

Anthropology Colloquia

Winter 2014

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Millennial Haunting:

The social life of ghosts, shamanism, and memory against culture in postsocialist Mongolia

Much of the writing on social memory studies associate ghosts and haunting with unresolved, and often violent, memories of the past. In addition to seeing ghosts as a form of such imaginaries, this paper explores the social lives of ghosts: their mediation through broadcast and social media and mediums, appropriation at the urban centers and impoverished margins, interpretations of the ghosts, and the impacts of these appropriations and interpretations on the communities and individuals involved. Throughout Mongolia, shamanic rituals strive to transform ghosts into origin spirits and thus control and ameliorate them. But many ghosts remain unidentified and thus open to ongoing re-interpretation within a loose symbolic and narrative framework. The paper explores how after decades of the state engineering of memory, the ghosts make legible the shifting frameworks of collective memory, and the controversial and differential strands of memory. Appropriated in various ways, ghosts are related to the development of postsocialist subjectivities that resist the legacy of the socialist state's homogenizing politics of personhood, as well as science and modernity at large.

Manduhai Buyandelger received her B.A. and M.A. in Literature and Linguistics from Mongolian National University and her M.A. and Ph.D. in Anthropology from Harvard University (2004). Prior to joining Anthropology at MIT she was a Junior Fellow at the Harvard Society of Fellows and taught at the Harvard Anthropology Department. Her book *Tragic Spirits: Shamanism, Socialism, and the State of Neoliberalism in Mongolia* (forthcoming University of Chicago Press) tells a story of the collapse of the socialist state and the responses of marginalized rural nomads to the devastating changes through the revival of their previously suppressed shamanic practices. In her next project "Technologies of Election: Gender, Media, and Neoliberal State Formation in Mongolia," the transformation of the former socialist state into a neoliberal one by looking at women's participation in parliamentary elections. She is a member of the project "Oral History of Twentieth Century Mongolia" (2007-2012) at the Mongolia and Inner Asia Studies Unit of the University of Cambridge University in the UK.



Monday, February 24

3:30-5:00 pm

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