Цацаг, цэцэг
Ч	ч	Ch	ch	Chimeg, chadal, ach	Чимэг, чадал, ач
Ш	ш	Sh	sh	Shashin, aash	Шашин, ааш,
Щ	щ	Sh	sh	Shedrin, Shors,	Щедрин, щорс
Ъ	ъ	I	i	Oriyo, suriya, gariya,	Орье, сурья, гарья
Ы	ы	Y	y	Khaany, akhyn	Хааны, ахын
Ь	ь	I	i	Khari, bari	Харь, барь
Э	э	E	e	Ezen, ene, emeel	Эзэн, энэ, эмээл
Ю	ю	Yu	yu	Yum, yuüden	Юм, юүдэн
Я	я	Ya	ya	Yamar, yaduu, aya	Ямар, ядуу, ая

Only “сум” will be “soum” without following the above standard to avoid confusion with the English word “sum”.

Contents

Notes	4
Abstract	6
Introduction	7
Who are the Buriads?	7
1. Methodology-Fieldwork	10
1.2 Literature review	12
1.2.1 Place-Lore.....	12
1.2.2 Identity.....	13
1.2.3 Collective memory	14
1.2.4 Post-Memory	15
2. Historical background	16
2.1 Russian Colonization	16
2.2 The early 20th century forced migration of the Buriad	22
2.3 Political repression in Mongolia	26
3. Data analysis and results, discussion	32
3.1 Resettlement in New Land	32
3.2 Place-lore	35
3.3 Collective memory	37
3.4 Post-memory	39
3.4.1 Singing expressions	42
Conclusion	49
List of references	52
Appendix 1- Interviewee list	58
Appendix 2- Interview translation (partial)	59

Notes

Most papers written about Buriad (Буриад) used the Romanized name of “Buryat (Бурят),” which is a Russian-influenced Romanization. As a Buriad-Mongolian (earlier written as ‘Buryat’), I will use the Mongolian Romanization “Buriad” in this thesis, which is an attempt at emic self-assertion. In the same condition, I will use Mongolian or Buriad words in Mongolian Romanization, such as Lake Baikal is known as Baikal. However, Baikal is a Mongolian word meaning “nature”.

Here are the transliterations of the honorifics of the relatives and other words in the Buriad Mongolian language that will be used in the following sections:

Words in Mongolian/Buriad	Transliteration	Translation
Нагац ахай	nagats	Maternal uncle
Хуриахай	khuriahai	Older brother-in-law
Авга	avga	Paternal uncle
Авгалжин	avgaljin	Paternal aunt
Авгай	avgai	Sister, including your older sister and every other female older than you
Худ	Khud	male relatives of your children's or siblings', aunt and uncles', in-laws' family
Ахай	akhai	Brother, including your older brother and every other male older than you
Тууль	Tuuli	chanting myth
Хошуу	khoshuu	archaic name of a soum
До яам Дотоодыг хамгаалах газар	Do yam Dotoodiig hamgaalah gazar	Domestic Security Agency, later became Dotood yavdliin yam Domestic Affairs Ministry)
Ногоон малгайт	Nogoon malgait	Officers who performed political repression in the field. They were wearing green officers' clothes and hat.
Хаан	Khaan	King

Лхүмбэ	Lkhumbe/Lkhumbo	Political repression first fabricated a crime case
--------	-----------------	--

Abstract

In this thesis, I am exploring the early 20th century migration of the Buriad people from the Baigal Lake region to Mongolia through oral narrative, focusing on how this was transmitted and preserved. There is not much application of the post-memory concept lens to the Mongolian Buriad migration topic, although many anthropologists and scholars have worked on topics related to the Buriads. Through the lenses of memory studies, particularly a post-memory one, the thesis examines how traumatic events can be transgenerationally inherited and shape the individual's and then the collective's identity. Interviews conducted in Eastern Mongolia reveal that all the traumatic events influenced Buriad descendants' sense of belonging and perceptions of the contemporary turns.

Keywords: Buriad, migration, post-memory, political repressions, transgenerational trauma.

Introduction

This thesis examines the traces and consequences of the Buriad community migration from the Baigal Lake region to Mongolia in the early 20th century as reflected in oral family history narratives. In the folklore framework of memory studies, particularly the post-memory concept, which explores how traumatic events, memory, and their trauma, identity have been transmitted transgenerationally, shaping individual and collective identity and belonging. The empirical data collection, the fieldwork research carried out in the summer of 2024 and in the winter of 2025, January in Eastern Mongolia, specifically in the small town of Bayandun (Баяндун) in the Dornod (Дорнод) Province, which was established in 1925. The smallest administration unit of Mongolia, called a “soum” (сум), has a population of over 3000 people, the majority of whom are third, fourth, or fifth generation descendants of Buriad migrants.

Bayandun is well-known for planting vegetables for the region, and livestock husbandry is engaged in primarily as a usual Mongolian nomadic lifestyle. Stories and details about forced migrations have long been silenced due to fear of political repression, and have only been told secretly, mostly among family members. Consequently, many descendants nowadays know little about their family history, and fourth and fifth generations briefly answer “Yes, my ancestors moved from Russia,” but cannot elaborate further or have no idea of the migration process. This is the motivation to work on this concept preserve these memories and discuss how it is mediating and influencing generations of migrants. The age interval of my interview participants varied between 20 and 80, representing the second and third generations. While conducting an interview, I tried to talk to delegations of every generation to compare their perceptions. The interview aimed to discover how narrators express inherited memories, their attitude to the stories, or how these stories were recalled within the family. Also, the research investigates what was inherited, lost, preserved, and

how the perspectives were transmitted across generations. What cultural influence, beliefs, landscapes shaped identity, or how migrants were influenced by a new environment? These questions will define this thesis framework. Collected data reveals that migrations and political repressions are deeply intertwined in the Buriads' experience in Mongolia, and it is shaping the identity and collective memory of the Buriad people through its tragic traces. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured, open-ended format, allowing narrators to express their knowledge freely.

Who are the Buriads?

Ethnogenetically, the Buriads are a Mongolian-rooted ethnic group, which has a long history and a peculiar culture. There were several hunter tribes that mainly hunted, fished, and herded livestock. Before the 13th century (1100-1200), today's Buriad formed from minority Mongolian tribes such as *Bulgad*, *Ekhired*, and *Khori tümed*. *Bulgad* and *Ekhired* rooted Buriads, the Western Buriads, lived along the Northwestern coast of Baikal Lake. They mainly practiced hunting and fishing, and later domesticated herding livestock and cultivated vegetables and crops. Ancient *Khori tümed*-rooted Khoriin Buriads lived a nomadic style on the Eastern coast of Baikal Lake. They moved east and south, following pasture to *Selenge*, *Üd*, and *Ingedei Rivers*; *Onon*, *Aga*, *Boorj*, and *Ergüne* riverbanks were the furthest. (Jamts, 2017, 9)¹

Buriad people's staple food was fish and herb roots for the summer, and in the winter, hunting was the main food source. Men's and women's participation was equal when hunting. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 10)

There was another ethnic minority called the *Barga*² Mongolians live with the Buriad people in the Baikal Lake region, who exist as a *Barga* Mongolian ethnic minority nowadays. From the 13th century, the Buriad and the *Barga* people belonged to the Mongolian Empire as the Chingis khaan commenced conquering all Mongolian ethnic clans. The Mongolian Empire's conquered territories were divided by Chingis Khaan for his sons to manage. The Buriad and *Barga* people belonged to Chingis Khaan's grandson *Züchi*, later Chingis Khaan's youngest son *Tului*.

¹ All historical background sections are briefly translated by me from materials originally written in the Mongolian language.

² Barga is a Mongolian ethnical minority group, 0.1% of the total population. Their language dialect is similar to that of the Buriads.

Many Buriads were living between the *Khatan*³ river and the western part of *Khökh nuur*. In the 15th to 17th centuries, a bunch of *Khori* Buriad people were moved to *Khölönbuir*⁴, the *Ergune River*⁵, as a dowry of *Altan khaan's* Princess *Baljin* of the *Tümed* when she married to *Solongud*⁶ *aimag's*⁷ *Büüvei beil khaan's* son *Dai Khun Taij*⁸. The Buriad Mongolians underwent various political shifts and migratory movements influenced by the changing dynamics of power during the Mongolian Great Empire, the *Yuan* Dynasty (1271-1368), and successive regimes, continuing until they relocated to Baigal Lake at the end of the 15th century and the beginning of the 16th century. (Jamts, 2017, 10) This myth could be a sign of Buriad's being relocated several times for centuries.

There are other varied studies about how the name Buriad was formed. For instance, a new fortress named *Bratsk* was built near *Padun* pass on the *Oka* riverbank by 1631. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 54)

The *Bratsk* sounded similar to *Brat*, is the Russian word for “brother”. Therefore, those are the “*brat*” who agreed to follow the Russian Empire, (softened with Buriad language as ‘Buriad’), those who did not follow the Russian Empire are named as “Mongol” and were chased to the south. So, the name of Buriad might not be a tribe name, but it may be simply a geopolitical concept. Over the centuries, Mongolian tribes acquired a shared national identity and the common name ‘Buriad’ as they began to live in closer proximity to one another, becoming more concentrated in the landscape following the Russian Empire’s invasion. (Baabar, 2024, 17)

There are many tribes, such as *Tsongool* (*Songool*), *Khamnigan*, *Evenk*, besides *Khori* Buriads, so the above variant could be true. Also, there are several myths about the *Khori* Buriads’ origin. One of those goes as follows: In the time before time was counted, there were three brothers from Baigal *Dalai*⁹ to a shaman named *Asuikhan: Bulgad, Khoridoi*,

³ The Yellow River (Huanghe) in China.

⁴ Inner Mongolian *Khölönbuir*.

⁵ Russian name is *Аргунь*, which flows into the Amur River.

⁶ There was a *Solongud* tribe among the medieval *Horchin* people, but it's unclear if the *Solongud* mentioned here is connected to that group or to the *Solon aimag*, which was part of the eight counties under the later *Qing* Dynasty. (B. Natsagdorji. Introduction of *Buubei beyile-yin sudur*, *Historia Mongolarum Journal of History*, № 397 (34) ISSN 2224-1804, 2014, 198)

⁷ State or clan

⁸ Noble title- Baron

⁹ Mongolians respect Baigal Lake as an Ocean

and *Ekhirit*¹⁰. They once lived as one and earned a lot of fortune. Yet while *Khoridoi* roamed the wilds on a great hunt, *Bulgad* and *Ekhirit* divided their wealth into three, without their brother's word. When *Khoridoi* returned and found his share carved without his voice, a storm rose in his heart. In anger and sorrow, he kicked away his portion, turned his back on their heart, and journeyed alone toward the sacred waters of Baigal *Dalai Olikhon* Island. *Khoridoi* lived in solitude, watching the winds and the wings that crossed the sky. One day, from the heavens above, a snow-white swan descended, and she shed her silver garments of light and feathers, turned into an angel while singing beautifully. As she swam, *Khoridoi* crept to the shore and took her clothes, hiding them from her sight. Without them, the swan-angel could not return. Bound now to the mortal world, she became *Khoridoi's* bride. From their union sprang eleven sons—noble in name and many in spirit: *Gulzuut*, *Khuatsai*, *Khügdüüd*, *Khalbin*, *Batnai*, *Khudai*, *Gushid*, *Tsagaan*, *Sharaid*, *Bodonguud*, and *Khargana*.” These sons issued the lineages of Buriad's eleven clans. Every clan has its identity poems, which are broadly known among Buriads.” (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 38, 39)

Buriad people have known their clan's name for generations and started using it officially, involving it as a symbol of their national identity when Mongolia started requiring family names, while Khalkh Mongolians were creating family names for themselves. Also, the Buriad people proudly assert their origin from the Swan mother:

Хун шувуу гарвалтай (Origin is Swan-Angel)

Хуна модон сэрэгтэй (Owns a birch wooden hitch)

The Buriad people take pride in their ability to trace and recite at least seven, and often all nine, generations of their ancestral lineages.

Buriad's religion was shamanism until Buddhism spread, the same way like for other Mongolian ethnicities. However, many temples and monasteries were built following the spread of Buddhism in Mongolia from the 14th to the 18th centuries. In the early 20th century, there were over thirty temples and several thousand monks. Now, both religions are practiced among Buriads.

¹⁰ Previously written as Ekhirod. However, Kudryavtsev wrote as Ekhirit. Decided to keep it as it is since this is my translation. Also, a brief translation, not entirely.

1. Methodology-Fieldwork

The fieldwork research for this thesis was conducted in the summer of 2024 in *Bayandun* soum of the *Dornod* province¹¹, Eastern Mongolia. There are two key reasons why I selected this location: First, I was familiar with many of the migration stories transmitted orally but never documented, as I grew up in Bayandun. Second, my personal connections to locals allowed me easier access to people, arrange interviews, and identify individuals who know their family stories. Most interviews were conducted in *Bayandun*. However, some interviews I conducted in Ulaanbaatar, there are my family stories originating from *Khövchiin Jonon Vangiin khoshuu*¹² where my great-grandfather resettled with his children, after moving from *Yaruuna*.¹³ Later in 1923, the archaic name was changed to *Binder* of the *Khentii* province. Hence, my family stories occurred in the *Binder* soum of the *Khentii* province. These collected narratives share common experiences even though they are geographically distinct. Therefore, these narratives possibly represent pieces of history, although it is geographically limited. The purpose of this fieldwork was to collect empirical data for this thesis by interviewing knowledgeable people about their parents' or grandparents' migration stories.

As I was looking for information about events nearly every Buriad family experienced around a hundred years ago, finding suitable narrators was challenging because many second-generation migrants had deceased. Those living narrators are mostly from the third generation, who know fragmented stories, and remembering the details, such as dates or names, or timelines, and narrating long-lost stories was challenging for them. However, I managed to find interviewees around the age of sixty-eighty who knew their parents' and grandparents' migration stories. Each interview began with the collection of consents and the narrator's information: name, age, occupation, and with guidance questions.

¹¹ Mongolia has 21 provinces. It is the second administration unit. Provinces are divided into soums.

¹² Хөвчийн Жонон Вангийн хошуу- *Khövchiin Jonon Vangiin khoshuu* is the *Binder* soum's archaic name. The Archaic name was active at that time when my ancestors moved to the area. *Khoshuu* is the archaic name of the soum.

¹³ *Yaruuna* is the Buriad name of the *Eravnenskii raion* (Russian name-Еравнинский район)

Then, I asked basic questions to collect the data I needed:

1. Do you know your family's migration story?
2. Which relative of yours moved in, and in what year?
3. What was the motivation for migration?
4. Why did they choose to settle this particular location?
5. Was there any discrimination or hardship while resettling?
6. How did political repression in the 1930s affect your family?

The interview began with guidance questions and continued with open-ended interviews to benefit from a more flexible approach to interviewing, depending on what came up in the interview, based on the narrator's knowledge and ability to express themselves. Therefore, they were inconclusive for some part, also telling without chronological order, depending on what they remembered at that moment. Hence, stories were unstructured, and it was complicated to obtain readable stories. So, I conducted a follow-up interview with some of them during my winter fieldwork in January 2025 to ensure clarification. Since the interview was open-ended, the length of narratives varied from a few sentences to an hour.

If written sources are available, I compared what I got from interviews with written sources to get more details. One of my key secondary sources is *Punished Buriad People* (2007), which is a compilation of archival materials and oral memory narratives, and post-memories compiled by Buriad scholars of Buriad ethnicity: Ts. Tseren, D. Byambasuren, Ch. Tsempeldorj, R. Regzendorj, D. Dashdavaa, D. Yumjav. Secondary sources provide clarity and more useful information to fill the chronological gap or provide additional detail. Flexible interviews shaped the approach, giving narrators the opportunity to share their knowledge with their emotions, attitudes, and nature that they inherited from their transgenerational memory.

1.2 Literature review

This thesis is not meant to argue against scholars' work or identify its gaps. There are many scholars who have published research materials on Buriads, such as Mandukhai Buyandelger, Rebecca Empson, Caroline Humphrey, Ippei Shimamura, and Christopher Kaplonski. However, the folklore method has not been applied before in the study of Buriad Mongolians' memory studies and oral history. This thesis aims to contribute to analyzing Mongolian Buriad's oral narratives, family stories in the frame of the concept of post-memory as an insider. Analyzing folk narratives through memory/post-memory studies lenses has never been done in relation to the topic of Buriad's migration experience. In addition, I have the ambition in the future to continue this study on a broader geographical scale, comparing three communities which are the Buriads who remained in Russia, migrated to Mongolia, and China.

The qualitative data I collected has multiple aspects, which give me the opportunity to understand applying folklore theories such as collective memory, trauma inheritance, social belonging, oral expressions (such as singing instead of narrating), post-memory, and place-lore. The main concepts of the theoretical frame are the oral narrative and post-memory. They are applied to analyze how transgenerational trauma is inherited by next generations and how Buriad migration narratives form/ influence ethnic, political, social, and cultural identity.

1.2.1 Place-Lore

Places often carry deep meanings to those who is connected to the place, and their significance can shift to any meaning dramatically instantly. Collected interview narratives reveals that how connection to lands changing due to traumatic experiences, and how individuals make decisions of moving based on the new meaning of the land. The landscape where their ancestors had inhabited for centuries, ceases to be a place of safety due to tragic event occurred in the place. In this section, I will discuss how places changed its meaning with tragic events using Ülo Valk's suggestion of the place-lore theory, "We can talk about the stratification of places as they store their histories, and

about their simultaneity, as multiple interconnected places often co-exist and overlap with each other.” (Ülo Valk, 2018, 9)

Also, memory can have crucial influences in deciding the place of resettlement. This theory will give the opportunity to see how much memory can affect an individual’s choice. It will help to reveal how people’s memories are connected to the landscape, it’s forced to change and adapt to the new conditions of settling.

1.2.2 Identity

Identity and belonging have been studied by many scholars. Particularly, there are countless materials published about identity related to migration in general. Some researchers defined the diaspora of Buriads who migrated to Mongolia. (Baldano, Marina N., Victor I. Dyatlov, and Svetlana V. Kirichenko. "Buryat Migrations and Diasporas in Historical Space and Time (20th-21st Centuries), ." *Журнал Сибирского федерального университета. Гуманитарные науки* 13, no. 5 (2020): 716-727.), Shimamura, Ippei, *The Roots Seekers: Shamanism and Ethnicity Among the Mongol Buryats*, Shumpusha Publishing, 2014, Namsaraeva, Sayana. "Ritual, memory and the Buriad diaspora notion of home." *Frontier Encounters. Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border* (2012): 137-163). However, it is complicated to name the Buriads who migrated to Mongolia as a “diaspora”. On one hand, the migration was indeed a cross-border. Politically and geographically belonging to different countries made the Buriad diaspora. On the other hand, Buriads were returning to their root, on the other hand, Buriads are moving to a new landscape geographically and politically by crossing a border.

Regardless of being diaspora or not, migrating to a new landscape made the situation complicated and dangerous. Therefore, cross-border migration leads to the formation of an identity. Here, I used several scholars’ identity and belonging-related material, such as Nira Yuval Davis, Madsen, Kenneth D., Ton Van Naerssen, and Bulut, M.

Mainly, I will apply Nira Yuval-Davis’ theory to analyze identity and belonging aspects occurring in narratives. The identity narratives can be individual, or they can be collective, the latter often a resource for the former. Although they can be transmitted and reproduced from generation to generation, this reproduction is always carried out in a

selective way. “They can be related to the past, to a myth of origin; they can be aimed at explaining the present, and, probably above all, they function as a projection of a future trajectory”. (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 6)

Also, she suggested that identity is fluid and contested, besides being selective:

“Identity tends to be different in different historical contexts and are often fluid and contested.” (Yuval-Davis, 2006, 3)

1.2.3 Collective memory

In this section, I will use S. Cammack’s review of “*Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*” by Aleida Assmann and the “Collective memory: An hourglass between the collective and the individual” article by Aline Cordonnier et al, definition and theory frame of collective memory. Aline Cordonnier et al, compared collective memory studies to an hourglass in the sense that individual memory forms through meso-level (family and friends) collective memory, and clockwise collective memory consists of individual memory, which forms an endless circle. Also, they involve broader ideas rather than past choices and their weights:

Memory study is an interdisciplinary field that gives the possibility to understand communities and individuals’ identity, and generational trauma inheritance [...] from the perspective of part of cognitive psychology, neurophysiology, biology, and, for disorders, neuropsychology, clinical psychology, and psychiatry. [...] From the perspective of the human and social sciences, memory is a subject of analysis for sociology, memory disorders, neuropsychology, clinical psychology, and psychiatry. History, anthropology, philosophy, and communication studies. (Aline Cordonnier et al, 2022, 1)

Analyzing this migration memory not only opens the possibility to understand the choice of migrating and the consequences of migrating, but also to understand in a broader sense the psychological and political weights.

In this thesis, I sought to uncover the motivations driving each individual family, much like tracing how every grain of a sand dune is shaped and shifted by the forces of a migrating wind. Consequently, an individual’s story is collected and analyzed in this paper.

When discussing memories of the First World War, Winter has insisted that political leaders and academic scholars do not shape historical narratives; rather, families are the ones doing the work of remembrance. (Aline Cordonnier et al 2022, 4)

1.2.4 Post-Memory

The post-memory concept allows to understand the past and its influence on the current generation. Significant events in the early 20th century shaped the current generation's lives. These events are given as a post-memory or post-post-memory to the next two generations. Memory is able to shape the next generation's psychology and life quality by inheriting transgenerational trauma. Being raised by individuals who have experienced trauma and the trauma being recalled often leaves a profound impact on future generations. Marianne Hirsch is one of the prominent researchers who devoted many years to post-memory concepts. She suggested that "Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before-to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and effectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. "Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recalling but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation. To grow up with overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one's birth or one's consciousness, is to risk having one's own life stories displaced, even evacuated, by our ancestors" (Marianne Hirsch, *postmemory.com*)

I will employ a post-memory theory based on Marianne Hirsch's definition, mainly as she is one of the big representatives who worked on the post-memory concept. While Hirsch's theory of post-memory is grounded in Holocaust studies, applying it to intergenerational trauma in the postmigration narratives of the Buriads is a new contribution to this theory framework based on oral narratives. This section will analyze how Buriad migration narratives transmit political trauma and identity to the next generations.

2. Historical background

2.1 Russian Colonization

The Qing Dynasty was constantly challenged weakening of the Mongolian Empire; meanwhile, the *Romanov*¹⁴ Dynasty's ambition to expand the Russian Empire was a fortunate opportunity to colonize the Buriads' territory in the 1600s. Tsogtiin Jamts wrote about this:

When the Mongolian Empire weakened, the Qing Dynasty invaded, and the Buriad and *Barga* people were without allegiance to any particular empire or state by the 17th century. The Russian Empire started expanding the country to Siberia and building *Nerchu's*¹⁵ castle, *Erkhuu's*¹⁶ castle in Buriad's land around the 1640s. This was the beginning of the Russian Empire's Colonization of Buriad. (Tsogtiin Jamts, 2017, 10)

The Russian Empire did not initially aim to colonize specifically the Buriads' territory. However, as they expanded east to the Pacific Ocean, they discovered the region's rich natural resources. Upon reaching the western shore of Lake Baikal, they were informed by locals that even wealthier lands and more prosperous clans live in the southeast, beyond the lake's eastern shore. Feodor Kudryavtsev wrote in his book *Buriad Mongolian People's History* in great detail about how this colonization began.

The main attraction to colonize Siberia was to collect hunting fur (mink, beaver, marten, black and red fox) as tax from the Buriad people. In Moscow, among those feudal¹⁷ "Soft goods" was a crucial trade tool, as "mink fur fund" was as crucial

¹⁴ Romanov's reign began in 1613 until 1917.

¹⁵ Нэрчү-Nerchinsk. The first agreement was signed between the Russian Empire and the Qing dynasty on 27th of August 1689, about diplomatic communication and trade between the two. (Baabar, in the foreword 18, *Buriad Mongolian people's history*, trans Baabar, 2024)

¹⁶ Irkutsk in the Mongolian language.

¹⁷ Kudryavtsev's *Buriad Mongolian People's History* (*Буриад Монгол ард түмний түүх*) was published in Leningrad in 1940. Translator Baabar noted in the foreword that this book was published right after Pan-Mongolism fabricated false crime. Therefore, this book cannot avoid Communist ideology, such as the word choice of "feudal". Also, I agreed with the translator's note that this book has Communist ideology, which is why the book should be against the White king's political move. Therefore, Kudryavtsev wrote about it in detail. This reason made this book my main source for this part. (the foreword, 14) All quotes from this book in this chapter are translated from the Mongolian language by the author.

as foreign exchange value when gold and silver funds were limited. [...] Around 1586, the king's treasury fund had 200,000 mink, 10,000 black foxes, 500,000 squirrels, martens, and otters, which were taken from Siberia. Also, underground wealth was another attraction to the Russian Empire. As a result, western Siberia was fully colonized by the 1620s. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 48, 49)

After several tries, Kozak¹⁸ soldiers managed to invade western Siberia and made people pay taxes in fur, and started building fortresses to establish their colonization. Since they had the endless ambition to expand the country, the new land's wealth encouraged them to go further. In order to collect more information, they were sending disguised intelligence as a trader or in any other form.

[...] founding of the *Yeniseisk Ostrog*¹⁹ in 1619, when the territory of the Russian state expanded to the *Yenisei* River, and detachments of *yasak*²⁰ collectors began to move up the *Angara*, Russian army intelligence began to receive information from the local population about new lands lying somewhere further to the east, yet unknown to Russians. Most of this information was just rumors passed between tribal groups in Western Siberia, but it caught the interest of the Tobolsk voivodes²¹ and stimulated the advance of detachments of military men further and further to the east. (Brodnikov, 2023, 3)

Kozak soldiers met with the local communities' resistance constantly. Building a fortress was not proving to be their colonization establishment. There were several big uprisings for approximately a hundred years. Despite strong resistance from local communities, the Russians continued to move forward. In the 17th century 20s, the Yenisei²² the chief sent an intelligence to the Buriad under the purpose of collecting yasak; however, the mission failed. Starting from 1625 until 1627, the Russian Empire soldiers made several failed attempts to reach Buriad's land as they understood they were aiming to get wealthy people

¹⁸ Russian Empire soldiers

¹⁹ Ostrog - a small wooden fortress with towers (blind and passable), ditches, and other defensive fortifications. The walls of the fortress could be in the form of vertically dug sharpened logs, but there could also be chopped walls, sometimes double built with inner space filled with stones.

²⁰ Yasak is tax

²¹ Voivode - a military leader, senior in the army, appointed from among the representatives of the nobility. In the 16th century to the first half of the 18th century, in the Russian state, an official who managed the administrative territory was called. The city of Tobolsk, built 18km from the city of Isker, the former capital of the Siberian Khanate, inherited the status of the main city of Siberia, and thus, mostly representatives of the aristocracy were appointed as Tobolsk voivodes.

²² Yenisei fortress was built in 1919. Fortress marked the beginning of the development of the city.

and a wealthy place. This rumor made the Russian Empire unstoppable. After all these attempts, the Russian Empire reached western Siberia and built the Bratsk fortress. In 1634 and 1635, a major uprising led to the destruction of the Bratsk fortress, which was reduced to ashes. By the 1630s, Buriad resistance to taxation had grown significantly. As a result of prolonged violent conflict, the Buriads were compelled to begin paying taxes between 1641 and 1649 under the gun and sword. However, during this period, several smaller uprisings occurred in opposition to taxation. From 1649 to 1652, for a period of three years, Buriad groups engaged in armed resistance against the Russian Empire's military forces. Further, the Russian Empire's expansion continued to expand around Baikal Lake, Buriad, and Evenk²³ land. A Mongolian envoy was dispatched to Moscow to lodge a formal complaint regarding the construction of a fortress in *Selenge* without prior notification or consent from the Mongolian lords in 1667. However, the complaint was dismissed. In 1668, *Seigun Taij* attacked *Balagan*, *Verkholensk*, and the Ilim fortress.

24

Further, several major uprisings were encountered, such as in 1658 and 1696. In addition, the number of refugees to Mongolia significantly increased by 1660, 1661, due to the torture of tax collector Pokhabov²⁵. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 82-88)

At the time, the Mongolians were occupied with the growing power of the Qing Dynasty (1636-1912). Still, they tried to protect the northern Mongolian lands from Russian expansion through both war and diplomacy—until the Qing Dynasty eventually fully invaded Khalkh Mongolia. This was the sole known attempt to assist the Northern Mongolians at a time when Khalkh Mongolia was preoccupied with affairs involving the Qing Dynasty. Mongolia was defeated in the battle with the Qing Dynasty because Mongolia had lost access to its northern retreat around the Baikal Lake region, formerly a place of refuge in times of weakness, which had by then become Russian territory. (Otgonbayar, 2024, №90)

²³ The Evenk tribe eventually united with the Buriads.

²⁴ Briefly translated from Kudryavtsev, 2024, 50-51, 54-63

²⁵ He was a cruel tax collector; his unsufferable torture became the motivation for uprisings. (Kudryavtsev)

In 1727, the Qing Dynasty and the Russian Empire formally demarcated their border. From that point onward, the Buriad people were officially recognized as an ethnic minority group within the Russian Empire. (Jamts, 2017, 11)

Colonization was established when Kozak soldiers started settling and building fortresses. Onward, peasants started migration for multiple reasons: somewhere promised a loan and reduced tax, as well as on orders such as exile to Siberia. The purpose was to supply food to Russian Empire officials, but also to establish their rightful claim to the land. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 111)

“In 1795 alone, over 5,500 Russian peasants were forcibly resettled in Buriad-Mongolian²⁶ territory. From that point onward, the influx of impoverished Russian peasants steadily increased, culminating in 1835 with the settlement of approximately 22,500 peasants’ families in the region within a single year.” (S. Baatar, 2007, 6) As a result, by the 1800 mid-1800s crop plants were domesticated. Further developed planting practices resulted in different species in specific areas depending on the soil. (Kudryavtsev, 2024,123)

Once the Russian Empire firmly established its control over Buriad territory, it began exploiting the region's resources for profit. They started by planting crops to secure a stable food supply, and later moved on to exploring silver and gold, and developed mining.

By the 18th century, the Russian Empire started mining in Eastern Siberia. In the beginning, RE explored silver and lead. The peak of the silver mining was 1774 and decreased over time. However, beginning in 1776, gold exploration was commenced by RE in the region, which marked a new chapter in the regional mining development. The extraction of metals brought little benefit to the general population, serving primarily the interests of high-ranking officials. Meanwhile, ordinary miners suffered greatly, with many perishing due to famine and harsh conditions, as the 1750s mining regional head, Soimonov, mentioned. Also, Buriads supplied sheep shearers, sheep, and firewood to the industry. (Kudryavtsev, 2024,130)

²⁶ Kudryavtsev and Baatar wrote Siberia as Buriad-Mongolian territory. Buriad-Mongolian territory loses Mongolia in 1957. (Baabar)

All the Buriad people lived around Baigal Lake under the Russian Empire's rule, serving them under its colonization. The Russian Empire's rule began around the 1640s and continued until the early 1900s. During this time, communication between the Russians and the Buriads improved. In the stage of invasion, Russians never traveled in Buriad's territory without a gun. The Buriad people put up strong resistance, and their communication with the Russians was tense in many ways. The following note indicates that, over time, relations between the Buriads and Russians improved, and the two groups gradually learned to coexist more peacefully.

Academician Pallas, who visited Lake Baikal in the 1770s, wrote, "Many people in the Selenge region and the towns and villages of the Daghur²⁷ have intermingled with Mongolians. A mixed population has grown through intermarriage with both Mongols and Russians. However, the Russian Empire's cultural assimilation was strong, so Russian cultural influence profoundly impacted the Buriad people since they followed the Russians. For instance, "In 1782, a state 'recognition' letter token was issued to Damba Dugar Rentsen, the chief baron of the Hori Buryats, praising him for "effectively training his people in Russian skills such as managing their households, constructing buildings, and cultivating crops. Although the number of intermarriages increased then, Pallas observed that the Buriad language was the main language in the Buriads' land when both Russian and the Buriad language were actively used. (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 140-141)

Russians also learned from Buriads to herd livestock, ride horses until the 18th century, and a nomadic lifestyle dominated in the Buriads' territory. (ibid.,142) However, with the increase in population due to colonization, pastures became more limited. Western Buriads were preparing hay for winter, unlike Eastern Buriads, as Georgi noted. Some of them started preparing hay in the 18th century. (ibid.,146)

Hunting remained an important part of life, but more as an entertainment than a livelihood, as agriculture developed significantly. However, hunting was still important for trading or paying yasak in some areas. Some poorer demographics become farmers. Therefore, Buriad culture and lifestyle flourished and became richer over a long time.

²⁷ Daghur is an ethnic group, the area they live in, named Daguur, covers Inner Mongolia, Mongolia, and Russia.

Buriad people started using sewing machines, milk machines, hay machines, etc. By leveraging the geographical advantage between two great empires, cultures, and the Baigal Dalai,²⁸ they were presented with a priceless opportunity to cultivate a rich culture and develop remarkable intelligence

Buriad people suited colonization for years; however, cultural assimilation and political situations became challenging, and these situations led to migration later on.

The situation became even more complicated when the Russian Empire started losing its power slowly. Also, pasture shortage due to population increase made a nomadic lifestyle more challenging. “At the turn of the 20th century, the process of Russification of the Buriad-Mongolians became stronger and deeper. Out of the 1,190,000 km² of land previously inhabited by the Buriad-Mongolians, 1,180,000 people lived there, while the Buriads accounted for 288,000, which is only 24 percent of the total population.” (S. Baatar, 2007, 9)

“Under the law enacted on April 23, 1901, the administrative structure of the Russian Empire was formally extended to Buriad land, mandating that judicial and governmental affairs be conducted according to Russian procedures. This reform was followed by a significant increase in taxation. During World War I, 20,878 Buriad men were conscripted into the army, and large numbers of the region’s finest horses and livestock were requisitioned to supply the military’s food provisions.” (ibid.)

The Buriad people thought Russians were monsters when they began attacking by robbing and killing with truncheons, as they had lots of facial hair, green eyes, and a cruel mannerism. It is important to note that Russians are called “monsters” by Buriad people in casual speech. The word for monster is “*Мангас*” (*Mangas*) in Mongolian, and its plural “*Мангад*” (*Mangad*) is used as a nickname for Russian people. The derogatory sense of this nickname has been diluted after being used casually over the centuries. Over the centuries, later generations started forgetting why the Russians were called monsters and the cruel etymology of “*Mangad*.” Therefore, the altered stories serve as an explanation why the Buriad people call Russians *Мангад*-monsters. (Baabar, 2024, 13)

²⁸ The 'Ocean' in Mongolian. Mongolians respect Baigal Lake as ocean.

2.2 The early 20th century forced migration of the Buriad

The wave of Migration to Mongolia and China began around the 1910s, with the motivations and experiences of migrants varying significantly from individual to individual and family to family. The migration process was far from smooth; migrants faced numerous hardships, including intense homesickness, painful separation from loved ones, and the challenges of adapting to unfamiliar environments both during their journey and after resettlement. Here, the motivation behind this migration will be explored, with an examination of whether it was a result of coercion or voluntary choice.

Historical sources suggest several different motivations behind this migration. Tsogtiin Jamts, an Inner Mongolian writer, whose parents migrated to China, the Shinekheen River²⁹, a first-generation immigrant after migration.

After the Russian Revolution of 1905³⁰ and its defeat, the First World War, which started in 1914 which expedited the Russian Empire's weakness as these events were an alarm to the Buriad people to consider their future. Leading aristocrats and heads of the religions grew increasingly concerned about the uncertainties of the future. The October Revolution of 1917 ushered in a period of widespread instability across Russia, significantly affecting regions such as Buriad, Mongolia. In the aftermath of the revolution, lawlessness and disorder intensified, particularly in border areas, where incidents of robbery, looting, and general violence became increasingly common. These conditions had a profound impact on the Buriad population, especially those residing near the frontier, compelling many to consider migration as a means of securing safety and stability. Motivated by a desire to escape violence and preserve their livelihoods, significant numbers of Buriad families began migrating during the late 1910s and early 1920s to recently independent Mongolia and Khölönbuir China³¹. (Jamts, 2017, 15)

²⁹ Those who migrated to China resettled on the Shinekheen riverbank. Therefore, they called Shinekheen Buriads among Mongolian Buriads. They were first-wave migrants.

³⁰ Russian Revolution of 1905, uprising that was instrumental in convincing Tsar Nicholas II to attempt the transformation of the Russian government from an autocracy into a constitutional monarchy. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution-of-1905>

³¹ I translated briefly from Tsogtiin Jamts "Shinekheen Buriad-Mongolians, 2007. I preferred this book as a primary source as this book was published in China and its references mostly memory narratives and sources published at the end of the 1800s. I believe there is no involvement of Soviet propaganda between Mongolia and the Soviet Union.

The Mongolian historian, PhD Otgonbayar³² defined migration motivations were to avoid the Communist People's Government due to the reasons of those who were fighting in the Russian Empire Army in WWI, those who were fighting in the White Army against the Red Bolsheviks after the 1917 revolution, also monks labeled as enemies, requisitioning their pastureland and increased tax, those who were avoiding Collectivism, in addition there was an offer from Mongolia that they would provide land without tax. Participation on the side of the White Army, even when coerced through forced mobilization, was sufficient to label individuals as enemies in the eyes of the Red Bolsheviks.

In another source, similarly, given as

[...] migrations of individual families and clans in search of pastures across an almost symbolic border. This was followed by several waves of refuge from the land policy of the tsarist³³ authorities and the mobilization of the First World War, the turmoil of the Civil War, and the policy of the Soviet government. Buryats settled mainly in the bordering northeastern regions of Outer Mongolia. [...] Migrants were exempted from taxes for a period of three years. 35517 people (9243 families) received Mongolian citizenship in 1923-1929. The rest were evicted to the USSR after 1924. As a result, the Buryat population amounted to 35 thousand people (according to the 1924 General Census).³⁴ (Baldano, et al, 2020, 609)

Yet, Kudryavtsev and Baatar wrote that one of the motivations was Pan Mongolism that thrived after 1911 revolution in Mongolia among all Mongolian nations. However, another source noted it was an accusation.

“[...] They turned into “bourgeois nationalists”, and the word “pan-Mongolism” became a label and a political accusation.” (Baldano, et al, 2020, 609)

The interview with the Buriad people shared a common, general understanding of migration — that it was a dangerous and uncertain time when anything could happen to anyone. They cannot describe the exact motive behind their family migration decision.

³² Historian PhD Yo. Otgonbayar's “Mongolian Lost Histories” podcast №93. He is a writer of the Mongolian Lost Stories 3-volume books. He is working on adjusting history, which was fabricated by Communist ideology during the Communist regime.

³³ Russian word meaning king.

³⁴ Baldano, Marina N., Victor I. Dyatlov, and Svetlana V. Kirichenko. "Buryat Migrations and Diasporas in Historical Space and Time (20th-21st Centuries)." *Журнал Сибирского федерального университета. Гуманитарные науки* 13, no. 5 (2020): 716-727.

Often, their stories began with their decision to migrate to China or Mongolia due to the potential dangers around them. Over the generations with Soviet propaganda, the motivation behind each family's migration became obscured, as many were afraid to share it. Even so, nobody could tell what the potential danger was. Only there was one common thread in their accounts: "Chaos³⁵ began and they confused who was the Whites, who was the Reds [to the commoner Buriads, everyone looked Russian³⁶]." Many groups, such as Ataman Semenov's³⁷ soldiers and Baron Ungern's men, besides the Reds and Whites, were responsible for the violence and confusion. Narrators were beginning their story with "That time was chaotic, dangerous" in every interview I conducted, including secondary sources, but no one could provide specific details about how they had been troubled. Here, Ataman Semenov and Baron Ungern were aligned with the White Army; however, Buriad commoners perceived the presence of multiple competing groups, which reflects the considerable confusion and uncertainty they experienced during this disturbing period. However, those who had the privilege to get information and be able to predict political situations and social upheaval, such as the rich and those in high-ranking positions, migrated before real chaos began. Therefore, they wanted to move even farther, like Japan.

Damchaagiin Tserenkhand said:

Some wanted to move even further than Inner Mongolia, like Japan. However, people say that some accidentally got the wrong ship and ended up in France.

The decision to move to Mongolia was dangerous, as they were considering that they might get trouble under the existing political circumstances in the Russian Empire. In order to conceal their intentions, the individuals involved disguised their migration as part of a routine nomadic movement. They gradually approached the Mongolian border, mimicking the typical seasonal pasture shifts characteristic of traditional nomadic life. However, as they got near the border and the risk of detection increased significantly, they were compelled to hide in the forest and continue their journey.

Jigjidjaviin Lkham shared her post-memory about her ancestor's migration:

³⁵ Mostly narrators referred to the robbings by the Bolshevik Red and White soldiers as "chaos" as they could not tell who is who. Buriad's land became a battlefield between white soldiers and the Red soldiers, who lacked food and clothing supplies, so they robbed the Buriads to survive. Narrators mentioned "үймээн or бужигналдаан", which I translated as chaos.

³⁶ Obtained from an interview

³⁷ Captain Grigorii Mikhailovich Semenov, a Cossack officer in Siberia who led one of the fiercest White armies fighting against the Bolsheviks. (Humphrey, *The Slippages of Exemplary Action: The Case of Ataman Semenov*, 8)

My family arrived in Mongolia around 1923 or 1924, though I can't recall the exact year. Tsegmid *avgai*, my father's oldest sister, was about 7 or 8 years old at the time (she was born in 1918). Tsegmid *avgai* spoke about how that winter was particularly harsh. They had to use shovels to clear the snow just to find enough grass for the livestock. During those spring days, my grandfather and father began disappearing for days at a time without saying a word to the children. One day, Tsegmid *avgai* went to deliver food to them and found them working on a horse cart in the forest, busy with woodwork. When people asked where they had gone, my grandmother would answer that they had left to find better pasture for the livestock.

That spring, we moved. Dashtseren *nagats* (Lkham's grandmother's brother's son) was the only child in his family, so his family decided to stay behind with other relatives not to separate him from others. However, Dashtseren *nagats* (she explained that he was Baldorj's father) chose to follow my father, saying, "I will go together with *hüriahai's* family." So, we moved together to Mongolia. On the day we set out, my father went in one direction, and Dashtseren *nagats's* family went in the opposite direction to make it look like a normal pasture change, to hide the fact that we were moving together. If we moved together in the same direction, it would definitely attract attention.

We traveled through forests and slept under the trees. At night, we had to tie the dogs' mouths to keep them quiet. We were all afraid of being caught. I once asked my father where we were going, and he replied, "*хайхан Монголдoo ошожо байнавж*" — "Going to my beautiful Mongolia." After several days of travel, my father told me we had finally reached beautiful Mongolia. I had been asleep, and when I woke up, the first thing I saw was a huge river. I believe it was the *Onon* River. We settled near *Bayan-Uul*, a neighboring sum.

Similarly, as a new daughter-in-law, another young girl moved to Mongolia with her newly wedded husband and his extended family. Her daughter-in-law, Damchaagiin Tserenkhand, shared that she had no idea where they were moving and why.

My mother-in-law was orphaned as a little girl. She lived with her father in present-day Russian territory. She was married off when she was about 16 or 17. Her in-laws decided to move to another place. *Tsempil Boldiin* (my mother-in-law) and her in-laws were traveling, and they ended up in present-day Chinese territory, which is on the eastern bank of the *Khalkh* River. This area was the borderline between China and Mongolia. They settled there and were living peacefully and well.

Another story shared by Galsantserengiin Oyun also revealed that those people were so careful when they crossed the border back then:

They were traveling through the forest, and at nighttime, they were tying cows' mouths to keep them quiet to get across the border.

The data above does not show detailed motivations for their families' moving to Mongolia, as in the story above. The children had no idea; their parents never told them about it then nor later. Every story here has one common aspect: this migration wasn't forced in the literal sense in how they chose to move, but it was a survival response for everyone involved. They felt they had no choice but to leave. As a result of this migration, the Buriad people are now spread across three different countries. Some stayed in Russia, some migrated to Mongolia, and others relocated to China.

2.3 Political repression in Mongolia

Early in the 1930s, the Mongolian countryside was peaceful; herders' lives continued as usual, and cars were a rare sight. However, cars' presence became more common, marking a significant yet unfortunate historical change. Those days with cars were the end of life for some, the end of a glimpse of light that Buriads were about to experience after migration. The Mongolian Great Purge commenced in 1932 with the Lkhumbé political case allegation. "The fabricated 'Lkhumbo Case', the secretary of the Mongolian People's Party, the head of the Mongolian trade unions, became the peak of this struggle." (Baldano et al, 2020, 609) This began in 1931 with Soviet pressure to find espionage or counterrevolutionaries. The Soviet government's pressure on Mongolian leaders was inevitable. Therefore, they had to start arresting possible enemies with the mentioned fabricated case.

[...] the fifteenth anniversary of the Revolution [in 1936], then Stalin commemorated the fifteenth anniversary by sending Choibalsan a present four days later. The gift included four rifles and thirty thousand bullets. Did this mean that thirty thousand Mongols were to be destroyed? Stalin was an Oriental man. He appreciated symbolic gestures and expressions of irony and humor. As it turned out later, the number of people killed by Choibalsan was in fact about thirty thousand. (Kaplonski, 2003, 6)

Further, he explained that the gift might be a sign of pressure from the Soviet Union on Mongolia in order to establish Communism firmly.

[...] The heart of this passage is the claim of the gift. Whether the story is true or not may be interesting, but ultimately irrelevant. It is the function of the story that matters here. The story of the gift ultimately exonerates Choibalsan from responsibility for the deaths. As almost any anthropologist will tell you, giving a gift creates an obligation on the recipient. The purges are thus not only foreshadowed by this story, but rendered almost obligatory. (ibid.)

This story could be true, as political repression began intensely in 1937. Therefore, most people in Mongolia understand that political repression only began in 1937. People say

about political repression that officers were catching people from the pasture on the way if the number of headcount was missing from their daily goal.

In a brief span of about eighteen months, from late 1937 to early 1939, almost an entire stratum of Mongolian society was eliminated. Starting in the fall of 1937, at least 22,000 people were killed out of a population that numbered at most 800,000. Although the victims came from all levels of society, many of them – at least 18,000 – were Buddhist lamas. Others were political and academic figures, or nobility, although ordinary workers and herders were also included. Buriad Mongols also suffered disproportionately, partly because they were well represented in the intelligentsia and partly because many of them had previously fled from Siberia shortly after the Bolshevik victory and were, therefore, suspected of being disloyal. (ibid., 2)

In total, 50 meetings were held by the “Special, fully authorized Commission” from 1937 to 1939; a sum of 19895 people were killed, which shows that 398 people were killed per day during this political repression. During the Khalkhiin Goliin³⁸ war, 237 people were martyred in total, and 32 people went missing. Figures showing the situation were far worse than the war. (S. Baatar 2007, 45)

Although killings started from the 1920s until 1985, they only became intense in the 1930s.

In Mongolia, those “Special, fully authorized commission” soldiers used to wear green hats, and those people were known to people as “green hat officers”. “Green hat” officers started arresting people from their homes, from livestock pastures, from hay fields, or wherever they were, day or night. “Green hat” officers were the nickname given by the Mongolians with a despised mental impression of those who performed this purge under the Mongolian Ministry of Domestic Affairs, also known as “Do yam”.

Buriad people were welcomed by Mongolia; however, the situation changed by the 1930s.

“White king’s who were conscripted and served the Russian Empire, mostly under order. This is the reason why the Buriad people were exiled or killed disproportionately during political repression from 1932 to 1938. [...] all Buryats

³⁸ Khalkh River war started in 1939.

as a group became political enemies and came under attack. Almost every family suffered from mass repression. Up to 90% of men in some Buryat regions were physically destroyed” (Baldano et al, 2020, 610)

The Soviet government’s idea to grant a visa for Buriad to Mongolia was the first step to keep Buriad Mongolians from migrating to Mongolia. The Buriad people were classified into several types of traitors according to visa:

- “Untrusted Buriad” – those who migrated to Mongolia with a visa and never returned,
- “Traitor and opposer of the Soviet Union Buriad” – who migrated to Mongolia after 1924 without a visa,
- “White (king) Buriad” – who migrated before 1924
- Japanese collaborator or espionage Buriad

This classification was created by the Soviet KGB³⁹ and performed by Dotood Yam. The Soviet Union put spies among Buriads who migrated to Mongolia to find out any uprising against the Soviet government because they had suspicion that many intelligent people had Pan Mongolism ambition. (S Baatar 2007, 23)

By the beginning of the 1930s, the situation had changed radically. The authorities of the USSR became disillusioned with the ideas of the world revolution, including in terms of uniting the Mongolian peoples under their auspices. The Buryat part of the political elite of Mongolia lost their political confidence. They turned into “bourgeois nationalists”, and the word “pan-Mongolism” became a label and a political accusation. The Buryat population of the north-eastern aimaks⁴⁰ of Mongolia began to be considered in the categories of “white emigrants”, opponents of the Soviet regime, and counter-revolutionaries. (Baldano et al, 2020, 609)

³⁹ The KGB was created in 1954 to serve as the “sword and shield of the [Communist Party](#).” **Russian in full:** Комитет Государственной Безопасности, **English:** Committee for State Security. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/KGB/Creation-and-role-of-the-KGB>

⁴⁰ provinces

In the political elite of Mongolia torn by group conflicts, a group of representatives of the youth “Khudon” wing, Khalkha by origin, stood out. They joined the fierce struggle for power, striving to push back the veterans, mostly Buryats, under the banner of the struggle with the “right”. The struggle of generations and ideologies took on an ethnic character. Supported by the workers of the Comintern, the “leftists” their Buryat rivals, many were destroyed physically as well. (Baldano et al, 2020, 609)

These suspicions changed the situation, which made political repression inseparable from Buriad’s migration in the early 20th century. Many people talk about political repression when they talk about their ancestors’ stories, since everyone was affected by this political repression, particularly in the Buriad community. Not only those who are exiled or killed have suffered, but also their families. Only a few know detailed, exact stories about their parents or grandparents accused of a crime or the reason behind persecution. Most people found out later in 1997 when the government started paying for acquittal. This is very common among the victims’ relatives all over Mongolia. Kaplonski shared a typical example of how stories are being lost. A Mongolian college student told me:

One member of my family was a high-ranking monk in a rural monastery, and he got killed just because he was a monk. When I was a small boy, my grandma used to talk about him a little bit, but my mom always stopped her from talking “nonsense”. (Kaplonski, 2003, 4)

Countless families were torn apart by repression. In the interview, the data reflected some of those families’ stories. *Jigjidjaviin Lkham* shared the story of her grandfather, whose name was *Bukhiin Bat*, who was persecuted in his hay field.

Jigjidjaviin Lkham: One day, Bat (my grandfather) was taken away while he was making hay at dawn. Firstly, the green hat people stopped by at their home and asked about Bat. My grandmother responded that he was in the hay field. Shortly after the green hat people left, they heard someone shouting. When my grandma went out of their ger⁴¹ she was told that “They took him away”. Later, my uncle Batiin Batdorj went to Siberia to bring back his father. And they got back together by 1952.

⁴¹ Yurt.

Shariin Batkhuyag and his wife *Baljinnyamiin Altan-Useg* are talking about her mother's repression story:

My mother's name is *Myadag Bold* (Болдын Мядар). She was born somewhere in the Russian Empire's territory. By 1937, she was arrested by the "green hat" officers for being suspected of the crime of "Lookhuuz⁴² espionage," even when she had no idea who *Lookhuuz* was, and ended up being exiled back to the Russian territory, where they must endure a 15-year sentence in a remote location within Siberia. The arrested suspects were riding horses and carrying their clothing on a handcart. Exiled people were forced to live a rather uncomfortable life under constant surveillance with very limited resources, like food and shelter, in the harsh Siberian landscape. This was experienced as a great hardship for those 10 or more people who relocated to the same place. They had been looking for an opportunity to escape and get back to their Mongolian home for a year, when one night they finally escaped [although not many details about this were mentioned] [...]

[...] She joined her brother *Radnaa*, who became a guard in Bayandun soum. There were guards or "green hat" people named *Samhaa Damdin*, *Batiin Garjil* in the area. My mother did not find peace after she reunited with her brother. *Batiin Garjil* continued to be threatened by the "green hat" officers with being sent back to Siberia unless she married a specific man he named. Out of her desperation, my mother agreed to marry that man, but she was praying that "Oh God, my future husband would at least be similar in age to me". Her husband, my father, was of a similar age to hers, as she wished. However, my father was partially paralyzed as his right hand and right leg were not functioning. They adopted 2 kids, including me. *Batiin Garjil* used to take her to the mountain in order to frighten her, pointing his gun and saying, "I will kill you" from time to time. Every time she decides to endure her destiny and closes her eyes, she responds, "Okay, kill me without torturing me". However, he never killed her. My mother was considered a Russian citizen until 1969, which meant she needed to get registered every year in the Dornod province center. She would undertake the journey on horseback, completing the round trip in just a single day by swapping out horses along the way.

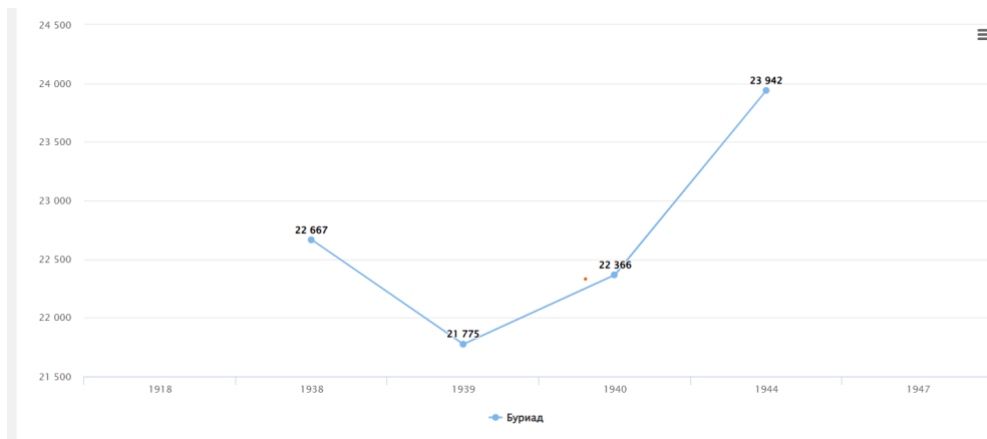
There is documented evidence indicating that individuals known as the "green-hat people" exploited political repression for personal gain, as illustrated in the case described here. Another narrative from *Khövchiin Jonon Vangiin khoshuu* inspired a piece of literature recounting the story of a man named *Danzan*, a green-hat figure, who committed a political offense against another man in order to marry his wife. This incident later evolved into what became known as the *Lhumbe* case. Victims' families were also subjected to mistreatment, including the requisition of ordinary household items, such as beds, under the pretense of labeling them as 'enemies of the people' or 'counterrevolutionaries'—terms commonly fabricated to justify persecution. The political repression extended beyond adult men; it also claimed the lives of women, children, and even pregnant women, many of whom were executed extrajudicially, in remote areas, without a formal trial. As a result, descendants often cannot locate official records or sentencing documents concerning their fathers' or grandparents' alleged crimes in state archives. These conditions have significantly complicated efforts to determine the

⁴² Lookhuuz case was another fabricated crime.

exact number of victims, and existing figures vary widely across sources. (S. Baatar et al, 2004)

The acquittal in response to political repression took place starting from 1962. Relatives of those persecuted victims were stating that “my father/grandfather wasn’t valued as a palm-sized paper” (Many people call the acquittal paper a “palm-sized paper”. This is not about the literal paper size, idea of comparing to human value).

The image below shows the Buriad population during the genocide years in Mongolia.



Graph 1 The graph shows a comparison of the population from 1938 to 1940.

3. Data analysis and results, discussion

3.1 Resettlement in New Land

The primary purpose of migration was to have a peaceful life, so Buriads believed moving to Mongolia would offer them safety. Although Buriads were welcomed with a comfortable offer of the pasture with no tax, and jobs from Mongolia, situations varied for each individual. The first challenge they faced was obtaining land permits. They had sent their delegation to a government conference asking for land permission with a headcount of the families:

Defining how many families in which *khoshuu* (copied S. Baatar's book format):

- ✓ *Ulz khoshuunii Buriad families, 1300 approx.*
- ✓ *Onon khoshuunii Buriad families, 1000 approx.*
- ✓ *Khalkh Gol River Buriad families, 450 approx.*
- ✓ *The Yöröö River Buriad families, 400 approx.*
- ✓ *The Malgar mountain Buriad families, 200 approx.*
- ✓ *The Eg, Selenge River Buriad families, 75 approx.*

Around 300 families want to establish their khoshuu, and many other families want to be citizens of one of the other khoshuus. Thus:

- ✓ *Families in total 4361*
- ✓ *Males 5149*
- ✓ *Female 5266*
- ✓ *Minor-male 2965*
- ✓ *Minor-female 2683*
- ✓ *In total 16063 (S. Baatar, 2007, 17)*

These people had official land permission in 1923 by the conference and lived in Northern Mongolia in different provinces, and have been living there until now. Resettlement was politically supported by the government under certain circumstances.

Such kindness of the authorities had quite practical reasons. For the formation of modern society and the state, the Buryats, with their education, knowledge of crafts and advanced technologies of animal husbandry and agriculture, represented valuable human material. The Buryat intellectuals and politicians, directed by the communist regime of Russia, at first formed the most influential

group in the country's leadership. They sought to create a nation-state in the vast expanse of the Mongolian world in the modern European sense of the time. On the path to realizing this goal, they lobbied for the interests of the Buryat immigrants, taking an active part in their self-organization and arrangement. For some time, the nationalism of Buryat intellectuals and politicians did not contradict the Bolshevik ideas of the world revolution. (Baldanoa et al, 2020, 609)

There were many Buriad migrants who were doing important jobs as they were educated, particularly with excellent knowledge of the Russian and Mongolian languages, which was well suited to the situation of the Soviet Union and Mongolian collaboration. Apparently, resettling was hard for some areas since this was a border crossing migration into a newly independent country. In some areas, resettled migrants were ostracized by the locals, yet in some less inhabited areas, there was less discrimination or none at all. The rich native people of *Barga* disliked new migrants near *Khalkhgo*⁴³, yet the migrants still had to work for the *Barga* for life. Also, some of them were under extreme poverty due to being robbed before they moved, also needed to leave their wealth behind to move in a hurry, secretly, or due to their poor origin. There are widespread rumors about the Buriads' poor life in the past: "They have nothing much to offer, only boiled curd⁴⁴ in horsemeat broth, give small-sized cotton as gifts during the lunar new year". However, some *Khalkh* Mongolians even welcomed the Buriads by helping with food.⁴⁵

[...] Migrating to a new place, we had to leave lots of household goods behind, and we were poor; we used to ask for dairy products from *Khalkhs*, and they used to help us a lot. [...]

The data collected in Bayandun did not reveal any trouble with discrimination. This shows that adapting to new places varied depending on where they were resettling. A below narrative⁴⁶ showing why they chose the area they decided to settle:

[...] One day, someone riding a bay horse approached us, and he was my *Buyant hud* (*hud* by *Badamtsoo avgai*). He suggested we better move to Bayandun, a beautiful open pasture, stirrup high grasses, and a better place to move to [...].

⁴³ Khalkhgo is a river in southeastern Mongolia and Inner Mongolia. It is 233 km long and originates from the Greater Khingan Range, flowing into Dalai Lake and Buir Lake.

⁴⁴ Boiling yogurt is one variant of the traditional Mongolian dairy product. Called "aarts". Here I used the English word curd. During winter, we freeze it in order to store it. This frozen curd in hot water or broth suits cold weather.

⁴⁵ Interview with Galsantserengiin Oyun

⁴⁶ Interview with Jigjidjaviin Lkham

Also, it is unknown whether they knew the Mongolian territory well or were just aiming to cross the border.

The process of newly immigrated individuals attempting to adapt to a new land and establish a sense of belonging continued for decades. Damchaagiin Tserenkhand shared that some immigrants changed their names to avoid possible dangers following the migration.

[...] I hesitate if my mother's real name is *Boldiin Tsempil* because there are many stories about changing names after fleeing back then. [...]

Even though political belonging was complicated, as spoken in the story of *Boldiin Myadag*. She was considered a Russian citizen until the end of the 1960s. Her son *Shariin Batkhuyag* said that:

[...] My mother was considered a Russian citizen until 1969, which meant she needed to get registered every year in the Dornod province center. She would undertake the journey on horseback, completing the round trip in a single day by swapping horses along the way.⁴⁷ [...]

The Buriad people's belonging to Mongolia was always fragile politically until 1990, when the communist regime collapsed through the Democratic Revolution, as many people hid their identity as Buriad when they got a new document or filled out an application form due to fear that their original identity might cause trouble. Therefore, in order to remain safe, many were introducing themselves as *Khalkh*⁴⁸.

Up to 90% of men in some Buryat regions were physically destroyed during political repression. The result was that the Buryats sought to hide their origin, did not wear national clothes, and did not use the Buryat language in public places. According to the Mongolian researcher R. Regzendorzh, the extermination of most men caused an increase in the number of mixed Khalkha-Buryat marriages, which sharply accelerated the assimilation processes. (Baldanoa et al, 2020,610)

Nowadays, among the Mongolians, there is a well-known stereotype that Buriad people are aggressive and always carry a knife with them, and are ready to stab you for any reason. There are many anecdotes about Buriad weddings in Mongolia; good wedding guests supposedly fight and stab each other, which makes the wedding exciting. Most Mongolians tend to be intimidated when discovering that one was Buriad, expecting that

⁴⁷ Batkhuyag does not know whether she owns a Russian passport or a Mongolian passport. I am unable to find.

⁴⁸ Mongolian majority ethnic group. 83% of total Mongolian population by 2020.

one might have a knife. I was looking for the origin of this rumor, and I was told a hypothesis that old-time *Khalkh* Mongolians used to bully them as refugees. Eventually, when they got fed up, they frightened those bullies with a knife to protect themselves. This act of self-protection might have been twisted into the stereotype of the Buriad people, then spread among Mongolians to vilify⁴⁹ the Buriad people. This way, it might be more justified to arrest them during political repression if they were identified as cruel people. Since creating false crime, accusing them of being “the enemy“. “Rumors and legends become a fertile ground for clichés, as people tend to reproduce stereotype-consistent rather than stereotype-inconsistent messages” [...] “The motivation the narrators have in creating and spreading the rumors should not be underestimated, as religious and political leaders have been using rumors and legends to shape people’s moods, often based on ideological preconceptions people may already have.” (Astapova A, 2020).

3.2 Place-lore

At that point, Mongolia represented a refuge, a place of relative safety, as an independent country by the 1911 Revolution. On 29th December 1911, the Mongols declared independence from the collapsing Qing dynasty.

The narrative below underscores the complex and often painful realities of migration. It reveals how the value of a place is not static, but deeply shaped by personal experience, political context, and relationships. When a place holds such meaning, the struggle to reach it becomes not only understandable but necessary.

However, Myadag Bold’s subsequent return to Mongolia, as represented in the narrative below, occurred under entirely different circumstances: the person had been deported from Siberia due to political repression. This second movement was not simply a search for safety, but a determined effort to reunite with her family. Her brother’s presence in Mongolia transformed the place into something more than a refuge — it became home, defined not by geography but by emotional and familial connection.

My mother’s name is Myadag Bold. She was born in a small village in the Russian Empire’s territory. She moved with her family to Mongolia, among the last refugees by the 1920s [approximately]. They started their refugee life in Tsagaan-Ovoo soum of Dornod province of

⁴⁹ This is my assumption

Mongolia. However, she was arrested by “green hat” officers on suspicion of carrying out “Lookhuuz spying “crime during the 1937 political repression, and she was exiled back to Russian territory for 15 years’ punishment. Arrested suspects rode horses and carried their clothing in a hand cart. Exiled people were forced to live under surveillance with very limited food and an uncomfortable life in the Russian landscape since they had been exiled. This was a hardship for those over 10 people. They were looking for an opportunity to get back home for a year, and one night, they finally escaped, pushing the guard to the ravine. As escapers, they were hiding in the forest during the day and traveling at night. It was a traumatic trip with no food, full of fear and trouble, such as having to pass through the flooded Onon River. Fortunately, my mother’s horse was a well-known swimmer named “Yearling of the Jonon mare.” Obviously, they were unable to hunt as they wished due to a lack of bullets. One day, they were lucky enough to hunt down a wolf. She used to say a lot about how wolf meat was so delicious while you were in a famine situation. Finally, they reached closer to the Chinese border, a place named Numrug. There, they had lots of bird cherries until they were stricken with colic. The only way to get over the colic was the wolf skin, which they were carrying by strapping it onto the saddle. They⁵⁰scraped the wolf skin from the inside to get oil or skin to consume, which was helpful. Everyone else wanted to go to Shineehen. Meanwhile, my mother was the only one who wanted to stay in Mongolia to find her own brother. Again, she needed to run away to Bayandun soun by herself from them. While she was traveling further on her own, she asked local families about her brother, and he finally rejoined her.

As a child, I remember that my neighbor, elder Batiin Batdorj, was sharing his mother’s memories of homesickness:

Some mornings, my mother used to talk about her homeland after the cuckoo calls. Cuckoo calls remind her of her homeland, and she used to say, “Cuckoo calls every morning in my northern birthland” with tears.

Thus, place is not only physical but could also be sound or any memory. “When places are actively sensed, the physical landscape becomes wedded to the landscape of the mind, to the roving imagination, and where the latter may lead is anybody’s guess.” (Ülo Valk, 8)

The story below reveals that memory could define the place one lives in, as well as one’s identity. In this story, memory plays a crucial role. Damchaagiin Tserenkhand shared her mother-in-law, Boldiin Tsempil’s, migration and resettlement story:

My mother-in-law was orphaned as a little girl. She lived with her father in present-day Russian territory. She was married off when she was about 16 or 17. Her in-laws decided to move to another place. *Boldiin Tsempil* (my mother-in-law) and her in-laws were traveling, and they ended up in present-day Chinese territory on the eastern bank of the *Khalkh* River. This area was the border between China and Mongolia. They settled there and were living peacefully and well. One day, *Tsempil* was out herding livestock. She saw her three-year-old daughter crying while holding a snake when she returned home. The mother was frightened for her daughter’s safety, and so, she told her daughter to let go of the snake. The snake attacked the little girl as soon as the daughter let go. The little girl died because of the snake bite on the same day.

The grieving family didn’t want to live in a place tainted with so much misfortune. So, they moved back to the other side of the river (not back to where they originally came from), which today is Mongolian territory. At that time, there were no clear borders between China and Mongolia. When the boundaries were clearly demarcated (a process between 1933 and 1962), *Tsempil*’s family

⁵⁰ Yearling of the Jonon mare- see a Singing expression section.

realized they could not cross the border at will. So, for several nights, they discussed deciding which country's citizenship they would take. Their other relatives decided to live on the Chinese side of the territory. Only *Tsempil's* family didn't want to go across the river (to the Chinese territory) because it was the place where her (*Tsempil's*) daughter had died. This is why all my husband's relatives live in Hailar, China.

Not wanting to live where their daughter passed away, the grieving family's "memory" isolated them from other relatives until 1992. The grieving memory decided their political belonging, not only where they lived. The story shows how strong its influence is when a place is actively connected to memory.

In another narrative of *Erdeniin Semjid*, told by her children, she had been looking for her husband among dead bodies on the *Öndörkhaan* mountainside until an old man accompanying her was assuring her by saying, "*Khurmaan*, enough now, it seems impossible, let's go back". Normally, people would not get close to that kind of evil place where genocide happened. However, "that very evil place where people were shot became "hope" for *Semjid*. She might see her husband for the last time and might be able to bury him respectfully, or have hope that her husband might still be alive, even if she could not find him there. Her will is changing the evil place to hope.

Below, *Sambuugiin Ishbaljir* shared his memory of bringing his mother to "her homeland".

In 1954, after graduating from school and becoming an engineer, on my way back to my hometown, I visited my grandmother's birthplace in the *Tavtaanai* region of *Agin* province, where I met with my relatives. I brought back about ten flowers and a handful of soil from the native land she had left 35 years ago, wrapped in a handkerchief. I offered the soil wrapped in the handkerchief to my mother. I also witnessed my mother's joy here once again. (S. Baatar, 2007, 87)

Homesickness was challenging for everyone who migrated. The above story shows that place can be transferable when memory and object are employed. The narrator was able to bring her mother's homeland to her with memory (flower, scent, color), and the soil is a symbol of the land. Places are not only environments, they are also a vessel for memory.

3.3 Collective memory

Buriads in Mongolia share the memory of migration from the Baigal Lake region to Mongolia. The political repression began by the time they started resettling and getting used to the new environment, barely. All these collective memories caused Buriad people to register themselves as Khalkh or not talk much about their origin. Each individual's

personal experience memory changes identity and the individual's choice, which is weighed until it becomes collective memory, which can shape society.

Badarchiin Bayarmaa (age 48) was raised by her grandparents. She shared her memory about her grandmother:

My grandmother used to say that only those whiny people complain about what they have been through; otherwise, those who didn't experience the disturbance of that time. I always remember what she told me as she nurtured me as I grew up. So, I do not complain about life, I have to be hardworking.

This narrative suggests a collective experience of hardship wherein individuals not only endured similar challenges but also internalized a shared response of emotional resilience and toughness. Over time, such experiences became normalized within the community, contributing to the formation of a psychologically hardened subsequent generation. This shapes the critical role of memory in both societal values and individual psychological adjustment and development. Thus, the tragic experience shaped people tougher, silencing them. Even under silence, memory passed across generations, influenced by its shadow to shape the next generation.

the belated reception of those events, an inquiry into the ways those events are remembered individually, how they are passed on or silenced as collective experience, how they are publicly recognized, and in what forms of media and ritualized commemorations they are being continually reconstructed. (Cammack, Susanne, 2016,2)

After a long time, the Buriad people lived under fear and hid their origin due to fear. People undertook efforts to recover their original identity wearing traditional clothes, also commemorating the 1990 Democratic revolution, and the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since 1994, the Buriad people in Mongolia have been celebrating the Altargana Folk Song Festival. Over time, the festival has grown significantly in scope—it is no longer limited to music, but now includes a wide range of cultural and athletic competitions. The primary motivation behind the festival is the Buriads' desire to reclaim and restore their original identity through the cultural event as a means of commemorating, as well as to gain recognition for their heritage and historical experiences.

3.4 Post-memory

The narrative data being used in this thesis reveals that transgenerationally inherited fear is common. The narrators cannot specify what the fear of the previous generation is besides saying “time was dangerous”. The first generation’s fear prevented the second and third generations from learning every detail of the migration story. This shows that the second and third generations inherited previous generations’ fear without realizing it consciously. The second and third generations’ storytelling attitude emphasizes its traumatic weight. Apparently, the second generation bears more empathy than the third generation. The second generation tended to recount their stories with a consistently somber tone, while those of the third generation exhibited a more complex emotional response, blending both enthusiasm and sorrow into their narratives. Yet, the fourth generation does not emphasize fear; they are neutral in emotion. Fourth generation knows only the minimal knowledge, which generally stops at “yes, our ancestors migrated, we still have relatives in Russia now. Buriad people were massively eliminated by political repression.” However, there are some members of the fourth generations raised by the second generation who have the same emotional attitude as the third generations. The fifth generation has almost zero knowledge. Even interview questions need to be elaborated. Some asked, “Are you saying that I am from Russia?” with a surprised tone.

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness, is to risk having one’s own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation. It is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. These events happened in the past, but their effects continue into the present. This is, I believe, the experience of postmemory and the process of its generation. (Hirsch, Marianne, 2008, 5)

Traumatic inheritance not only shapes one’s life, but it can also affect even bigger events. Erdeniin Semjid’s grandson, Dashtserengiin Bayartsengel (age 61), shared about his grandmother’s migration and political repression memory, and his reflection on his grandmother’s attitude and anger against the Soviet government, how it influenced him:

I lived with my grandmother for four years. She used to hate the revolutionary party and its communist government. My grandmother’s traumatic experience and her constant expression of anger influenced my point of view against the Mongolian Revolutionary People’s Party.

Later, he was one of the initiative figures in the Mongolian Democratic Revolution of 1990. His personal memories played a significant role in shaping his political orientation. More broadly, these recollections may offer insight into those who led the democratic movement influenced by politically traumatic post-memories. It may not be coincidental that many key figures in the revolution, named “democratic heroes” later, including its central leader, Sanjaasürengiin Zorig⁵¹ (1962–1998), were of Buriad origin. This suggests a potential link between post-memory and how it influences ethnic identity, historical memory, and political mobilization during Mongolia’s transition to democracy.

As memory studies have become an interdisciplinary, or post-disciplinary, formation par excellence, the site where historians, psychoanalysts, sociologists, philosophers, ethicists, scholars of religion, artists and art historians, writers and literary scholars can think, work, and argue together, it seems a good moment to scrutinize some basic assumptions. (Hirsch, Marianne, 2008, 6)

Younger generations inherited the trauma through their parents recalling, repeating, and reinforcing it while nurturing their kids. For instance, Shariin Barkhuyag’s post-memory implies that criticizing food is bad behavior according to her mother:

She used to talk a lot about that wolf meat, which they fried over a fire, and how it was especially delicious during this time (while she was escaping Siberia after deportation) of famine, which made it one of the strongest memories of that time. She used to mention this story every time I criticized food.

Few people returned from Siberian exile after decades. In both cases, I encountered that they got back after their son’s prolonged requests and their acquittal. *Bashuudain Dorj* (from *Khövchiin Jonon Vangiin khoshuu*) was exiled to Siberia and had been working in a Gulag⁵² for years. Later, his son got permission for his return to Mongolia from Siberia. Finally, he returned in 1982. His name could be Ishdorj or possibly a shorter version of *Dorj*. This is why his children cannot find information about him in the general archive by 1997, when the government pays acquittal reimbursement. But later, *Dashdorj*, who was persecuted from the same *khoshuu* and exiled to Siberia. After returning from exile and he shared about how persecution process happened to them and what happened to others:

⁵¹

⁵² Labour camp was in the Soviet Union.

We had been in a temporary jail for a while. Nothing happened in the meantime. I think the day was the 4th of Jan 1934. We were all divided into 4 trucks. There were definitely around 120 people, we were packed in the car. All we knew was we were heading northwest. We reached *Altanbulag*. From there, we were taken to Ulaan-Ud. From Ulaan-Ud, we were loaded like animals onto a cargo train. Then we reached Irkutsk. *Bashuudain Dorj* and *Bislain Badamtseren* were sentenced to 10 years each when we got off the train. (S Baatar, 2007, 74)

This was *Bashuudain Dorj's* only persecution story his children have seen on paper. After he returned from Siberian exile, he was already isolated from his son emotionally.

Another narrative about returning from exile that I collected by interviewing Bayandun, exposing how political repression torn apart families and how narrator and her cousins misunderstood their grandfather:

At that time, I was little, and he seemed like a strange-eyed SSSR old man to me and my cousins. He had a prosthetic eye due to his hardship while he was laboring in the Gulag. We used to think that he couldn't close his eyes just because he was stingy and guarding his candies from us. He used to eat anything and eat so fast, even when the food was about to rot. We didn't realize as children what he had been through.⁵³

These stories give insight that those who were executed during the political purges not only lost their lives, but were also symbolically erased from social memory, treated as outcasts even within their own families. Their children, often growing up without knowledge of their fathers' identities or the circumstances of their deaths, experienced a deep sense of orphanhood despite being surrounded by extended kin. This compounded the psychological and social trauma across generations.

My grandmother expressed her anger, grief, and despair with an act of showing a thumb between pointing finger and middle finger [this sign is international, but in Mongolia, it is considered vulgar] to the employee who handed her acquittal letter saying, "You took away an entire human and brought back only a palm-sized paper instead of him". In our family, we recall this kind of memory enthusiastically in order to remember how strict and fearless she was. Later, as a grown-up, recalling this story brings me her despair and the anger she was feeling. This memory helps me to emphasize how brutal that time was and how she turned into a tough person. My father and uncle used to call her "impossible".

⁵³ Jlgjijaviin Lkhamiin interview.

3.4.1 Singing expressions

Mongolian singing is an expansive and timeless cultural expression that has been preserved for centuries. There are conversational songs, short songs, long songs, and humorous songs being employed to tease and playfully interact with one another or express themselves. Buriad oral culture is described equally rich as "...Local peasant who knows Buriad language listens to Buriad fairy tales and myths. Buriad folklore is so rich" (Kudryavtsev, 2024, 142)

In this section, I will focus on the singing traditions of the Buriad people, which is a way to express when you cannot talk. A rich repertoire of Buriad songs has been sung among Buriads that covers every imaginable topic. Buriad people sing with a unique vibrato, a vocal technique that is exclusive to them. To perform a Buriad song, one must have spoken the Buriad language from birth; without this linguistic foundation, it is impossible to do the vibrato or express the depth of emotion inherent in the songs.⁵⁴I cannot feel the right vibrato when non-Buriad professional singers sing Buriad songs.

Buriad people have a constant fear during migration or political repression times; they expressed themselves with singing since they could not speak up. Song was employed to transmit memories that cannot be told. Every occasion has a dedicated song, and people even easily create songs to entertain or reveal their sadness. Mostly, they use similar music to express their feelings. Below are a few folk songs as examples that I obtained by interviewing, using secondary sources, and some other well-known songs.

The melodies of Buriad folk songs can vary; it is common for new songs to be created using familiar melodies. When people compose a new song, they often choose a melody that they already know. (J Badamdash, 1998, 1)

Sambuugiin Ishbaljir was born and raised in Bayandun *soum* in 1931. His maternal grandparents moved to Mongolia during migration. He recalled that "From as far back as I can remember, I spent my entire childhood along the *Ulz* riverbank, at the end of the *Büs* River, and on the southern side of *Dun* Mountain, in the *Tuultain* steppe."

He shared a song from his childhood which is:

⁵⁴ My assumption

*Аавын минь нутаг Алхана уулаар
Алхаж л мацаж л явлаа даа
Ариухан миний Дун уултай
Адилхан юм даа адилхан юм.
Өвгөдийн минь нутаг Агын талаар
Өөдөө сөөргөө л явлаа даа.
Өөрийн минь төрсөн Улзын талбай
Өө зайгүй адилхан юм даа.
Улз, Ага, Дун, Алхана
Угаас монгол нутаг болохоор
Ус нь ч адилхан, уул нь ч адилхан
Уянга нь ч адилхан байлгүй яах вэ дээ (S. Baatar 2007, 84)*

Translation:

*In the Alkhana mountain, the homeland of my father's,
I wandered and climbed
It has the kindred spirit to my holy Dun mountain
It is the same, it is the same
In my ancestors' homeland, the Aga steppe,
I traveled up and down
I feel a kindred spirit with my birthplace, the Ulz steppe
It is the same, it is the same
All of Ülz, Aga, Dün, Alkhana
Originally, the Mongolian land
Water or Mountain, all alike
Spirits/Melodies⁵⁵ are the same
How could they not be*

This song intends to reassure people that their new land is equally beautiful and sacred as their homeland, singing like it is still the same mountain, same water, and same spirit.

⁵⁵ The literal meaning is melody; the second meaning used here is spirit. I translated all songs here.

“Some significant places emerge due to perceptual strategies by means of which certain landscape features are prioritized and perceived as special, charging local topography with the quality of sacrality.” (Ülo Valk, 2018, 9)

During the political repression, the 'Do Yamniihan' (Ministry of Domestic Affairs) not only arrested people but also requisitioned household goods and livestock. Each family was left with only seven 'bog' (goats and sheep) and one 'bod' (horse, camel, or cow). They even took away sharp items such as scythes, flint guns, and knives, fearing they could be used as weapons. In those tragic days, women were left behind with their orphaned children, and there were no men around to kill the sheep. (S. Baatar, *Buriad's punishment*, 2007, 105)

Almost all men were taken away, so their widows were singing to express their solitude:

*Уулын оройгоор харахадам
Униартай манан соо наран байна
Учирсан гансаяа хүлээхэдэм
Уулзахын аргагүй л хол байна
Хадын оройгоор харахадам
Харанхуй манан соо наран байна
Ханилсан гансаяа хүлээхэдэм
Харилцахын аргагүй хол байна*

Translation:

*Looking at the top of the mountain
I see the sun in a smoky fog
When I wait for my destined love
It feels so far that we would never meet
Looking at the top of the cliff
I see the sun in a blind fog
When I wait for my other half
It feels so far that we would never talk.*

I heard this song a lot while growing up. People used to sing it occasionally. I realized that the entire expression and lyrics' actual meaning depicted Buriad's life back then, and how sorrowful life was to them. They never knew when their husbands, fathers, brothers,

or uncles would return. They did not even know why they had all been caught. Similarly, the sun is never the same and never vivid. Nothing was clear. I thought of it as a drunken people's song during my childhood before I realized the lyrics. In the spring of 2024, a famous Mongolian pop singer performed this song in a pop style. This representation was deemed to the Buriad community that she did not realize the tragic expression and simply sang it as a regular “pop song with a beautiful melody” in revealing clothes. This offended the Buriad community, and it became a huge sensation on social media for months until she apologized. The collective reaction of the Buriad community to this traditional folk song being represented in such ways showed the deep intergenerational trauma that is still being felt generations later, and how this song carried the weight of sad events.

Another sad expression song was sung by *Erdeniin Semjid* after his husband was arrested by “green hat” people around in 1937 [cannot obtain exact year from her children]. Her granddaughter, G. Oyun, and her youngest daughter, J. Tserenkhand, shared about Semjid. Her nickname was *Khurman*.

She was born in 1900 (or 1901) in a place called *Yaruuna* (Yeravne in Russian) in the Russian Empire. Moved to Mongolia with her siblings and father around 1918. She married a man named *Jambal*. However, he was arrested like others, probably by 1937. She was issuing a mess, wrestling with a guard when he was kept in temporary prison in *Batshireet*⁵⁶. Her husband, *Jambal*, said, “*Khürmaaan*, please stop it, otherwise we might both get arrested here. I haven’t done anything wrong, so I should be fine”.

Unfortunately, he never returned as he was shot. He used to run a government-owned shop called “Agent”. However, “green hat” people illegally confiscated everything in the shop. Later, they falsely claimed that they needed to pay for everything that was in the Agent. So, *Semjid* started carrying wood from *Batshireet* to *Öndörkhaan* (distance is approximately 140 km) for years to pay the debt. She was told that there was still a remaining balance of debt when she thought she had finally paid it. She was left with her 4 little children and huge debts. Her kids had to stay at home by themselves while their mother went away to work. Another woman was sharing exactly the same situation, and both of them were blamed and scolded for a fake debt they supposedly shouldn’t pay. This was way too overwhelming, so the other lady sadly hanged herself from a tree at the *Onon* River. Yet, *Semjid* bought a bottle of vodka and had it on the horse. Galloped away while singing to relieve herself:

Ардаг ардаг бороороо

Арын гурван давааг давлаа

Ардын засгийн хуулинд нь автаа нь үгүй

Адайр зантай Хурманхан

Номгоной даваанд цуцаагүй

Номхон бор морь минь

⁵⁶⁵⁶ Khentii Province soum.

Ноёдын өмнө зусраагуй
Нохой зантай Хурманхан

Translation:

I passed three passes of the back
With my fierce brown horse
I am the stubborn Khürmankhan
Will not obey the revolutionary government's law
My gentle brown horse
Wouldn't give up Nomgon's pass
I am the dog-like Khürmankhan
Will never flatter lords

The narrative shows how much bitterness and emotions are expressed through this singing about the political situation. Her children recalled that they never saw her drink alcohol. This was a time when she was on the edge of giving up and desperately needed to find the strength to keep fighting for her life. Singing about one's horse is very common in Mongolia as horses are considered man's trusted friend. Here, she might have sung "I am not alone, with my gentle friend" to encourage herself. In addition, political repression and confiscation left them with only one horse to ride. That's why the lyrics might also have meant that even though she was left with only one horse, it was powerful and fierce enough to get her anywhere. I was also told that she sang this song for herself while she was looking for her husband among the dead bodies at the *Öndörkhaan* mountainside (as mentioned in the place-lore section).

In another story, a good horse named Yearling of the Jonon mare appeared. One of the most dominant themes of Mongolian folklore is the tales of exceptional horses, which come in the form of epics, songs, and dances. Here in the story, a swimmer horse named "yearling of the *Jonon* mare" gives me the impression of a very good horse. The word *Jonon* is in Mongolian *Жонон*, the first meaning is prince or lord governor, the second meaning is the frosty tip of a colored horse. Mongolian myth is rich in horse-themed tales, such as a folk epic about the Horse Head violin (*Khuur*). In Mongolia, only good horses get a name.

The sheer abundance of horse-related myths highlights the central role of the horse in Mongolian life and worldview. This prominence was especially evident during fieldwork on nomadic lifestyles, where numerous narratives featured horses, indicating that traditional beliefs and values surrounding horses have persisted into the present day. In Mongolian heroic epics, known as *tuuli*, horses are portrayed not merely as animals, but as loyal companions and wise advisors to their heroic riders, often more perceptive than the heroes themselves. In some tales, horses even possess the power to resurrect fallen heroes. These portrayals are rooted in older mythological beliefs, where the sun and sky deities frequently appear in the form of horses. Such themes constitute a core element of Mongolian mythic tradition. (Sampildendev, 2002, 23)

Khaidaviin Yumjav was born in 1915. He shared his memory from the political repression in S. Baatar's *The Punishment of Buriad People*:

When I returned from army duty in 1938, few men who had seizures or, were very old, etc., were left beside ladies and children after all men were illegally taken away. They even arrested some women. All the wealth and livestock had been confiscated. There was no livestock in the pasture, and no person to meet when you left home. People were collecting snakeweed and some other edible herbs and plants to eat. Hence, I thought that we should plant crops. I borrowed 2000 tögrög (Mongolian currency, equal to current days 4 euro) to buy 10 steers. There were some remaining plows. We managed to find one sack of crop seed. We harvested twenty sacks of crops successfully. We kept 2 – 3 sacks as seeds and ground the remaining wheat in a hand mill. Also, we managed to grow oats successfully.

Consequently, people encouraged themselves by singing this song:

Хүрэн шугуйн баруун урд
Хөгжилтэй тогтсон нэгдэл байна
Хөгжилтэй тогтсоны ач тусаар
Хүчирхэг нийгэмдээ дэвшивэй.
Шавгын булгийн баруун урд
Саналаараа тогтсон нэгдэл байна

Саналаа нэгтгэсний ач тусаар

Сайхан нийгэмдээ дэвшивэй (S. Baatar 2007, 81)

Translation:

To the northeast of the dense forest,

A united collectivism is established in progress.

Thanks to the benefits of this progress,

Let us advance in our powerful society.

To the northeast of the spring's source,

A united community formed by mutual agreement exists.

Through the benefits of uniting our thoughts,

Let us advance in our beautiful soci

Conclusion

This thesis is intended to analyze the early 20th century Buriad' people's migration from Russia to Mongolia. The research looks at its historical conditions and the long-lasting traumatic experience, reflected in memory and post-memory narratives and families' oral history, as well as in perceptions, attitudes and identity construction of people in the current period. Analyzing narratives about forced migration, I applied the theories and methods of folkloristics, memory and post-memory studies, and textual and contextual analyses. One of the aims of this thesis is to document and analyze some of the Mongolian Buriads' stories of migration that have never been published before, thus giving a voice to those events and their participants, who have been silenced for decades. Besides these untold stories, which were collected during my fieldwork in Bayandun soum, expanded with my family histories and secondary sources, which consist of post-memories and post-post-memories told by the second and third generations of those who experienced the tragic events.

In my thesis, I looked at how Buriads' migration narrators express inherited memories, their attitude to the stories, how these stories were recalled within the family, as well as the traces, features, and consequences of the memories. Also, the research investigates what was inherited, lost, preserved, and how the perspectives were transmitted across generations. What cultural influence, beliefs, landscapes shaped identity, or how migrants were influenced by a new environment? These questions define the limits of the framework.

I find it interesting that the use of memory theory, particularly post-memory theory, provides a framework for emphasizing how people are changed into tougher, and more resilient after experiencing a traumatic event, and how people pass down the trauma to multiple generations by recalling it verbally and unconsciously with nurturing and silence. The first-generation migrants rarely spoke about their experiences openly. Consequently, not many people know about their family history, and the forced

migrations that were hidden due to fear and were retold secretly, mostly among family members.

The narratives revealed that living in a politically unsafe environment instills unconscious fear in the next generations. This unexplained anxiety and silence were the most commonly transmitted traumatic inheritance in the given data. The second and third generations of migrants inherited via memory the sorrow of those tragic events or for the missing homeland or lost family members, which is recognized from their attitude and tone of narrating, as well as by their reaction. These transmitted post-memories not only shape an individual's personality, but also an individual's political belonging, such as citizenship and influence collective identity, which possibly motivates the political revolutionary movement. The strongly inherited fear has led the fourth and fifth generation representatives to have minimal knowledge about topics such as the Buriad dialect and the emotional inheritance.

Further, the attitude and knowledge about the migration and traumatic events, as well as the dialect, and most importantly, the fear, vary between generations. Analyzing oral narratives revealed a multilayered place-lore in memory, belonging, and identity. I referred to Ülo Valk's definition of place-lore that places are not only physical locations, but their forms and the meanings they carry can also morph with memory. For instance, Tsempil's story shows how a new place that one resettles in provides one with a peaceful life, which can easily shift into a horrible place that one would avoid. Also, apart from the events taken place in a location, but all kinds of sensory memories, such as the smells, the flora and fauna, the view of the landscapes, and the sounds can be powerful markers of the place. Memory can redefine landscapes into places of hope or loss. The narratives of Tsempil's story show that political belonging is directly decided based on memory, as they became Mongolian citizen due to their loss. Buriad migrants were trying to blend in with Mongolians due to fear by hiding their true national identity by passing as Khalkh Mongolians. This collective memory became a motivation to revitalize the Buriads' identity after the Democratic Revolution.

Post-memory research by Marianne Hirsch provides an opportunity to understand that memory is a strong carrier to inherit its tragic weight, which could emotionally, politically, and economically shape the individuals, in addition to the collective's identity. All these generational differences show that post-memory travels across the next two

generations as Marianne Hirsh defined. Post-memories' weight fades from the fourth generation. This thesis contributes to the memory appliances in Mongolian Buriad contexts, focusing on the oral narratives of the crossing of migration and political repressions. It is also the foundation for my further studies of post-memory on Buriad communities of Russia, China, and Mongolia. In the end, this research proves that memory is more than words-of-mouth or a record of the past. It is a living process that shapes how communities recognize themselves and their choices, to a greater degree, their histories.

List of references

Цогтын, Жамц, *Шинэхээн Буриад Монголчууд*, Буриад судлалын академи, Улаанбаатар хот, 2017. [Tsogtiin, Jamts, *Shineheen Buriad Mongols*, Buriad Study Academia, Ulaanbaatar, 2017]

Kaplonski, Christopher. "9 Thirty Thousand Bullets: Remembering political repression in Mongolia." In *Historical Injustice and Democratic Transition in Eastern Asia and Northern Europe*, pp. 155–168. Routledge, 2003.

Содовын Баатар, *Буриад зоныг залхаан цээрлүүлсэн нь*, Монголын Улс Төрийн Хэлмэгдэгсдийн Холбоо, Улаанбаатар 2007. [Sodov Baatar, *The Punishment of Buriad people*, Mongolian Political Repression Victims Community, Ulaanbaatar, 2007.]

Ц. Навагчамба, П. Санж, С. Баатар, *Хэлмэгдсэн заяа 38*, Монголын Ул Төрийн Хэлмэгдэгсдийн Холбоо, Улаанбаатар, 2004. [Ts. Navagchamba, P. Sanj, S. Baatar, *Repressed destiny 38*, Mongolian Political Repression Victims Community, Ulaanbaatar, 2004]

Ф.А.Кудрявцев, *История Бурят-Монгольского народа*, Ленинград, 1940, translated by А.Алимаа, *Буриад-Монгол ард түмний түүх*, Непко хэвлэлийн компани, 2024. [F.A. Kudryavtsev, *History of Buriad-Mongolian people*, 1940, published by Nepko, 2024]

Баабар Бат-Эрдэнийн, Батбаяр, "Буриад-Монгол Ард Түмний Зарим Түүх." Forward. In *История Бурят-Монгольского Народа*, 13–19. Улаанбаатар, Непко, 2024. [Baabar Bat-Erdeniin Batbayar, "Buriad-Mongol People Histories", foreword of Kudryavtsev "Buriad-Mongolian People History" 1940, by Nepko 2024]

Valk, Ülo, and Daniel Sävborg. *Storied and supernatural places: studies in spatial and social dimensions of folklore and sagas*. Finnish Literature Society/SKS, 2018.

Hirsch, Marianne. "The generation of postmemory." *Poetics today* 29, no. 1 (2008): 103–128.

Jackson, Jason Baird. "On cultural appropriation." *Journal of Folklore Research* 58, no. 1 (2021): 77–122.

Жамбал, Бадамдаш, *Алтаргана-Буриад Арадай Дуун*, Улаанбаатар, 1998. [Jambal, Badamdash, *Altargana-Buriad Aradai duun*, Ulaanbaatar, 1998.]

Хорлоогийн, Сампилдэндэв, *Монголын аман зохиолын товчоон*, Хэл зохиолын Хүрээлэн, Шинжлэх Ухааны Академи, 2002. [Khorloo, Sampildendev, *Mongolian Folklore Bureau*, Language and Literature Institute, Science Academy of Mongolia, 2002.]

Postmemory,

<https://postmemory.net/>

Mongolian Statistical Information Service,

https://www2.1212.mn/tables.aspx?tbl_id=DT_NSO_0100_001T92&t1_select_all=0&t1SingleSelect=_2&YearY_select_all=1&YearYSingleSelect=&viewtype=linechart

Mongolia Commemorates Victims of Political Repression

<https://montsame.mn/en/read/351051>

Mongolian Cyrillic Romanization Standard MNS 5217:2012

<https://gogo.mn/r/101115>

Cordonnier, Aline, Valérie Rosoux, Anne-Sophie Gijs, and Olivier Luminet. "Collective Memory: An Hourglass between the Collective and the Individual." *Memory, Mind & Media* 1 (2022): e8. <https://doi.org/10.1017/mem.2022.1>.

Yuval-Davis, Nira. 2006. "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging." *Patterns of Prejudice* 40 (3): 197–214. doi:10.1080/00313220600769331.

Mongolian Statistical Information Service, General Census

https://www2.1212.mn/tables.aspx?TBL_ID=DT_NSO_0300_003V1

Astapova, Anastasiya. "Rumours, urban legends and the verbal transmission of conspiracy theories." In *Routledge handbook of conspiracy theories*, pp. 391-400. Routledge, 2020.

Yondongiin, Otgonbayar, "Who wanted the Lkhumbе case?", March 2025, historical podcast №90. YouTube, 1:15:12, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhGYmX8zcRA>

Baldano, Marina N., Victor I. Dyatlov, and Svetlana V. Kirichenko. "Buryat Migrations and Diasporas in Historical Space and Time (20th-21st Centuries)." *Журнал Сибирского федерального университета. Гуманитарные науки* 13, no. 5 (2020): 716-727.

Du Quenoy, Paul. "Warlordism à la russe: Baron von Ungern-Sternberg's anti-Bolshevik crusade, 1917–21." *Revolutionary Russia* 16, no. 2 (2003): 1-27.

Latynina, Julia. *History Workshop Journal*, no. 39 (1995): 225–29.

<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4289372>.

Humphrey, Caroline. "The Slippages of Exemplary Action: The Case of Ataman Semenov." *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 64, no. 1 (2022): 4–33.

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417521000372>.

Kaplonski, Chris. 2011. "Archived Relations: Repression, Rehabilitation and the Secret Life of Documents in Mongolia." *History and Anthropology* 22 (4): 431–44.
doi:10.1080/02757206.2012.626407.

Kaplonski, Christopher. 2012. "Resorting to Violence: Technologies of Exception, Contingent States and the Repression of Buddhist Lamas in 1930s Mongolia." *Ethnos* 77 (1): 72–92. doi:10.1080/00141844.2011.595810.

Brodnikov, Aleksandr A., and Petr E. Podalko. "Russia and Siberia: Russian People's Entry into Transbaikalia and the Amur Region."

Dolby-Stahl, Sandra K. "A Literary Folkloristic Methodology for the Study of Meaning in Personal Narrative." *Journal of Folklore Research* 22, no. 1 (1985): 45–69.

Brodnikov Aleksandr, A. "Russia and Siberia: Russian People's Entry into Transbaikalia and the Amur Region." *青山国際政経論集* (The Aoyama Journal of International Politics, Economics and Communication) 110 (2023): 1-20.

Кузьмин С. Л., Оюунчимэг Ж, "Социализмын эсрэг 1932 оны Монгол дахь Бослого", 2014. [Kuzimin S L, Oyunchimeg J, "1932 uprising against Socialism in Mongolia", 2014.]

Assmann, Jan, and John Czaplicka. "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity." *New German Critique*, no. 65 (1995): 125–33. <https://doi.org/10.2307/488538>.

Kershaw, Angela. "Chapter 4.7. Memory studies" In *A History of Modern Translation Knowledge: Sources, concepts, effects* edited by Lieven D'hulst and Yves Gambier, 273-275. John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1075/btl.142.36ker>

Madsen, Kenneth D., and Ton Van Naerssen. "Migration, identity, and belonging." *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 18, no. 1 (2003): 61-75.

Bulut, M. "Identity belonging changes through migration." *New Trends and Issues Proceedings on Humanities and Social Sciences* 5 (2017): 26-31.

B. Natsagdorji. Introduction of Buubei beyile-yin sudur, *Historia Mongolarum Journal of History*, № 397 (34) ISSN 2224-1804, 2014, 198

Shimamura, Ippai, *The Roots Seekers: Shamanism and Ethnicity Among the Mongol Buryats*, Shumpusha Publishing, 2014

Buyandelger, Manduhai. *Tragic spirits: Shamanism, memory, and gender in contemporary Mongolia*. University of Chicago Press, 2019.

Buyandelgeriyn, Manduhai. "Post-post-transition theories: Walking on multiple paths." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 37, no. 1 (2008): 235-250.

Swancutt, K. "Rebecca M. Empson, Harnessing fortune: personhood, memory and place in Mongolia." *Journal of the Anthropological Society of Oxford Online* 3, no. 1 (2011).

Humphrey, Caroline. "Detachment, difference and separation: Lévi-Strauss at the wedding feast." *Detachment: Essays on the Limits of Relational Thinking* (2015): 147.

Namsaraeva, Sayana. "Ritual, memory and the Buriad diaspora notion of home." *Frontier Encounters. Knowledge and Practice at the Russian, Chinese and Mongolian Border* (2012): 137-163.

Cammack, Susanne S. Review of *Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, by Aleida Assmann. *Modernism/modernity* 23, no. 4 (2016): 929-931. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/mod.2016.0089>.

Britannica-World History, Russian Revolution of 1905

<https://www.britannica.com/event/Russian-Revolution-of-1905>

Britannica- Politics, Law & Government International Relations-Creation and role of the KGB, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/KGB/Creation-and-role-of-the-KGB>

Resüme

Ränne, mälu ja post-mälu: Mongoolia Burjaatide kogemuslikud narratiivid

Magistritöös analüüsin 20. sajandi alguses Venemaalt Mongooliasse rännanud inimeste järeltulijate mälestusi kasutades folkloristlikke narratiiviteooriaid. Mälu-uuringud on oma olemuselt interdistsiplinaarsed, erinevate mäluperspektiivide avamine pakub rikkalikke analüüsivõimalusi. Üheks selle magistritöö eesmärgiks on dokumenteerida ja analüüsida mõningaid burjaatide rändelugusid, mida pole kunagi varem trükitud avaldatud. Lapsepõlves kuulsin sugulastelt palju huvitavaid ja traagilisi lugusid, mis puudutasid väljarändamist ja poliitilisi repressioone. Väljarändajate järeltulijana inspireeris see mind teemat lähemalt uurima. Töös analüüsitud lugude jutustajad on sündmustest kahe või kolme põlvkonna kaugusel, sestap asetub analüüsitud materjal mälu-uuringute post-memory studies konteksti. Töös kasutatud lood koguti välitöödel intervjuude kaudu. Nende eesmärk oli uurida, kuidas jutustajad väljendavad varem kuulnud mälestusi, milline on nende suhtumine lugudesse või kuidas neid lugusid pereringis on meenutatud. Samuti uurib töö, mida on edasi räägitud, mis on kadunud, mis säilinud ja kuidas erinevad perspektiivid on põlvkondade edasi kandunud. Milline kultuuriline mõju, uskumused ja maastikud on kujundanud väljarändajate identiteeti või kuidas uus keskkond on oma mõju avaldanud? Need küsimused moodustavad selle magistritöö raamistiku.

Lugudest selgus, et poliitiliselt ebaturvalises keskkonnas elamine sisendab järgmistesse põlvkondadesse alateadlikku hirmu. See ärevus tundmatuse ees oli kogutud andmetes kõige sagedamini edasi kandunud traumeeriv pärand. Need niinimetatud hilisemad mälukihid (post memories) ei kujunda mitte ainult üksikisikuid, vaid ka nende poliitilist kuuluvust ning mõjutavad kollektiivset identiteeti, mis võib kujuneda poliitiliselt revolutsiooniliseks liikumiseks. Lisaks tulevad esile põlvkondade vahelised erinevused suhtumises, teadmistes rände ja traumaatiliste sündmuste kohta ning keelemurdest tulenevatest üksikasjadest. Teise ja kolmanda põlvkonna esindajad kannavad endas nende traagiliste sündmuste või kaotatud kodumaa ja lähedaste igatsuse kurbust, mis peegeldub nende hoiakutes, jutustamise toonis ja reaktsioonides.

Ülaltoodu analüüsimiseks kasutasin Ülo Valgu, Marianne Hirschi, Aleida Assmann ja Nira Yuvali kirjutisi.

Appendix 1- Interviewee list

Interviewee list:

4. Jigjidjaviin Lkham: age 82, retired as an agronomist
5. Garamsad: age 85, retired as an agronomist
6. Jambaliin Tserenkhand: age 90, retired as a zootechnician
7. Damchaagiin Tserenkhand: age 74, a retired Social Security officer at the Bayandun government administration office
8. Galsantserengiin Oyun: age 65, a retired Mathematics teacher
9. Dashtserengiin Bayartsengel: age 61, retired as a project manager
10. Budjaviin Tselvelmaa: 68, retired as a herder
11. Shariin Batkhuyag: age 63, retired as a herder
12. Baljinnyam Altan-Useg: age 63, retired as a herder
13. Badarchiin Bayarmaa- age 48, a freelancer

Briefly questioned: 4th and 5th generation members.

- 2 Enkhboldiin Aminkhuslen- age 23, actress
- 3 Batjargaliin Densmaa- age 40, pharmacist
- 4 Garamsadiin Tsermaa- age 53, high school teacher
- 5 Amarsaikhanii Mendbayar- age 39, freelancer
- 6 Battumuriin Oyun-Erdene- age 39, water architecture engineer
- 7 Sükhbaatariin Maitsetseg- age 45, freelancer
- 8 Bayartsengeliin Baigal- age 26, skincare technician
- 9 Munkhbayariin Ulziisaikhan- age 39, manager of a cosmetic clinic

Appendix 2- Interview translation (partial)

1. Erdeniin Semjid story told by G. Oyun:

She was born in 1900 (or 1901) in a place called Yaruuna (Yeravne in Russian) in the Russian Empire. Moved to Mongolia with her siblings and father around 1918. She married a man named Jambal. However, he was arrested like others, probably by 1937. She was issuing a mess, wrestling with a guard when he was kept in temporary prison in Batshireet⁵⁷. Her husband Jambal said that “Khürmaaan, please stop it, otherwise we might get arrested here both. I haven’t done anything wrong, so I should be fine”.

Unfortunately, he never returned, and he was shot. He used to run a government-owned shop called “Agent”. However, “green hat” people illegally confiscated everything in the shop. Later, they falsely claimed that they needed to pay for everything that was in the agent. So Semjid started carrying wood from Batshireet to Öndörkhaan (distance is approximately 140 km) for years to pay the debt. She was told that there was still a remaining balance of debt when she thought she was finally over with it. She was left with her 4 little children and huge debts. Her kids had to stay on their own while their mother went away to earn. Another lady was sharing exactly the same situation, and both of them were blamed and scolded for a fake debt they supposedly shouldn’t pay. This was way too overwhelming, so the other lady sadly killed herself on a tree at the Onon River.

2. Batkhuyag Shar and his wife Altan-Useg Baljinnyam are talking about her mother’s refugee story:

My mother’s name is Myadag Bold. She was born in small village of Russian empire’s (present day) territory. She decided to move with her family to Mongolia among with last refugee people by the 1920 (approximately). They started their refugee life in Tsagaan-Ovoo soum of Dornod province of Mongolia. However, she was arrested by “green hat” (government employees who were responsible to arrest political crime suspects) officers as a suspect of “Lookhuuz spying “crime by the 1937 political repression, and she had exiled to Russian territory back for 15 years of punishment. Arrested suspects were riding horse and carrying their clothing on the “yavgan tereg”. Exiled people forced to live under guard with very limited food and an uncomfortable life in Russian landscape since they had exiled. This was hardship for those over 10 people. They were looking for an opportunity to get back home for a year, and one night day finally escaped pushing guard to the ravine. As escapers they were hiding in the forest during daylight and had been traveling during nighttime. It was traumatic trip such as no food, full of fear and troubles

such as Onon river was flooded, but they still need to pass through. Fortunately, my mother 's horse was a well-known swimmer horse named "yearling of the Jonon mare". Obviously, they were unable to hunt on their own will, as well as having a lack of bullets. One day they were lucky enough to hunt down a wolf. She used to talk about a lot that wolf meat was so delicious while you are in famine situation. Finally, they reached closer to Chinese border, place named Numrug. In there they had lots of bird cherry until they had been stricken with colic. The only way to get over colic was wolf skin which they were carrying by strapping from saddle. What they did was scrap wolf skin from inside to get oil or skin to consume, which was helpful. Everyone else wanted to go Sheheen, meanwhile my mother was the only one who wanted to stay in Mongolia to find her own brother. Again, she needed to ran away to Bayandun soum by herself from them. While she was travelling further on her own, she was asking from local families her brother and he finally rejoined with her brother. Some of those escapers got China, some being shot and some left where they were. Her brother Bold became a guard in Bayandun soum. "Green hat" people frightened my mother they will send her back to Russian territory again, unless she marries to a paralyzed guy when they got Bayandun soum. My mother was desperately agreed to marry that guy. She was praying that her future husband is at least similar age as to her. Her husband, my father was around 20 similar ages as her, however, he was paralyzed, his right hand and right leg were not functioning. They adopted 2 kids including me. She was considered as Russian citizen until 1969, so she needs to get registered every year in Dornod province center. She rides a horse to get Province center. This trip used to take for her only a day for a round trip.

3. Болдын Цэпил

Миний хадам ээж багадаа эхээс өнчрөн эцгийн хамт амьдардаг байсан бөгөөд дөнгөж 16 юмуу 17 насны орчимд хадамд гарч, бэр буулгаж авсан айл нь удалгүй нүүжээ. Хаашаа нүүж яваагаа мэдэхгүй, учрыг сайн ололгүй явсаар Одоогийн Хятадын нутагт ирж Халх голын зүүн эрэг дээр нутагласан байна. Амар жимэр амьдарч суутал нэг өдөр малаа хариулж яваад гэртээ орж ирэхэд 3-4 насны охин нь могой бариад уйлж суужээ. Сандарсан ээж нь могойгоо тавиарай гэтэл охин могойг тавихад суларсан могой охиныг хатгаж, охин бүх бие нь хаван гүйгээд удалгүй өнгөрчээ. Охиноо алдаж гашуудсан айл муухай газар гэж бууриа сэлгэж Халх голын баруун талд нутагласан байна. Ингээд хил хаах болоход Халх голын зүүн тал нь Хятадын нутаг дэвсгэр, баруун тал нь Монголын газар нутаг болохоор тогтсоныг мэдсэн нутгийнхан шөнөөр морьтой давхиж төрөл төрөгсөд айл саахалтаараа хэлэлцэж аль улс нь илүү амар жимэр, амьдрал сайн байхыг хэлэлцэж ихэнх нь Хятадын нутгийг сонгож үлджээ. Зөвхөн охиноо алдсан хадам ээж маань охиноо алдсан газарт буцаж нүүхгүй гэж Халх голын баруун талд буюу Монголын иргэн болох сонголтыг хийж. Миний нөхрийн аавын талын ихэнх хамаатан Хайлаар Хятадад байдаг нь ийм учиртай. Мөн цаанаас Монголын иргэн болохоор орж ирсэн иргэдийн ихэнх нь Барга ястан байсан бөгөөд Буриадуудаа хавчих хандлагатай

байсан тул Буриадууд салж хойш нүүсээр одоогийн Цагаан-Овоо сумын нутагт ирж нутаглажээ. Нийтээр нь нүүлгэхдээ Хэрлэн гол дагуулж нүүлгэсэн байна. Аймгийн төв орчмоос хойшоо Хэрлэн голоос салж нүүсээр Цагаан-Овоод ирж суурьшсан байна. Наашаа ирж явах замдаа хүүгээ буюу миний нөхрийг Хөлөнбуйр сумын нутагт 1947 онд төрүүлжээ. Ээж минь амьдралын эрхээр нутаг сэлгэж 3 улсын нутаг дамнаж амьдарсных нь тусгал нь Хятад, Орос, Монгол хэлээр ярьдаг байв. Өөрөө сонин уншсаар бичиг үсэг тайлагдсанаас бусдаар сургууль номын мөр хөөгөөгүй хүн байв. Хайлаар явж наймаа хийдэг байсан тул Хятад хэл сурсан байж. Мардайн уурхайн Оросуудтай дайралдахаараа юм ярьж байснаа дараа нь “улаан дээрэмчин байсан одоо л ах дүү болж гэнэ” гэдэг байлаа. Үнэн хэрэгтээ бүгд цагааны тал байсан бөгөөд хувьсгалын дараа дүрвэсэн учир Монголд ирээд большевик гэгдэх болсон хүмүүсийг энд л большевик болж гэж ёжилдог байж. Хүү нь Намын даргийн алба хаадаг байсан тул “чиний наад улаан оросыг дагасан ажил ч дээ, хол явахгүй ээ” гэдэг байсан. Мөн урагшаа Хятад руу нүүсэн эхний нүүдлийнхэн цаашаа Япон явах сонирхолтой байсан ч далайн шуурга гэх мэт асуудлаас болоод явж чадалгүй үлдсэн хүмүүс байхад бүр онгоцоо андуурч суугаад Франц орсон хүмүүс ч байдаг аж. Миний ээжийг Болдын Цэмпил гэдэг нэрийг жинхэнэ нэр эсэхийг нь сайн хэлж мэдэхгүй. Учир нь тэр үед дүрвэж ирснийхээ дараа нэрээ сольж байсан түүх их бий гэнэлээ.

Translation: Boldiin Tsempil’s story by Tserenkhand Damchaa

My mother-in-law was orphaned as a little girl. She lived with her father in present-day Russian territory. She was married off when she was about 16 or 17. Her in-laws decided to move to another place. Tsempil Boldiin (my mother-in-law) and her in-laws were traveling, and they ended up in present-day Chinese territory which is on the eastern bank of the Halh river. This area was the borderline area between China and Mongolia. They settled there and were living peacefully and well. One day, Tsempil was out herding livestock. She saw that her three-year-old daughter was crying while holding a snake when she came back home. Scared mother for her daughter and thus she told her daughter to let go of the snake. As soon as the daughter let go, the snake attacked the little girl. The little girl died because of a snake bite on the same day.

The grieving family didn’t want to live in a place that was tainted with so much misfortune. So, they moved back to the other side of the river, (not back to the place they originally came from) which today is Mongolian territory. At that time there were no clear borders between China and Mongolia. When the borders were clearly demarcated (a process that took place between 1933-1962) Tsempil’s family realized that they could not cross the border at will. So, for several nights they discussed among themselves to decide which country’s citizenship they would take. Their other relatives decided to live on the Chinese side of the territory. Only Tsempil’s family didn’t want to go across the river (to the Chinese territory) because it was the place where her (Tsempil’s) daughter had died. This is why, all my husband’s relatives live in Hailar, China.

On the Mongolian side of the border, where Tsempil's family decided to live, was an area inhabited by Barga people. People from this community were discriminating against the few Buryat families living there, including Tsempil's family. Thus, Tsempil's family moved to another place towards the North which was still Mongolian territory in Tsagaan-Ovoo, Dornod province. On the way to Tsagaan-ovoo, Tsempil delivered a son (who I consequently married) in 1947. Tsempil had lived her life in three different countries and spoke three different languages and she learned how to read on her own without enrolling in school. She was born in Russian territory, then she migrated to Chinese territory. In China she would go to Hailar to purchase her commodities, this is how she learned Chinese. Then she moved to Mongolia and lived her entire life in Mongolia. She lived a life of many hardships.

Close to my (Tsempil's daughter-in-law is still telling the story) hometown, there was a uranium mine named Mardai. Many Russian laborers worked there. Tsempil would speak to these workers in Russian when they ran into each other. After the meeting, she used to say to her daughter-in-law "Hmm, now we are acquainted as a comrade with "Red Russian robbers" and call each other "brothers" humorously and humiliatingly. Tsempil didn't like the idea of the Bolshevik "red robbers" suddenly attaining the same social status as hers³. She had a sense of humor (as all Buryat people do,) and she would laugh at the situation that all Buryat migrants to Mongolia had to behave as the same "Bolshevik" people that they had earlier considered to be "White" as they were serving Tsari. Tsempil's son/my husband was a communist party leader and she used to tease him saying, "Your job following the Red Russians is not going to take you far in life".

Badarchiin Bayarmaa (age 48, freelancer) about her grandmother:

My grandmother used to say that only those whiny people complain about what they have been through; otherwise, "who didn't experience the disturbance of that time?". I always remember what she told me as she nurtured me as I grew up. So, I do not complain about life, I have to be hardworking.

Non-exclusive licence to reproduce the thesis and make the thesis public

I, Yanjinkham Dashtseren

1. I grant the University of Tartu a free permit (non-exclusive licence) to reproduce, for the purpose of preservation, including for adding to the DSpace digital archives until the expiry of the term of copyright, my thesis

Migration, Memory, and Post-Memory: Experience Narratives of Buriad Peoples of Mongolia,

supervised by Alevtina Solovyova.

2. I grant the University of Tartu a permit to make the thesis specified in point 1 available to the public via the web environment of the University of Tartu, including via the DSpace digital archives, under the Creative Commons licence CC BY NC ND 4.0, which allows, by giving appropriate credit to the author, to reproduce, distribute the work and communicate it to the public, and prohibits the creation of derivative works and any commercial use of the work until the expiry of the term of copyright.

3. I am aware of the fact that the author retains the rights specified in points 1 and 2.

4. I confirm that granting the non-exclusive licence does not infringe other persons' intellectual property rights or rights arising from the personal data protection legislation.

Yanjinkham Dashtseren

21/05/2025