

# Whatever Happened to Nomadism?

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Mongolians have been living as nomads for centuries, for thousands of years even. On the move. They have persistently cultivated and elaborated upon a mobile culture that seems to feel secure and comfortable in the status of the resolute and recurring flow. A flow that is almost caressingly arranged around the ger, the round tent-like nomadic dwelling more commonly known as yurt or jurt. The ger is the means by which the nomads cope with the barren landscape of the vast Mongolian steppe; it is a circle of highly condensed functionality, that has never even had to consider the very idea of urbanity. A tough structure with a fragile appearance, today the ger is in danger of becoming obsolete as urbanization and the flux of nomads to Ulaanbaatar have created a situation where gers form vast agglomerations on the outskirts of the capital. Ger cities – a contradiction in terms. From a Western point of view, the ger seems like an anachronistic relic that is either to be transformed or overcome. It has miraculously appeared on the Global Aid Agenda, allegedly begging for relief from the ever-growing pressure of urbanization, modernization, and westernization. With the ger, an entire culture seems at stake. I decide I want to discover it while it is still there.

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Mongolia, a country in a clandestine fetal position, trapped and sheltered between its foster parents in the north and south, the protective mother Russia and the demanding and rigorously absent father China. Mongolia, ideologically fed by the umbilical cord of the Trans-Siberian Railroad, is flocking towards its nucleus Ulaanbaatar. Interfused not only by former and current Socialist parental care, but also driven by a wish for consumerist relief from nomad privations. Life in the steppe is tough, always has been.

Having lived in a constant nomadic state since the beginning of Mongolian thinking, i.e., with the unification of the Mongolian tribes by Genghis Khan, and thus *forever*, the ascetic purity of the nomadic,



Fig. 1: Dusty fence-clad Ulaanbaatar Ger areas.

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Fig. 2: Aerial view of Ger areas, apartment blocks, crossed by Peace Ave.

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