

Experiencing Mongolian Mobility

An ethnographic study of
Mongolian rural-urban migration

Master Human Geography; Globalisation, Migration and Development

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Foreword

It has been a long journey, both literally and figuratively, to get to this point in my studies. The last part of my journey through all the Radboud Universiteit has to offer has been the most rewarding. With help from the university I travelled to Mongolia to do the fieldwork necessary for my master thesis. The journey itself was full of challenges. I lived on my own in a foreign country for the first time in my life. I have seen the beauty that Mongolia has to offer, I have met the friendliest people I could have hoped for and still there were times when I felt alone. It is extremely hard to through such wonderful and terrifying experiences without someone there to share them with. It was not a bad experience in any way. In fact it has honestly been the most wonderful experience of my life to survive on my own in such a different country. I have a lot of people to thank who helped me in preparation, during my time in Mongolia and afterwards when writing this thesis.

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It might have taken me eight wonderful years of studying to get to this point, and have met wonderful people along the way, but I hope that this thesis will make up for the delay. My last thanks goes to the people reading this thesis, thank you for taking an interest in what I have to offer and I sincerely hope you enjoy reading this thesis.

Jelle Blom

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Abstract

Mongolia is urbanizing exponentially. Domestic migrants now account for 31,6 percent of the adult population of Mongolia and nearly half of those have moved to Ulaanbaatar (World Bank, 2011). The population of Ulaanbaatar accounted for 14% of the total population of Mongolia in 1956, increased to 22.3% in 1969 and increased further in 43.6% in 2010 (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). Many of the migrants that created this exponential population growth come from the vast rural areas of Mongolia. Internal migration has the potential to significantly change a country and internal migration also changes migrants. Rural-urban migrants face their own sets of challenges when migrating to Ulaanbaatar, in this thesis I examine how the mobility and the livelihood strategy (on an individual level and on a household level) change the migrant and how mobility and livelihood relate with regard to migration, sedentarism and nomadism in Mongolia.

The experience a rural-urban migrant in Mongolia has with regard to their mobility depends greatly upon the migrant. In this thesis some differences in the experienced mobility of a migrant come to light when migration is distinguished in three phases: pre-migration, first arrival in the city and post-migration. Some migrants, especially those with a nomadic background, experience high levels of mobility in the pre-migration phase. They are constantly in an mobile 'in-between' state (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). The nomadic lifestyle that characterises the pre-migration phase offers a 'freedom' that a sedentary life cannot. A key role in the experience happens in the second phase: a migrant's experienced mobility changes when arriving in the city. Ulaanbaatar acts like a magnet attracting the migrant initially but then holding them in resulting in high levels of immobility. In the post-migration phase some migrants regain some of their former mobility through increased financial means. In general the rural-urban migration of Mongolian migrants to Ulaanbaatar decreases their experienced mobility. Mobility is a 'motor of change' (Ernste, Martens & Schapendonk, 2012). The change in a migrant's mobility is not always for the better.

This creates friction and nostalgia among many migrants between assimilation into city-life and keeping their nomadic traditions. Their cultural identity might transform to more of a sedentary life but it still retains elements of nomadism. This is the essence of the issue between sedentarism and nomadism. In Mongolian rural-urban migrants there is

evidence of both. The impact of the migration process on the Mongolian migrant is partly influenced by this nomadic past of Mongolia. In most migration-cases migrants detach from a sedentary lifestyle in their place of origin and make a migratory move (become mobile), in the case of Mongolian migrants the reverse is true.

Rural-urban migration is often seen as a livelihood strategy made on household level. In the case of the Mongolian migrants this is rarely true. The decision affecting households is often made by an individual member in order to gain personal development. The family process is not driven by a household livelihood strategy but more by the desire further development of an individual. Mongolians often feel that the future of this younger generation is in Ulaanbaatar which keep the in-migration rate high and the out-migration rate low.

An individual's decision making process influences the livelihood of the rest of the household. An individual can make decisions which directly correlate to the furtherance of the collective household livelihood, but often times makes decisions to further their own goals. A decision for the personal development of that individual has consequences for the rest of the household, a collective effect.

The link between a household's livelihood approach, their mobility experience and their eventual migration exists, but the decision is often made by an individual member of a household instead of as a collective decision. Migration leads to an extension of the family in geographical terms. This creates multi-local households. The multi-local household, and its process of livelihood decision making, is influenced by their initial mobility. The attitude and willingness to migrate is part of that household. The high mobility experience inherent to a nomadic lifestyle, this makes the migration process possible. The mobility influences livelihood on a household level and influences choices by individual members.

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List of Terms and Abbreviations

- ADB - Asian Development Bank.
- Aimag - Mongolian word for a province, Mongolia has 21 ‘aimags’.
- Aimag centre - Capital city of an ‘aimag’.
- DFID - Department for International Development, United Kingdom.
- Ger - A traditional Mongolian round tent.
- Ger-area - A ‘slum area’ within the city characterized by many ‘gers’.
- Soum - Mongolian word for a municipality, Mongolia has 331 ‘soums’.
- Soum centre - Largest administrative town in a ‘soum’.
- Sow - Traditional Mongolian salty milk tea.

Our president once told us that the dream of most Europeans is to have a big back yard and acres of space for their kids to run around in. Come live here, we have plenty! We are living part of the European dream, according to our politicians. But what use is a kilometre of living space for me? I am not a goat herder. If it is just me there that means there are no schools for my kids and no jobs for my wife and me, that is why I live in the city. Unfortunately, many people feel the same way.

- Batjargal

1. Introduction

Every day the city of Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia, grows. It is the centre of Mongolian political, economic, societal and cultural life. Every day new migrants settle into the city life and even newer migrants arrive. The streets of Ulaanbaatar are busy in the cold Mongolian spring when I walked to work with Batbayar. During my fieldwork in Mongolia for this thesis I shared an apartment with Batbayar for almost four months. This morning he tells me what it is like living in Ulaanbaatar these days: *The city has changed a lot in the last years, new apartment blocks rise up every day, new people come in from the countryside and clog up the city. The traffic is terrible these days for example. These new people don't know how to drive in a city because they have never lived in one before. There are rules here.* He gestures to the road and lets the morning gridlock around us drive home his point. It is very visible that many migrants have trouble settling into city life. When we pass children begging on the street, an older woman selling wood or the occasional drunk still holding an empty vodka-bottle on our way to work, I wondered whether or not these people were migrants. Ulaanbaatar is a fascinating city for internal migration scholars because of the continuing flow of migrants coming in, the lack of support they seem to receive and the cultural differences that exist within the city. Batbayar, in his late fifties, has lived in the city for many years now and has continued to support his wife and daughters and now also his grandchildren as the city changes around him, but he came here years ago as a migrant.



Image 1: Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

Mongolia is urbanizing exponentially. Domestic migrants now account for 31,6 percent of the adult population of Mongolia and nearly half of those have moved to Ulaanbaatar (World Bank, 2011). This can be seen in major cities all over the world, the same holds true in Mongolia. In Ulaanbaatar the population growth has shown signs of rapid expansion since the early 60's and has been the main destination for rural migrants in Mongolia, a pattern often seen in developing countries (Algaa, 2007). Mongolia is special in this sea of urbanizing cities for two reasons: its nomadic history which still influences its inhabitants behaviour (see Box1: the history of Genghis Khan) and the fact that Mongolia is the country with the lowest population density in the world. From the estimated 2,8 million Mongolians about 1,1 million live within the Ulaanbaatar area (UNdata, 2014) although numbers vary greatly depending on the source¹. But every source agrees that this number is

¹ The number of inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar is debatable. Algaa (2007) mentions 3 thousand; Janzen et. al. (2005) of 1.4 million; UNDP (2007) of 1 million and APUR (2012) talks of 1.2 million inhabitants. These differences can be explained by different definitions of both 'Ulaanbaatar' and 'inhabitant' used in these studies. I have chosen to uphold the data from UNdata (2014) because it is the most recent and overall reliability of the source.

ever increasing. This completely landlocked country covers around 1.564.116 km² (UNdata, 2014), that equals a population density of 1.8 per square kilometre. Even with this massive amount of space 1,1 million out of the 2,8 million inhabitants live in small apartments or in 'gers' (traditional Mongolian round tent) in the city. Migrants flock to Ulaanbaatar every day in search of a new beginning, an education or work while there is often no living space available, most Mongolians bring their own.



Image 2: Illegally placed 'gers' in Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

The 'ger-areas' of Ulaanbaatar have been expanding exponentially during the past two decades. This is due to the establishing of new families, the low income level of new migrants and the lack of apartments connected to the centralized sub-structure of Ulaanbaatar (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). As of 2011, around 184.200 inhabitants of Ulaanbaatar live in these 'ger-areas'. That amounts to around 17% of the total population and the number of people in these 'ger-areas' increase by around 60% each year, the percentages will therefore only increase in the coming years. Almost every space within the

city that is not occupied by an apartment block has a 'ger' in it. These, mostly illegally placed, 'gers' are a Mongolian's traditional tent.



Image 3: A traditional Mongolian 'ger' just outside Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

These 'gers' feel, as Tim Cresswell (1996) called it, 'out of place' in the centre of a big city and seem more at home on the open plains of Mongolia. These 'gers' obviously do not have access to running water, electricity or sanitation. But Mongolians are generally very attached to their 'gers'. When talking about their homes they often point to the fact that it is easy to heat up because of its round shape, saving fuel costs, and easy to move should they wish, or need, to do so. The desire, symbolized by the 'ger', to be mobile is central to Mongolian culture and seems to be an inheritance from the Mongolian tribes who have roamed the plains for thousands of years. The nomadic culture still resides within the Mongolians, they often 'dream' of the open plains and their simple rural life. As a consequence they go out to the countryside every weekend to escape the squalor of the city and regain some of that freedom. This is a different circumstance than in most internal migration and mobilities studies. It seems to be the case that most migrants over the world

detach from a sedentary lifestyle in their place of origin and become mobile in search of a better life, the migrants in Mongolia have led relatively mobile lives and move towards sedentary life in the city (see Schapendonk, 2009).

The increasing numbers of migrants are causing issues to flare up in both rural and urban areas. *“The growing concentration of migrants in Ulanbaatar has become very visible and inevitable. Its potential social, economic, and environmental impacts are of interest to policy makers and the international development community.”* (World Bank, 2011). Mongolia is a country where a lot of these processes, struggles and conflicts are extremely visible in the ‘ger-areas’. Where the people live on the fringes of society are in danger of becoming, what Castells (2000) called, 4th world citizens as being left behind by a modernizing, globalising and urbanizing city.



Image 4: These ‘ger-area’s, occupied by people with little to no income, grow exponentially on the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

Box 1:***The history of Genghis Khan***

Mongolia has a very mobile history, this started with the most famous Mongolian; Genghis Khan. Traditionally Mongolians were a nomadic people, roaming vast empty plains in search of fresh pasture for their herds. Mongolia was not one country but an area occupied by many tribes with warlord-like leaders in a state of constant struggle. Among these tribes were the *Naimans*, *Merkits*, *Tatars*, *Khamag Mongols*, and *Keraits*. This remained the case until Genghis Khan (born as Temojin around 1162; see image below) united all Mongolians in 1206 into one tribe *The Mongols*. Temojin gained the honorary title of Khan (great leader) and renamed himself Genghis Khan. He and his descendants went on to conquer most of Asia and even as far into Europe as Poland. Genghis Khan died in 1227 and became a symbol of national pride in Mongolia and barbarity in Europe. During his life his court was a center of knowledge, learning and religious freedom. Even though Genghis Khan had a 'capital city' (Karakorum) his people were still nomads at heart, preferring their old lifestyle over city life and his court moved around. This mentality is still seen in the Mongolian culture. The plains of Mongolia are to this day viewed as an idealized place of freedom where herds of sheep, goats and cows wander with their herders. The dream of a 'free', nomadic, life still lives on in the minds on many Mongolians. (Weatherford, 2004). Image 5: Statue of Genghis Khan in Ulaanbaatar. By Jelle Blom.



Some of the reasons why this exponential urbanization is happening in Mongolia might be quite self-evident, others might be slightly loftier. The adoption of democracy and the following steps onto the global market economy has led to significant changes to all parts of Mongolian society and economy (Janzen, 2005). Throughout history, Mongolians have mostly been nomads until its adoption of the Soviet system of government (Algaa, 2007; see Box1). The process of urbanization started in Soviet-times and expanded rapidly after the collapse of state-funded and state-owned agricultural systems in rural areas. As a result of this most of the rural population lost their jobs (Janzen, 2005). The Mongolian government then proceeded with development plans largely focussing on the three major cities, Ulaanbaatar (or Ulan Bator), Darkhan (or Darhan) and Erdenet (see Map 1) causing increasingly high urbanization numbers in those cities. Most of this centred around Ulaanbaatar however. As a result the percentage of the population living in urban areas was around 57% during the 90's (Neupert & Goldstein, 1994). These were the early signs of increasing rural-urban migration leading to rapid urbanization. The

population of Ulaanbaatar accounted for 14% of the total population of Mongolia in 1956, increased to 22.3% in 1969 and increased further to 43.6% in 2010 (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). The statistics department of Ulaanbaatar claims that between 2000 and 2011 383,924 internal migrants registered in Ulaanbaatar, that is an average of nearly 35 thousand every year. By comparison, around 68 thousand people left the city during these years. The highest mark was reached after a drought in 2003 and 2004 which led to 68,808 people migrating to Ulaanbaatar in 2004 (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). These are only the registered migrants however and there are many unregistered migrants, especially in the 'ger-areas', who do not show up in these statistics.

The way I have studied the issues these migrants face in this research is by examining them from an ethnographical perspective focussing on their mobility and livelihoods. This thesis follows the lives and livelihoods of five migrants. The stories of these five migrants, plus the stories of others I have met during my fieldwork, will form a guideline throughout this thesis. I grew quite close to these migrants during my time in Ulaanbaatar, I lived with Batbayar and his family for almost four months and went travelling through rural Mongolia with another of these migrants, Batjargal, who became a close friend in the process. Their frankness, hospitality, friendliness and experiences will help to link my own observations with migration theory and literature to paint a picture of the livelihood and mobility of rural-urban migrants in Mongolia. The research goal of this thesis is to gain insight into the lives of rural-urban migrants in Ulaanbaatar through ethnographic methodology and examine the possible link between their mobility and their urban household livelihoods; thus linking theories of migration, migrant mobilities and household livelihoods through a narrative of the stories of migrants.

This leads to the following main research question: *What are the mobility experiences of rural-urban migrants in Mongolia, centred around Ulaanbaatar, and how does their mobility affect their household livelihoods?*

To answer this main research question first there are a number of sub questions that need to be addressed. The sub questions in this thesis are:

- Which mobility experiences can be observed among urban migrants, with a rural background, and what is the migrant's perception of this mobility?
 - How do migrants experience their pre-migration mobility?
 - How do migrants experience their mobility in Ulaanbaatar?
 - How do migrants experience their post-migration mobility?
- How does the rural-urban migration of the migrant influence their household livelihoods on a multi-local level?
 - Do the migrants make decisions regarding livelihood on a household level?

This thesis will follow the conventional structure of explaining the methodology used for this thesis (Chapter 2) and the theories behind central to the subject (Chapter 3) first. Before answering the research question with qualitative empirical data. The mobility experience of the migrants is discussed in Chapter 4 and the livelihood aspects in Chapter 5 before answering the main research question in Chapter 6. In this thesis I will often give examples and stories from five migrants I followed extensively during my time in Mongolia. These five migrants and their stories will serve as the backbone of this thesis. In Paragraph 4.1.1. I will introduce these migrants first and the migratory moves they made to Ulaanbaatar. All five migrants have a different story to tell and these stories will all offer a different perspective on the subjects covered in this thesis.



Image 6: The office where I worked during my time in Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

1.1 The issue of Rural-Urban Migration

Migrants often find themselves strangers in a new environment. This is especially true for people coming from rural areas. In Mongolia most migrants come from either small cities or from the plains. The adjustment to life in the city is often difficult. Cultural differences are often thought of when discussing international migration, but are also relevant in other forms of migration research. *“Specifically to rural-to-urban migration where such moves bring population groups together that often have social, cultural, linguistic, ethnic and racial differences. It is a mistake to assume that internal migrants are necessarily more homogenous in terms of these characteristics than are international migrants.”* (King & Skeldon, 2010). What is meant by this became clearer during my fieldwork in Ulaanbaatar. Batbayar has lived in Ulaanbaatar for a long time and over time he has come to identify more and more with Ulaanbaatar’s native inhabitants, sharing their views on the new arrivals, which is illustrated in this small remark:

You can tell that some people have problems integrating in to city-life. Some people prefer gers over apartments, that is their choice, even though my apartment now is much more comfortable than my old ger.

- Batbayar, 2014.



Image 7: The second bedroom I rented in Batbayar’s two room apartment, which also serves as the kitchen. *By Jelle Blom.*

What Batbayar refers to is the problem of integrating into city life, which he has done successfully over time. Migrants who do not integrate fully, or have not had the time to do so, into city life are visible in Ulaanbaatar. The 'ger-areas' expand daily for example. After reflection I realized that the issue Batbayar points out is from the perspective of city dwellers, who seem to be becoming more aware of the internal migration issue facing Mongolia. King and Skeldon (2010) rightly say that internal migration, nowadays is often the less studied form of migration. In fact, international migrants are a minority (200 million) compared to the 540 million internal migrants (King & Skeldon, 2010). Like its name suggests rural-urban migration is a migration from the countryside to a city within the same country. Rural-urban migration is of course part of the larger spectrum of the internal migration field. This form of migration can lead to a further migratory move towards international migration. In Mongolia this is rarely the case however. This is shown by the relatively low numbers of migrants leaving Ulaanbaatar, 8.502, compared to the migrants entering the city, 28.593 (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). The negative net migration rate of Mongolia, -1.1, is also relatively small compared to other Asian developing countries (UN ESCAP, 2012). Generally, people move to the capital in the hope of staying there to find a job or finish an education, not necessarily hoping to make a further move to a different country. This is a pattern I also witnessed among the migrants I interviewed during my fieldwork.

The phenomenon of rural-urban migration has been studied extensively but the process of migration in Mongolia has not been studied often. Traditionally rural-urban migration theory has focussed on two things: Why do migrants move? And where do they go (mainly how far)? The first question has been an important topic of discussion which led to the push-pull-hypothesis. Often studies suggest that these push-pull factors play an important role and that migration patterns depend on the economic possibilities in urban areas. It is therefore a model which describes and predicts migratory movements from a rational economic level for which it was developed by Harris and Todaro (1970). The reasons why the migrants followed in this thesis chose to migrate will become clear in their stories.

The push-pull analysis is not a major part of this thesis however because of its restrictions in the social aspects of the decision to migrate. In Africa rural-urban migration has been studied by Akin Mabogunje (1970) for example, where he did a system analysis

model for rural-urban migration patterns in West Africa. In neighbouring China there have been similar urbanization issues as in Mongolia and these effects have been studied extensively (Zhang and Song, 2003; Liu, Li and Zhang, 2003; etc.), unlike in Mongolia. Internal migration and its relationship to development has become a focus for some migration scholars (see: De Wind & Holdaway, 2008).

“As a result of this literature on what is often called the ‘migration-development nexus’, international migration is now widely viewed as having the potential to contribute to development and poverty alleviation. Many governments and development agencies are seeking ways to maximise the benefits of migration, e.g. through remittances and return migration, and minimise its costs. Yet the focus of both scholars and policy-makers has tended to be almost exclusively on the relationship between development and international migration, overlooking the fact that, in most developing countries, internal migration is quantitatively more important.” (King & Skeldon, 2010, p. 1637).

Internal migration has the potential to significantly change a country and internal migration also changes migrants. In this thesis I will expand on rural-urban migrants from a specific perspective, that of mobility and livelihoods. I will focus on what effect migration has on the migrants instead of on the country or the city. I will expand further of the theories behind rural-urban migration in chapter three.

1.2. Migrant Livelihoods and Mobilities

This thesis examines effects on livelihoods, but what are livelihoods? ‘Livelihoods’ is often accompanied by a signifier called ‘sustainable’. Sustainable Livelihoods is a concept that has been developed in the context of poverty alleviation (Bryceson et al., 2003). It is a concept that is increasingly used by policy-makers and developmental agencies to mean the life patterns of people. Livelihoods has emerged as a term in mobility and migration studies dating from Chambers (1987), but has been more widely used since the 1990’s (see Bryceson et al, 2003; De Haan & Zoomers, 2005). The term sustainable livelihoods was accompanied by an extensive debate about its meaning and usage (Ashley and Carney, 1999). *“Is [sustainable livelihoods] an approach, an objective or a framework?”* (Bryceson et al, 2003, p.3). The UK Department for International Development (DFID) sees the concept more as a

tool to be used in conjunction with the theoretical framework (Ashley and Carney, 1999). An increasing number of academic studies are using the term of sustainable livelihoods to *“enhance understanding of individual, household or community efforts to achieve day-to-day survival and long-term betterment in a developing country”* (Bryceson et al., 2003, p.3). This is the approach I have taken in my research for this thesis. The focus on livelihoods is an interesting way to view migration from a different perspective, the perspective of the migrant and their families. I will expand on this further in chapter 3.

I have followed the same definition of sustainable livelihoods as stated above. The Livelihoods Approach focuses on understanding the individual, household or community efforts for survival (Bryceson et al., 2003). The aim of Bryceson et al. (2003) was to study mobility using the Livelihood Approach with the aim of poverty alleviation. My research uses this same approach but is centred around a different case, using rural-urban migrants and their livelihoods as a starting point and adding mobility. Furthermore I will focus on an individual migrant's role within a household livelihood approach.

When thinking about livelihood strategy jobs often spring to mind. Migration is also a livelihoods strategy. Livelihood strategy was originally often referred to as survival strategy in fact. Migration however does not decrease inequalities between areas of origin and destination in general. It is more seen as a way to increase a single rural household's livelihood, through remittances sent by members employed in urban areas for example (de Haan, 2000). The urban and rural livelihoods are then linked (Tacoli, 1998). The move to urban areas is a chance to decrease a household's poverty through this rural-urban linkage (Tacoli, 1998) this is an important strategy when considering migrant-issues.

“Migration is an important element of livelihood strategies. In many cases, it is more useful to understand households as multispatial rather than 'rural' or 'urban', and to encourage the positive linkages between spatially distant members, by recognising urban-based members' claims on rural assets and facilitating their contribution to the rural economy, for example through the productive investment of remittances.” (Tacoli, 1998, p.13).

The multi-spatial element is a key element in the livelihood strategy . Multi-spatiality requires mobility however. The research field of 'mobility' is much more than the availability

of means of transportation. It encompasses the decision-making, about both means and destination, the availability of transportation and the movement itself (Bryceson et al., 2003). Mobility and accessibility are not the same thing, accessibility only looks at the means of transport available to the migrant. Accessibility is required to bring supplies to a village for example. Mobility is a measure of how people choose to move between points (Porter, 2001). The mobility in this thesis is dependent on the individual migrant and what is available to set migrant (Porter, 2001) and how he/she views his own (im)mobility. This immobility (see Schapendonk, 2009) is a lack of mobility experienced by the migrant. Immobility is often seen as a state of being. This is experienced mobility and this thesis focusses on how it impacts the lives of the migrants on a multi-local level.

Mobility and migration have very significant effect on the family's livelihoods in rural areas (de Haan, 1999). When I talked with migrants they quite often felt a need to have their families closer. As Munkhbileg, one of the migrants I interviewed, said: *My family lives too far away, it is hard to stay in contact with them.* When I asked if she would consider moving back to the countryside she answered: *I feel like I can't, because of work, because of friends, I have to stay here.* It is physically very easy to move between rural and urban in Mongolia (although not as easy as in most Western countries), but mobility is more than that. It is decision-making and the wish for something different that plays a central role in Mongolia. When researching mobility in Mongolia the past nomadic lifestyle still plays a role (see Box1). Khazanov and Wink (2001) describe the issues faced by nomadic lifestyles in a city. It is the dichotomy of sedentarism versus nomadism that is often seen in scientific research. This might not be the case in Mongolia.

1.3. The impact of this thesis

The growth of Mongolia is increasing the number of rural urban migrants, 31,6% of the population is now a migrant (World Bank, 2011), and the capital city of Ulaanbaatar is their main destination (Algae, 2007). As a result the 'ger-areas' of Ulaanbaatar expand by 60% each year (Bayanchimag & Batbayar, 2012). These are facts that make Mongolia an interesting case to study for a migration scholar but the impact the migration has on the migrant is less studied. The change brings migrants to a different culture in which it is not also easy to assimilate. The impact of the migration process on the Mongolian migrant is

partly influenced by the nomadic past of Mongolia. In most migration-cases migrants detach from a sedentary lifestyle in their place of origin and make a migratory move (become mobile), the reversal of the roles of sedentary or nomadic lifestyles in the case of Mongolian migrants gives us an opportunity to look at migrant mobilities studies from this different perspective. In terms of scientific relevance this is a key consideration. This thesis also relates the two research fields of mobility studies and livelihoods with regard to Mongolian migrants (see Chapter 3). The two fields are very different but both are influenced by an individual or a household consideration (de Haan, 1999). Livelihoods has been described (Bryceson et. al, 2003; de Jong, 2000) as a process of collective decision-making that is made on the household level. But the role of the individual, and choices they make to further their own personal development, have scarcely been factored in. In this thesis I will examine the role of an individual's decision-making, the consequences that has for household livelihoods in Mongolia and how that is influenced by their mobility.

2. Methodology

Fieldwork for qualitative research is rarely a simple process. During my fieldwork I found that the methods and methodology I planned to use from my research proposal were almost completely defunct in real life situations. The journey I went through during the fieldwork-process of this thesis will be explained in this chapter and I will argue why certain choices had to be made 'on the fly' and why these choices do not impede the value of this research. Fieldwork is rarely a straight forward process and, certainly in my case, changes significantly during the process and I will reflect on my methods, methodology and fieldwork. This seems to be inherent to geographic and anthropological fieldwork, as England (2001, p. 210) said: *"fieldwork is a discursive process in which the research encounter is structured by the researcher and the researched"*. Originally this thesis was meant to be based on a survey and then more in-depth interviews with migrants but this methodology did not work in the Mongolian context and, structured by the respondents, the methodology changed.

2.1. Ethnography

In this research I have adopted the qualitative method of ethnography. Ethnography is aimed at reconstructing the culture of a group or individual (Atkinson, 2001) and has a distinctive descriptive character. Ethnography, theoretically at least, has the advantage of giving more insight in the lives of migrants because of the inside-view it provides. That was the main reason behind this choice in methodology. During the fieldwork itself I found that there were also practical arguments to be made for this methodology. My ethnographic research knows four phases (a condensed version of Wester & Peters, 2009). In reality all phases mixed and the lines between them blurred until it seemed as one 'fieldwork-phase' and only looking back are the distinctions visible. I mentioned that I did not plan on using an ethnographic methodology from the start, I changed my methodology whilst in the field, from a survey-based methodology to an ethnographic methodology. I will argue why the change in methodology was necessary and describe my actions within each of the phases of my fieldwork process.

2.1.1 Preparation phase

This phase is intended to identify the central issues at stake in the region of choice, in this case Mongolia, and is done before the actual fieldwork begins. Mongolia might have been an unorthodox choice as a case, but the reasoning behind this choice was clear from the

beginning. Central Asia in general is rarely an area which occupies the Western migration scholar. The focus for migration scholars often tends to be migration in relation to the Western world or Africa. Since this research was meant for a master thesis having an area which is less studied gives a clear advantage in terms of originality and being able to add something substantial to scientific knowledge. Central Asia gave me this area with relatively unexplored migration issues and of the central Asian countries Mongolia fitted best because of practicalities such as safety, connections and visas.

During the preparation for this research I found the examination of migration issues in Mongolia fascinating but soon discovered during my original literature search that there was one real issue that stood out in Mongolia: rural-urban migration. Internal migration has been overshadowed in recent years by international migration so this too gave me an opportunity to examine the less conventional sides of migration. It was clear from this point on that internal migration has significant impact in Mongolia. Then examining the theories relevant to the case became a priority. The perspective of the migrant seemed very attractive to me at the time because the methodological implications would suit the strengths of my writing- and research style quite well. The livelihood approach is a way of examining the effects of migration on the migrant. Combining this approach with migration mobility gave extra value to this research and would also imply connecting rural to urban because of the multi-localities inherent in these intra-urban households. After this choice of subject it was a case of forming a research question which was both intriguing and manageable in the limited time given for this thesis. I arrived relatively quickly at this research question with the added notation that the research in this phase still included an analysis of migrant successfulness which was later excluded. On paper, this phase centred on the theoretical background and research questions, in reality the choices made in this phase shaped the rest of the research process.

I also started to make the practical preparations which were necessary for a four month long stay in Mongolia. This involved a visa for four months, a traditional tourist-visa would not suffice because of the research I was going to do. With regard to my research, I started out with the aim of using a survey to identifying respondents in the urban centre of Ulaanbaatar. I started examining the possibilities for using such a survey at an early stage of my research preparation.

2.1.2. Locational phase

There are choices to be made at the start of every research project and I had originally planned to make this research multi-sited by visiting both rural and urban households. The setting for this research soon turned out to be Ulaanbaatar, the place where most issues with rural-urban migration could be seen, for purely practical reasons. I also needed a safe place to live during the time I was in the field and also needed to stay in contact with the Radboud University, my supervisor and family. This was impossible in rural Mongolia, especially since temperatures in February reach -35°C and there is little to no electricity. This went hand in hand with discussing the various issues that were available to research and if they would suit multi-sited or single-sited ethnography more. When viewing the city as both a relational and an emotional place (see Gielis, 2011), and the migrant as my unit of analysis, a single-sited ethnographic approach would fit this research.

During this phase I also started to try to make contact with parties in Mongolia that could offer me a place to work and assistance during this research. This assistance would range from translating to guided tours. Observation is a key part of ethnography so I looked for a workplace which would give me access to some migrants. I found such a place in the form of the Tuul River Basin Authority, who were generously able to provide me with some of the help I needed during my fieldwork. It turned out that the assistance available in Mongolia was limited because of a different approach to research. During this phase I also needed to create my own role as an observer. I initially chose to be a participatory observer because I felt this would give me more insight into the daily life of the migrants. As a participatory observer I would join the migrants in their daily routine and would gather the honest, uninhibited, opinions and experiences of my migrants. On reflection it is doubtful that I was a participatory observer as I would never truly know what it feels like to be a rural-urban migrant in Ulaanbaatar. I did not face the same issues as them, I faced other ones instead. I also had my first own experiences of life in Mongolia to draw from during this phase.

2.1.3. Tuning phase

Whilst making these choices and I continued figuring out the best way of researching my research-goals by continually adapting my methods to those most likely to produce results (I will expand on this further later in this chapter). This phase was characterised by a couple of changes in the methods used during my research.

I landed on a very cold February morning in Ulaanbaatar and felt like I fell into the deep end of a pool without being thoroughly prepared. I had to figure out my place both as a researcher and as a human being and it took quite a few days for me to feel comfortable. Luckily for me, most of the Mongolians (with Batbayar as most prominent example) I met during my first weeks in the country were very helpful and willing to show me around town and how to survive amidst the chaos of Ulaanbaatar. When I arrived, I soon started looking for respondents for my planned survey. This survey was meant to include around fifty respondents in order to identify patterns. This survey did give me significant insights in the scale of the migration issue in Ulaanbaatar and also gave me a better idea from which areas the migrants came. When I tried to do this survey amongst my colleagues it was produced some results and generally worked reasonably well. I could explain what I was asking and they were very willing to help. Outside of this circle this survey did not work out. This survey failed to be very detailed, even though I did manage to find eighty respondents, because I needed it translated into Mongolian, where it lost the nuances within the questions and with the language barrier preventing me from asking follow-up questions I got little new information. This method now mostly served as background information and, after some tweaks, a map of rural-urban migration patterns was created by having the migrants circle their hometown on a map of Mongolia (the idea for which came from mental mapping techniques in human geography). My survey methodology was not working and I focused entirely on the qualitative aspects of my research. *“Typically, qualitative discussions focus on paradigms, on theoretical overviews (e.g., Morrow & Smith, 2000), or on identity and moral agency (e.g., Hoshmand, 2005), and researchers are left without guidance as to how to proceed with an inquiry.”* (Cresswell et. al., 2007). I therefore needed a new approach, which I had to figure out whilst in the field. I needed to find a way of communicating with the migrants and overcome the language barrier which was becoming more disruptive the further I stepped out of my comfort-zone. In-depth interviews would offer me the chance to

ask follow-up questions but would not give me the quantifiable data that a survey would. The language problem would be less of an issue if I had more time with the migrants. That would mean I could slowly explain what I meant and gain the information about their livelihoods and mobility experiences that I required, time was an important factor during my fieldwork.

I switched to interviews with migrants, which switched my entire methodology towards an ethnographic methodology. I found that migrants were willing to talk to me about their home-life in one-on-one interviews but the answer always seemed quite vague. The language barrier that I mentioned above did not help matters. It was also puzzling that people were willing to talk to me openly when I was not taking notes or there as a researcher but as a tourist. I therefore experimented with structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews until I found that interviews with an extremely loose character yielded the best result. This worked best with the migrants I interviewed because it avoided socially desirable answers. They originally seemed to give me the answers I wanted to hear (or needed to hear) for my research. This defeated the point of following these migrants so I resorted to just going to places with them. During these trips I found out more on how they actually viewed their livelihoods. Batjargal, for example, was quite closed off when I first met him but opened up when we went out for lunch one day. I offered to help him write an application for a summer-school in Germany for which he wanted to apply and so gained his trust. This eventually led to me giving him lessons in English every Tuesday, during which time I asked him questions relating to my research whilst keeping it loose. Very important to note is that seeing these migrants over a significant period of time give me more familiarity with them and their language use. This added value of time was the key factor in gaining trust and therefore in obtaining information about the migrants. An issue with this method however is that I had little control over the interview and could not record the interviews. My notes on these interviews were hastily written down afterwards from memory. This has an impact on the 'quotes' I will be using in this thesis. The wording is often times done by me and is based on my interpretation of what they meant rather than what they actually said. This is due to the relatively poor grasp on the English language among many Mongolians.

often portrayed as a classical colonial encounter in which the fieldworker lords it over her/his respondents, the fact of the matter is that it usually does not feel much like that at all. More often it is a curious mixture of humiliations and intimidations mixed with moments of insight and even enjoyment”.

2.1.4. Writing phase

During the end of my fieldwork I gathered my data from observations, interviews and documents and coded them by the points of interest. This was done to create an overview over the data and discover if there were still areas I had not covered. This was the writing phase (a combination of the descriptive, thematic and writing phases of Wester and Peters, 2009) of my research during which time I started looking for patterns within my data which could guide me to answering my research questions. During this phase an opportunity arose to bring back some elements of multi-sidedness that I had originally cut from this thesis when Batjargal wanted to show me rural Mongolia. I asked him if we could go to visit his family in rural Mongolia and he generously agreed to take me. We visited his mother in a village just outside Ulaanbaatar and his parents-in-law in the area of Sukhbaatar in the North (bordering Russia). During these trips I gained some insight in the multi-localities of his household and therefore re-introduced some elements of multi-local livelihoods in this research. Important to note is that even after my fieldwork was finished I stayed in contact with Batbayar and Batjargal (and many other Mongolians) through new media like Skype and Facebook and used this frequently to gather more information during the writing of this thesis.

In the writing phase of this research I also gathered the data into patterns which would later become the main source for the main paragraphs and chapters in this thesis. The goal was not to make an analysis of these patterns but simply to relate the migrants experience about their mobility and migration. The patterns became clearer when comparing my data with literature on migrants in other areas. I checked the patterns I had seen with the rest of my data to make sure that the data did not contradict itself. Gathering these patterns and fitting them within the framework of this thesis was the last step in this writing phase. As many of my findings are based on observations and interviews these form the guideline through this thesis which oftentimes has a narrative quality to it often found in ethnographical research.

2.2. Experiencing fieldwork

Changing the research methodology whilst doing fieldwork brought unexpected challenges but the result was an ethnographic study of rural-urban migrants in Mongolia. This methodology offered me the opportunity to involve myself as much as possible in the life and activities of a select few migrants which gave me the data required for the writing of this thesis. Fine (2003) argues that qualitative, and especially ethnographic, research is more than the inclusion of the data gathered during fieldwork. The world that has been observed during this fieldwork has to be presented to build the arguments instead of clearing up the arguments. That is also what I have tried to do in the writing of this thesis. This aimed to be a presentation of the world of rural-urban migrants in Ulaanbaatar. But because it is based on my own observation and my interpretation of the things said during interviews, it is often not a presentation of their world but a presentation of my interpretations of their worlds. This is a part of ethnography and this change was a direct result of my relationship with my subject. At the beginning of this chapter I quoted England (2001) because his observation about the relationship between the research, the researcher and the researched has turned out to be true during my fieldwork in Mongolia and in the writing of this thesis; it was shaped more by the obstacles faced and by the migrants I followed than by my original research plan.

3. Livelihood and Mobility theories

Paragraph 1.2. is an introduction on the theoretical underpinnings of this research. These theories play a key role in every phase of both the fieldwork for and the writing of this thesis. The migrants I interviewed were often puzzled by my interest in their livelihoods and mobility and how this could be of value in my research about migrants in Ulaanbaatar.

3.1 Livelihoods

The livelihoods approach two decades ago was in the viewed as a *“more optimistic [version of] household studies ... which approached households from a livelihoods perspective and showed how people are able to survive.”* (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005, p. 29). As stated in chapter one, the basis of this approach are Chambers and Conway (1992), in their research they gained insight from previous research on food security and agro-ecological sustainability, to make ‘sustainable livelihoods’ the focus in research on environmental sustainability (see Chambers and Conway, 1992; De Haan & Zoomers, 2005). Their definition stated that: *“a livelihood system comprises the capabilities, assets (including both material and social resources) and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base.”* (Carney, 1998, p.2). After this the focus soon switched from environmental issues to poverty alleviation. This approach was meant *“to search for more effective methods to support people and communities in ways that are more meaningful to their daily lives and needs, as opposed to ready-made, interventionist instruments”* (Appendini, 2001, p.24). It therefore has a developmental inclination.

In the 1990’s there was need for a new approach in poverty; there was a need for a livelihood approach. The sustainable livelihoods frameworks, used in various policies by the British governmental body Department of International Development (DFID) since, has not changed much since Chambers and Conway, it was claimed that the used approach was:

“not intended to depict reality in any specific setting . . . [but] rather [used] as an analytical structure for coming to grips with the complexity of livelihoods, understanding influences on poverty and identifying where interventions can best be made. The assumption is that people pursue a range of livelihood outcomes (health, income, reduced vulnerability, etc.) by drawing on a range of assets to pursue a variety of activities. ... In aggregate, their

conditions determine their access to assets and livelihood opportunities and the way in which these can be converted into outcomes. In this way, poverty, and the opportunities to escape from it, depends on all of the above.” (Farrington et. al., 1999, p. 1, in: De Haan & Zoomers, 2005). In this quote by Farrington we find elements of the original definition by Chambers and Conway (1992), but the shift to poverty and livelihood strategies is also visible.

The idea that livelihoods can go beyond economic considerations was uttered by Long (1991) and is a reason behind my choice for using livelihood strategies in this research. This idea was not new however, Wallmann (1984) said it before: *“Livelihood is never just a matter of finding or making shelter, transacting money, getting food to put on the family table or to exchange on the market place. It is equally a matter of ownership and circulation of information, the management of skills and relationships and the affirmation of personal significance . . . and group identity. The tasks of meeting obligations, of security, identity and status, and organizing time are as crucial to livelihood as bread and shelter.”* (in: Appendini, 2001, p.25). Livelihood approaches go beyond economic reasoning, *“this is not to say that livelihood is not a matter of material well-being, but rather that it also includes non-material aspects of well-being.”* (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005, p. 32). So as the definition of Chambers and Conway (1992) can be upheld but with the additions of the non-economic considerations offered by Appendini (2001) and De Haan and Zoomers (2005). With the goal of *“enhance understanding of individual, household or community efforts to achieve day-to-day survival and long-term betterment in a developing country”* (Bryceson et al., 2003, p.3).

Livelihoods as a way of understanding migrants faced two challenges (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005). The first challenge is the access. Access is increasingly seen as a key point in the conceptualization of livelihoods. The social relations, institutions and organizations are variables entangled with this issue. The access tends not to go further than the economic considerations, as stated above. The second challenge is the lack of information about the decision-making process involved in a migrant’s choices. Some decision-making processes are made from a strategic perspective, whilst others tend to be characterized as unintentional behaviour. *“In this context, styles and pathways are used as concepts that try to disentangle regularities. A pathway can be defined as a pattern of livelihood activities which emerges from a co-ordination process among actors, arising from individual strategic behaviour embedded both in a historical repertoire and in social differentiation, including*

power relations and institutional processes, both of which play a role in subsequent decisionmaking.” (De Haan & Zoomers, 2005, p.44-45). The role of the individual within this household decision-making process is left aside in livelihood studies. The role of the individual, who can make choices to further their own personal development, could have an impact on the household. This issue of individual versus collective decision making (which is more goal oriented) plays a role in this thesis. Too little is known about the patterns in the decision-making process with regard to rural-urban migration, especially when considering the multi-local livelihoods that will be created by rural-urban migration.

3.2. Multi-local households

The urban and rural livelihoods are linked through rural-urban migration (Tacoli, 1998). This livelihood strategy to decrease poverty for a multi-local household is increasingly used in Mongolia, this can be logically concluded from the rising number of rural-urban migrants. *“Migration is an important element of livelihood strategies. In many cases, it is more useful to understand households as multispatial rather than 'rural' or 'urban' (Tacoli, 1998, p.13).* But what is this element of multi-spatiality or multi-locality? The strong commitments between rural-based and urban-based members of the same household constitute a 'multi-spatial households' (Tacoli, 1998). The key point here is that the household does not occupy the same physical space, but do exist within the same social, or networked, space (see: Smith, 2007). Remittances then form an interesting way of receiving support from the urban-based family members. This is not only an important source of income for families of migrants. This goes for many forms of migration, not just rural-urban migration, with rural-urban migration the multi-local livelihoods can clearly be seen.

As with general livelihood-research, the literature on rural-urban linkage often quantifies this as an economic strategy. The rural-urban linkage transfers assets from urban to rural or vice versa. With remittances and a support network in both physical spaces this can be seen as a livelihood strategy for a household (see Kruger, 1998). There has been little known about the emotional complexities of this social space. This goes back to my earlier comments about the differences between a nomadic life and a sedentary life. Khazanov and Wink (2001) studied nomadic lifestyles in a city and found that these lifestyles do not always assimilate. Urban-dwellers with a nomadic history tend to have a transcendent emotional-

social space which still incorporates the nomadic rural history (Khazanov and Wink, 2001). This emotional element of multi-localities is interesting with regard to Mongolian migrants. Batjargal told me about the troubles faced by an urban-based member of a multi-local household with a nomadic history. This emotional element to multi-local livelihoods is an element I have explored in this thesis.

I came to Ulaanbaatar to finish my education. But some of my family stayed behind. Early on I'd go back when I could, during holidays, to experience the simple life I'd left behind. Walking around the open fields and drinking traditional Mongolian drinks such as horse milk, when in season. The 'free-life' is difficult to match with living in a metropolis like Ulaanbaatar. I feel part of two separate worlds.

- Batjargal

3.3. Migrant (Im)mobilities

Mobility is seen as a 'motor of change'. The importance of mobility was brought to light by philosophical pioneers like Deleuze and has had great influences throughout the Human geographic research fields. *"Mobility (instead of only settlement) is perceived as integral to human lives which challenges social science to go beyond their sedentary viewpoints."* (Schapendonk, 2009). Mobility changed both place of origin and place of destination through a combination of movements in goods, money, information and people (Ernste, Martens & Schapendonk, 2012; Hannam et al., 2006). Migration and mobilities are often linked. *"Through the analysis of different migrant mobilities, the relationships between dwelling and mobility, and the mobilization of transnational and diasporic networks and other connections. And yet, mobilities research clearly extends far beyond the study of migration, just as the latter extends far beyond the conceptual and methodological concerns of 'the new mobilities paradigm.'* (see: Cresswell, 2006; Hannam et al., 2006; Sheller and Urry, 2006). *Although research on mobilities and migrations cannot be collapsed onto each other, there are many productive connections between them, particularly in terms of materiality, politics and methodology."* (Blunt, 2007, p.2). It is therefore necessary to limit the range of mobilities studies incorporated in this thesis, because it is a separate field in its own right. I will only focus on one element of it: people, specifically: migrants.

This field of migrant mobilities focuses on the changes that result of a migratory move. As Ernste, Martens and Schapendonk (2012, p. 509) put it: *“people, as well as other material and immaterial objects of exchange, change themselves through the process of relocation, something which has largely been ignored in the spatial disciplines, and mainstream transportation research in particular”*. That migrants change through mobility is the general idea behind this thinking. That is the assumption which triggers the debate around migrant mobilities.

There is increasing agreement to view migration not as a movement between two distinct communities, which would belong to different places and characterized by different social relations, but rather as continuation of the social relation of the migrant (Diminescu, 2008). Mobility for a migrant expands his sense of ‘place’ without breaking the ‘emotional space’. In the modern age, with highly developed forms of long distance communication, a migrant is no longer cut off from his former relations by a migratory move. It is therefore important to look at the changes that occur in a migrant and therefore in the social relations within households on a multi-local level. The question of: ‘how has mobility changed the social space of the migrant’ remains up for debate.

In Mongolia the element of sedentary and nomadic lifestyles plays a key role within this migrant mobilities debate. The key element of nomadic lifestyles, according to Deleuze and Guattari (1987), is the ‘in-between’: *“The nomad has a territory; he follows customary paths; he goes from one point to another; he is not ignorant of points ... But the question is what in nomad life is a principle and what is only a consequence ... A path is always between two points, but the in-between has taken on all the consistency and enjoys both an autonomy and a direction of its own. The life of the nomad is the intermezzo”* (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.380). Deleuze and Guattari discuss nomads, brilliantly, on a highly theoretical level. In this thesis I take one element out of their theories and relate this to the Mongolian migrant, not on a theoretical level but as a practical consideration that influences Mongolian migrants. This element of the ‘in-between’ state of nomads has consequences for the debate on migrant mobilities in Mongolia. How does sedentary life within the city affect the migrant in Mongolia? The ‘in-between’ then no longer exists.

3.4. Using the theories

In the case of Mongolian migration there are several aspects that influence the process. Two of these aspects have a theoretical basis in human geography; household livelihood and mobility. In these case of Mongolia these aspect are also influenced by the nomadic past of the Mongolian people. The livelihood approach studies households from the perspective of livelihoods (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005). Not only with regard to economics but non-economic considerations influence the Mongolian household dynamic as well. The role of the household and their decision making is central. But an individual's decision making influences the livelihood of the rest of the household (Chapter 4). In this thesis the relation between the household and the individual decision making is related trough migration.

This decision making with regard to migration is influenced by their mobility. Mobility as a 'motor of change' plays a key role in this thesis. Migration does change the place of destination and the place of origin (Hannam et. al., 2006). I will analyse the migrant's experience with their mobility during three phases (Chapter 5): before the migration, the first phase in the city and after the migrant has been in the city for some time. Each phase offers different challenges for migrants with regard to mobility. A question that remains is how does mobility influence the migrant? In this thesis I will relate the change within the migrant and the household livelihood. A changing migrant and the migratory move itself can create multi-local household livelihoods (Tacoli,1998) that span several physical spaces but how does this relate to the household?

Another question is whether 'a nomad in the city' truly has a sedentary lifestyle. Sedentarism versus nomadism has often been described as a dichotomy, as one or the other (Khazanov and Wink, 2001). But this might not be the case with regard to Mongolian migrants. Does this 'in-between' state of Deleuze and Guattari (1987) have no place in sedentary, city life? If the 'in-between' is a state of mobility, the opposite (a sedentary life) should be the immobility. Immobility comes in various forms (see Schapendonk, 2012), the element that is interesting with regard to Mongolian rural-urban migrants is experienced (or perceived) immobility. I tried to gather the migrants' own ideas about their (im)mobility (Chapter 4) and livelihood (Chapter 5) in this thesis, which resulted in questions about the relation between household and individual; nomadism and sedentarism; and experienced (im)mobility.

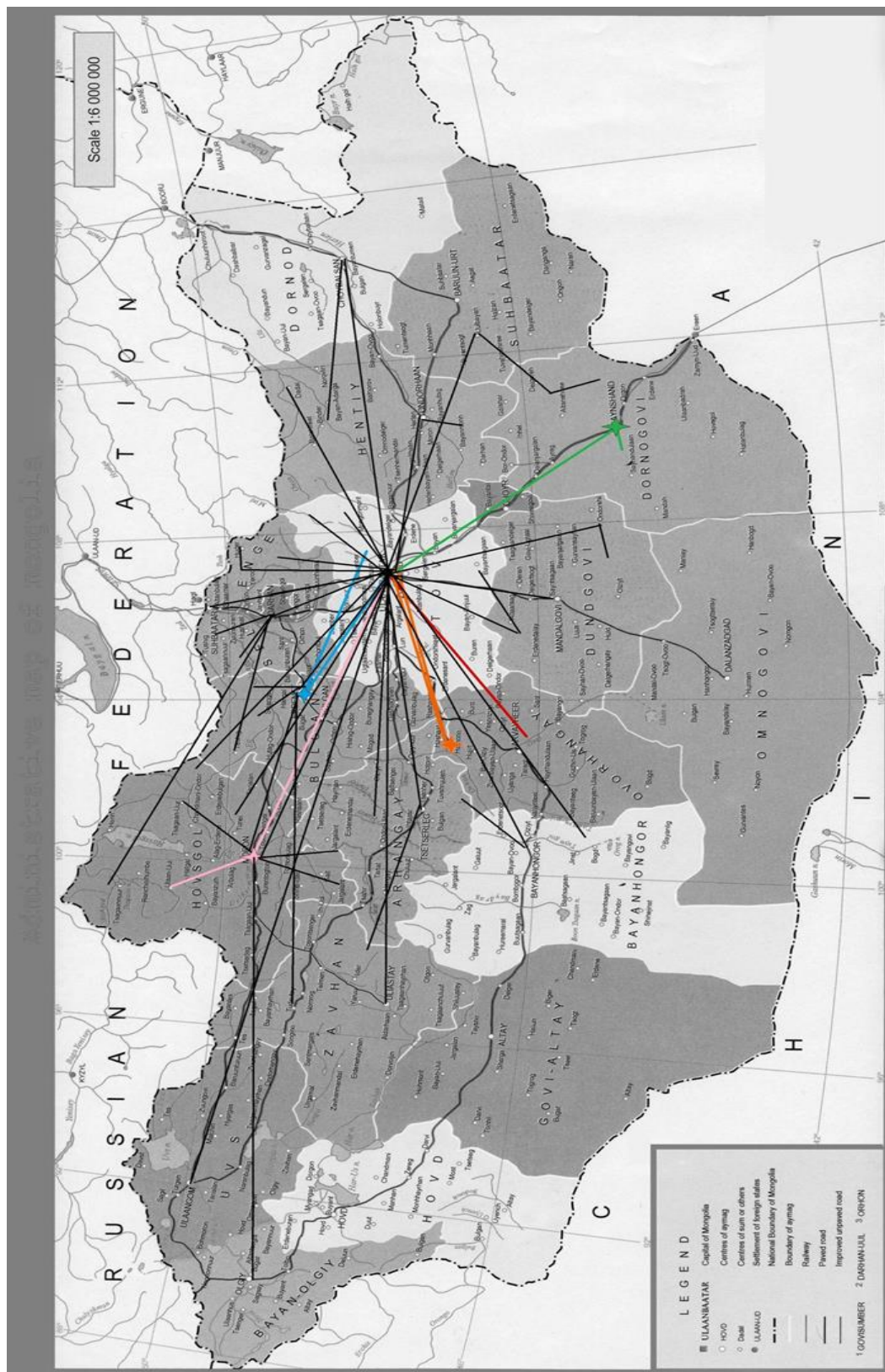
4. Mobility and Mongolians

When I first came here, this city was a stranger. The city is my home now, I don't want to go back. Everything is here, that is why people move here. - Munkhbileg

When walking through Ulaanbaatar, making my way through the spring snow of March, I was struck by a thought: this was not what I had expected of Ulaanbaatar. The city is continuously gridlocked, crowded and with plenty of examples of what urban planners call 'urban squalor'. In the middle of this metropolis I was carrying a notepad and a questionnaire, looking for migrants. The questionnaire I handed out asked about mobility and how they liked it in the city, but also asked where the migrants were from. I got little cooperation. I sat down in Café Amsterdam, owned by a Dutchman who settled in Ulaanbaatar some twenty years ago, and had lunch. Looking through the window the people in Ulaanbaatar seemed busy, stressed even. When walking through the wide open countryside of Mongolia it is almost impossible to fathom why people move away from this idyllic landscape, and their mobile life, to live in the cramped confines of Ulaanbaatar. The landscape's beauty is only surpassed by its emptiness. The opposite is true for the capital city. I got up and got on with the task at hand, finding migrants who could fill in my questionnaire in order to find out.

4.1. Patterns of mobility to the city

With the questionnaire I tried to gather information about where the migrants come from and why they moved to Ulaanbaatar. The names of places in the Mongolian countryside filled my ears. I had little idea where these places were so after a while I asked them to point them out on a map of Mongolia. The dots, markings and arrows drawn on various maps made it clear to me that the Mongolian migrant is very mobile before migrating to the city. Not only have some overcome great distances, but it also seemed relatively easy to move between points. When connecting the dots on this map, some patterns seemed to emerge. The result was a map of migrant mobility patterns (see Map 2).



Map 2: A black and white map showing the routes taken by the five migrants followed in this thesis (in colour) and the most clear trajectories that came out of the initial survey (in black).

Edited by Jelle Blom. Original source: welcome2mongolia.com.



Image 9: Me on the wide-open plains of central Mongolia. *By Batjargal.*

4.1.1. Following five migrants

In this subparagraph I will briefly discuss the migratory moves to Ulaanbaatar that the five migrants I follow in this thesis made. In Paragraph 4.1.2. I will analyse the patterns that can be seen on Map 2 with regard to the migrants I spoke to during my survey. On Map 2 they all have separate colours to identify them. I became closest to Batjargal and Batbayar and therefore have gained the most information about their lives and mobility.

Batjargal (red line) lived on the plains of central Mongolia, in the 'aimag' of Övörkhangai, helping out his family with the care of their livestock. This was essentially a nomadic life, he lived in a 'ger' and worked with animals. He did have the opportunity to go to school because his family stayed close to a small town in which they had a small school. When Batjargal (now 31 years old) turned eighteen he decided that he wanted to go to university. This meant he had to move to Ulaanbaatar. He made the migratory move in one step to Ulaanbaatar. He has a wife and three young children and is an engineer in the water sector. He became my closest friend in Mongolia and took me to the countryside on several occasions.



Image 10: Batjargal (red shirt) and his in-laws at a 'Mongolian barbeque'. *By Jelle Blom.*

Batbayar (orange line) lived in a village to the south-east of Ulaanbaatar when he was younger and went to school there. He also married a woman from his village. He later moved to Kharkorin to find a job, where his oldest daughter was born, and after that moved to Ulaanbaatar where he resides now. He and his wife have two children, both married and living in Ulaanbaatar, and three grandchildren. I became close with Batbayar (56 years old), who occupied the desk opposite mine in the office of the Tuul River Basin Authority, because he offered to rent me the spare room in his apartment. I spent most of my time in Mongolia in his company and he has since become a close friend.



Image 11: Me (left), Batbayar (middle) and his wife (right) taking a last minute picture on the day I left Mongolia. *By Jelle Blom.*

Munkhbileg (blue line) came from a village relatively close to Ulaanbaatar in the Tov ‘aimag’, central Mongolia. At a young age she moved, with her family, to Erdenet (Bulgan ‘aimag’) before moving to Ulaanbaatar for her studies. She is a very modern woman (30 years old) who studied business and now works for a phone company in Ulaanbaatar. I picked her to be one of the migrants I followed in this thesis because she contrasts greatly with the other four migrants followed. Her attitude is different with regard to assimilation into city culture, she is also a woman which could give a perspective on her livelihood. She has a husband and a two year old daughter.



Image 12: Munkhbileg on Sukhbaatar-square. *By Jelle Blom.*

Ankhubayar (pink line) came from an area in the northern part of the Hovsgol 'aimag'. He now works for the Mongolian government, as a low-level translator, but he was transferred to Ulaanbaatar from his home in Moron, the Hovsgol 'aimag'. Before Moron Ankhubayar (43 years old) lived in the small town of Ulaan-Uul, Hovsgol 'aimag'. He has a wife and two children and is the only one of these five migrants who lives in a traditional Mongolian 'ger'.



Image 13: The wife of Ankhubayar (right) and their daughter and granddaughter (left). The difference in the level of integration into city-life is visible through their clothing. *By Jelle Blom.*

Chinzorig (green line) came to Ulaanbaatar only recently and came from the south of Mongolia, the Dornogovi 'aimag'. He had worked for an Australian mining company before he lost his job. He then moved to the bigger city of Saynshand. Chinzorig (34 years old) finally came to Ulaanbaatar to find a job, which was difficult, but he now works as an engineer. He and his wife live in the outskirts of Ulaanbaatar.



Image 14: Chinzorig in a backroom of the café where we met. *By Jelle Blom.*

These five migrants are migrants I spoke to at length and offered great insight into Mongolian migrants. In this thesis these five migrants play a key role. Not only because they each offer a different perspective based upon their own life experiences, which I will use to contrast their stories with each other. They come from various different age groups, affecting their opinions. Other contrasts are, for example, that Batbayar has lived in the city for a long time and Chinzorig has only moved recently. Perspectives and their opinions differ greatly between these five migrants, but their stories also tell the story in their own unique way.

4.1.2. Analysing the map

The various patterns emerging from Map 2 are interesting because they point to certain tendencies in rural-urban migration. It seems clear that it is rarely a straight forward move, this stands in contrast to what some researchers have written about migration patterns (see King and Skeldon, 2010, for an overview of possible migratory moves). The straight forward rural to urban move is often broken up into several, more manageable, smaller moves. The story of Munkhbileg (see 4.1.1) is a simple example of the complexities that arise within rural-urban migration. The migratory move rarely seems as simple as I originally expected. This led me to think that an internal migratory move holds to the same principles that international migration holds to. King and Skeldon (2010) explain that various migratory moves are possible within internal migration and that migration patterns are often more complex than they seem on when they are sketched out. It is therefore also reasonable to expect that not all rural migrants find their way to Ulaanbaatar, but stick around in the smaller cities, explaining their exponential population growth (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). These cities often are the 'aimag'-centres (provincial capitals) within the 'aimag' in which they were born, but this is certainly not always the case.

Another pattern that can be seen is that the place of origin of rural-urban migrants in Ulaanbaatar is not spread evenly on the map. There are relatively more people coming from Northern Mongolia and North-Western Mongolia than are coming from anywhere else. This can partially be explained by the better infrastructure North of Ulaanbaatar and also that these areas already have a greater population density than other areas. But these are conclusions based on a relatively small survey among migrants and my own observations, to accurately explain this uneven spread of migrants a separate study is needed focusing on the mobility patterns in Mongolia.

What also became clear to me when combining the survey and the resulting map with the interviews I did with migrants is that Map 2 does not tell the whole story. Time is an important factor when discussing migratory moves, time influences feelings about migration and especially identity. Even though I did not include this in my original survey questions I can state that time has had an impact on Mongolian migrants, research, in several ways. One thing that I found is that migration scholars often do not include the idea that migration can also span generations. The series of smaller migratory moves I found can be made over

various generations. This leads to the question whether these people can then still be considered 'rural-migrants', because they still hold a lot of the same identities, cultures and values of the generation before. I think of this as a cultural echo, resounding through generations. This echo can often times also be seen in the integration problems faced by international migrants in Western society. This echo resounds clearly in Ulaanbaatar where migrants with a rural background often hold on to their culture by wearing traditional Mongolian outfits by which an expert could even pinpoint what area they were from. This attitude of holding on to a cultural identity plays a key role in a migrant's life I observed. But, nevertheless my findings suggest that a migratory move, specifically a rural-urban move, can span generations. You could say that mobile parents make mobile children.

I did not include the time span in which the move to Ulaanbaatar was made on the map but it plays an important role nonetheless. This timespan turned out to have significant impact on the view the migrants take on their migration journey and especially on the cultural echo I mentioned above. With the increase in time between starting the migratory move and their eventual arrival in Ulaanbaatar the identity has already changed and started to assimilate into an urban culture. This should not be surprising, but from my observations and especially my interviews with migrants I found that this leads to a more romantic or nostalgic view of their lives on the Mongolian plains. The element of time might often be forgotten in migration research but definitely plays a role in the views migrants have on their migratory move.

4.1.3. Perceptions of distance

The migration in various steps has led me to believe that the perception of distance has a great influence on rural-urban migrants in Mongolia. The move from rural areas to Ulaanbaatar might often seem like too big a step to take. In contrast, the move from a smaller city to Ulaanbaatar seems smaller. This might be the case even though the place of origin, the rural, might not necessarily be further away geographically, as is the case for Batbayar (see 4.1.1). Distance is subjective and therefore open to perception. These perceptions differ between the migrants I have spoken with. Some have had an easy time coming to Ulaanbaatar, for some it was emotionally difficult. The same people who expressed their emotional difficulties often painted a picture in which it seems that rural Mongolia and Ulaanbaatar were two separate worlds. Batjargal is one of these migrants who

views the countryside as distinctly different from the city, when he described the countryside to me he made it sound like a different country. There is therefore a place for the smaller cities, a place to close the distance between rural and capital city. I consider these smaller cities as stepping stones towards a migratory move to Ulaanbaatar. This is often found to be the case in international migration research. African migrants, for example, use the borderlands of the European Union as stepping stones in an attempt to enter. When continuing this comparison it becomes clear that this leads to similar consequences for the migrant. Some people who use these stepping stones choose to stay there, some are forced to stay there and some move on. This is similar to what Schapendonk (2012) sees when discussing stranded, stuck or settled migrants.

In Mongolia there is one exception to the patterns I have talked about throughout this chapter which keeps occurring: rural-urban migrants that move to Ulaanbaatar for a higher education. For them the perception of distance is almost irrelevant because most of the options for a higher education are located in Ulaanbaatar; there is no other realistic option than moving to Ulaanbaatar. This obviously leads to an unequal spread of highly skilled migrants throughout Mongolia. I found many migrants, so there might be an overrepresentation, with similar stories because these are also the migrants who can, to various degrees, speak English. Migrants who move to obtain a higher education also tend to move more directly towards the capital without the use of 'stepping stones'.

With one of the migrants I followed extensively during my fieldwork in Mongolia this is definitely the case; Batjargal (see 4.1.1). Batjargal lived on the plains of central Mongolia, helping out his family with the care of their livestock. He painted an idyllic picture of walking cows across open plains, drinking traditional Mongolian 'sow', which is slightly salty milk tea and riding his horse through his quiet surroundings.



Image 15: A photograph of a rural village similar to the place where Batjargal went to school. *By Jelle Blom.*

For his studies he moved to Ulaanbaatar. The two worlds could not be more different, the new metropolis of Ulaanbaatar and the wide-open nomadic life on the plains. In terms of physical distance the move was not massive by Mongolian standards. In terms of perception of distance the two could not be further apart. What I gathered when he talked about his migratory move to Ulaanbaatar was that it was a big step for an eighteen year old but one that had to be made. The reason being that Ulaanbaatar is one of the few places, and when talking to migrants it seems the only place, where young Mongolians can get an university degree. This seemed to have a significant impact on my original findings about the perception of distance. The perception of distance has not shortened for students but it has become easier to overcome because it is the only choice for them. It is therefore easier to bridge that gap. Overcoming this perception of distance is a requirement for potential students in Mongolia. I viewed this as the importance of their goal. They had a specific goal in mind with their migratory move which appears to make it easier to make that move in one go. These students, I assumed, then stick around because of the job opportunities that Ulaanbaatar presents. Munkhbileg is one of the many migrants who brought on this assumption, she also came directly to Ulaanbaatar for her studies. Munkhbileg stayed in

Ulaanbaatar after her studies and is very content about city-life. She has lived and worked since then and has seen no reason to move to another place.

On the other hand Batbayar did quite the opposite. He lived relatively close to Ulaanbaatar growing up but after finishing university he moved to Kharkorin. This capitol of old, in the time of the Great Khans, gave him a job opportunity that he could not find in Ulaanbaatar.



Image 16: The old capitol of the Great Kahns, the main tourist attraction of Kharkorin. *By Jelle Blom.*

Among the migrants I spoke to this is an exception but nonetheless gave me cause to rethink my original assumption that university students stick in Ulaanbaatar after their education has finished. This shows that the patterns I mapped in Map 2 are far from complete and that migratory moves get increasingly complex the further a researcher digs and that for every pattern found there are a lot of exceptions.

4.2. Perceptions of (im)mobility

"[P]eople ... change themselves through the process of relocation" (Ernste, Martens and Schapendonk, 2012, p. 509). Migrants change the place of origin and the destination, which has been a main assumption in geography. That the migrants themselves change because of the migratory move is less established but nonetheless an interesting point. This is the main reason why I chose to research the mobility experiences of migrants. When asking migrants about their mobility it becomes clear that, at least, physically it is relatively easy to be mobile in Mongolia. Being mobile has long been a staple of Mongolian society. But with the migratory move changing the migrant as well as the city, how much of that culture remains?

4.2.1. Nomads in the city

In Mongolia there is an extra thing to consider when talking about internal migration: their nomadic history. In many cases around the world rural-urban migrants, and other migrants alike, exchange their sedentary life for mobility. In Mongolia however, migrants exchange their semi-nomadic lifestyle for a sedentary one in the city. This brings its own set of challenges.

I have lived in this city for years. I work here, most of my family is here, my whole life is here. And it is generally a good life. I finally decided to get my grandfather to the city as well. First he lived in a ger just outside the city and he liked it. Finally we found him a nice apartment in the city. After two days my grandfather wanted to move back into the ger. I asked him why: "because I can't stand the thought of people above me using their bathroom, apartment-life is not for me". He was afraid it would somehow affect his apartment.

- Man (35 years old) outside his office, May 2014.

This is just a small example of the struggles faced by migrants with a nomadic background in a sedentary setting, but it points to the strange situation of some Mongolian migrants. I met this man outside the office building of the Tuul River Basin Authority, where I worked during my fieldwork, and it turned out that his office was in the same building. He was a nomad that migrated to the city and he gave the inclination that it was not always easy for Mongolian migrants to settle into city life.

Not all rural-urban migrants led a nomadic lifestyle before settling in the city, but some have. The ‘in-between’ state of a nomadic lifestyle (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; see Paragraph 3.1) plays a role for migrant mobilities in Mongolia. The ‘in-between’ phase that is so central to nomadic life is challenged by a sedentary life. Ankhbayar (see 4.1.1), for example, is a migrant I have met only twice, but he has made a deep impression on me. Specifically on my views of a truly nomadic lifestyle. He is a recent migrant, only living in the city for a few years and still wears traditional Mongolian clothing in his free time. His clothing makes him seem ‘out of place’ in the modern capital city and I was very eager to talk to him. I met him while conducting my survey and it turned out he was a translator for the Mongolian government. He talked about the wonders of city life and that he was very happy here. I decided to buy him a cup of coffee, which he politely declined, and sat down with me and we started to chat. He asked me if I was going to visit the Mongolian countryside, I said that I would like to but I didn’t know where to go.

When I was younger, still a teenager, we moved every couple weeks because my family owned some cows. Cows need fresh pasture often. In Hovsgol-aimag (Northern Mongolia, bordering Russia) we moved around. It is quite different now. My ger that I live in now (in one of the ger-areas of Ulaanbaatar) has never moved.

– Ankhbayar.



Image 17: An example of a ‘ger’ that has never moved, the type in which Ankhbayar still lives. *By Jelle Blom*

I tried to steer him towards the topics I was interested in, which was not always easy. Emotionally it seemed easy for Ankhbayar, but he told me that many migrants do not find it an easy transition from nomadism to sedentarism. My thoughts were that the 'in-between', or mobile life had disappeared. I thought about what he meant when he said: *my ger has never moved*. I already knew that the 'ger' is more than a living accommodation and that it was a symbol for Mongolian culture. That is why every traditional picture of Mongolia includes at least one 'ger'. When I expanded on that thought and related the value of nomadism in Mongolian culture I started to think that the 'ger' is not only a staple of Mongolian culture but more specifically a symbol for the nomadic lifestyle it represented. *My ger has never moved* was Ankhbayar's way of saying that he had given up parts of his mobile life for a sedentary life within the confines of the city. City life had decreased the mobility he had when he lived in the countryside.

It has been especially hard because most migrants do not comprehend the consequences of a sedentary life before making a migratory move. I found that many of the migrants with a higher education had a realistic expectation of sedentary city life. But even they also find themselves 'stuck' in the city. In mobility terms: they experience high levels of immobility. It seemed to me like many migrants both like and loath the city. Batjargal (see 4.1.1), for example, often talked about taking his kids back to the quieter life in rural Mongolia. There the kids would be able to play outside and have the freedom he enjoyed in his youth. But the education for his kids is, almost exclusively, in Ulaanbaatar. He obviously wants the best for his kids, which for Mongolians means a better education, so they stay in Ulaanbaatar. He often takes his family to visit the countryside. The nomadic dream seems to be a fleeting one, but the dream is still alive nonetheless amongst some rural-urban migrants in Mongolia.

In contrast, Munkhbileg (see 4.1.1) is a migrant who does not romanticize the past. Her sober and balanced way of viewing her surroundings, coupled with a very forward-thinking personality, is one of the reasons I enjoyed talking to her so much. Her migratory move had not been simple and her adjustment period in Ulaanbaatar was quite long but she does not feel like she is missing anything. Her adaptation of modern Mongolian customs was quite refreshing to see. She did not have the romantic desire to return to a nomadic lifestyle that I noticed in Batjargal and Ankhbayar. She was more experienced with iPhones and

computers than most Westerners of her age and enjoyed her city life. Her aspirations were not the open plains but rather owning the latest innovations by Prada, Apple or Samsung. This attitude of complete submersion in modern culture I noticed a lot in my office as well. Tuvshuu, a girl in my office who helped me a lot with my visa applications, the overall bureaucracy involved in fieldwork and helped with translation when I tried to teach my co-workers English, I saw as a typical highly education Mongolian woman who was born and raised in Ulaanbaatar. Munkhbileg had more in common with her than with other migrants. Both had more modern phones and gadgets than I do, are more prolific in using modern social media and kept up with the latest fashion in both the West and Mongolia and spent every available second in virtual reality. Munkhbileg adopted the sedentary lifestyle and made it her own, but is nonetheless still very mobile. The virtual world has given her an opportunity to increase her experienced mobility. The nomadic dream that I mentioned earlier did nothing for her, she respected it but it stopped there. The cultural echo I talked about earlier had not made her nostalgic as it did with other migrants but made her adopt modern Mongolian life with extra vigour. Like Munkhbileg said: *The city is my home now, I don't want to go back. Everything is here, that is why people move here.*



Image 18: The modern centre of Ulaanbaatar that attracts Munkhbileg. *By Jelle Blom.*

In terms of immobility Munkhbileg did not find herself stuck in the city, as Batjargal found, she was settled into city life. This would not be worth noting in most migration cases because it is a natural development but in the light of Mongolia's nomadic history it is. The nomadic history of Mongolia still influences the lives of the residents of Ulaanbaatar, whether it is romanticised or not. One thing that is certain is that a lot of Mongolians with a nomadic background are eventually lured to the city.

4.2.2. Magnetic power of the city

Immobility is not just a physical state of being, it is also an emotional state. When I was driving through Ulaanbaatar with Batjargal an innocent question about 'gers' sparked a long discussion on living in the city. The simple question was: 'do the migrants take the 'gers' with them from the countryside or do they buy them here?'. The answer was not as simple. Some buy them here as a substitute for an apartment, some take them with them from the countryside. The 'ger' is a symbol of mobility for Mongolians. It represents their culture, their heritage and their freedom. Batjargal told me what he felt when he first moved to the big city: excitement and fear.

I was not scared of the city or scared to lose my family, I was scared because I felt that this was the first change to losing my way of living

– Batjargal

He told me about Mongolian culture, about the freedoms it represents. It sounded wonderful, but a bit idealised. More and more people flock to the city every day, in search of everything, from work, to education to family. The city is like a magnet for the rural Mongolian. Once there however it seems difficult to get out again. One migrant that experienced the magnetic effect of the city is Chinzorig (see 4.1.1.). He came because of necessity but has since found some difficulties with his experience of city-life. Chinzorig is not a rich man so the transport opportunities are limited for him. The city offers him a place to live and work but in terms of social relations the initial migration has cut at least some of the ties to his former home. His financial means, and transport possibilities do not allow him to travel back to his roots often. This is an effect the city can have on rural-urban migrants. Munkhbileg on the other hand made the sedentary lifestyle her own by not fighting the

transition and submersing herself in city-life. It seemed to me like she did not have such struggles as described by Chinzorig and Batjargal with regard to city-life. Munkhbileg was attracted by the bright lights of the city but then did not romanticize her past semi-nomadic lifestyle. Batbayar has also taken on the lifestyle of the city by raising his children and grandchildren here. It seems that the stronger people try to hold on to their nomadic culture the stronger the magnetic power of the city feels.



Image 19: The modern magnet: Ulaanbaatar. *By Jelle Blom.*

This magnet was dubbed by Harris and Todaro (1970) as the ‘bright lights of the city’. Even though Harris and Todaro used the term frequently, it was often seen as a sub-par explanation for complex phenomena, or as they say it: *“Moreover, this lack of an adequate analytical model to account for the unemployment phenomenon often leads to rather amorphous explanations such as the “bright lights” of the city acting as a magnet to lure peasants into urban areas.”* (Harris and Todaro, 1970, p.126). Since 1970 there have been studies suggesting that the purely economic models used by Harris and Todaro do not

explain every rural-urban move (see Akm Ahsan Ullah, 2004 for example). In my research I found that economic explanations do not explain the full effect of the 'bright lights', not all reasoning in rural-urban migration is, or should be, economic. I believe that the 'bright lights' are real and the negative connotation Harris and Todaro (1970) attributed to it is not a representation of reality, or at least not in the Mongolian context.

The Mongolian rural-urban migrant is attracted to his magnet, without fully understanding the significant changes that such a move will trigger. The migrants often expressed the feeling that the city is holding them in. There are little to no jobs in the rural areas and little possibilities for a higher education for the new generation. This is of course a pattern seen in many migration fields throughout the world and is a pattern often emerging when researchers use a push-pull model on migration cases. The magnet attracts and holds them there, preventing a move back. This is a form of immobility seen amongst some of the rural-urban migrants in Ulaanbaatar. This version of immobility is not as the immobilities described in Schapendonk (2012), it is an emotional state, not a physical one. The people are trapped by their urban existence. This chapter is filled with stories where the migratory move from rural to urban changes the mobility of the migrant. In other words: mobility creates immobility.

4.3 Post-migration (im)mobility

The question of mobility does not stop when the migratory move is completed. I have argued that Ulaanbaatar has a significant impact on the mobility of migrants. This is also true after a migrant has integrated into life in Ulaanbaatar. For all the migrants I followed extensively it has become easier to move around Mongolia when they embraced city life. When they adopted the sedentary mind-set that is required for integration into city life they gained some of their lost mobility. This is because they are now able to afford cars, train tickets and other things that increase their physical mobility. Batjargal (see 4.1.1) travels all around Mongolia for his job as a water expert and Batbayar (see 4.1.1) went to China by train at least twice in the time I was living with him and his family. I concluded that these small examples of increased mobility are due to the increase in financial flexibility that Ulaanbaatar offered them. With increased financial means it becomes easier to move in any direction around, in and out of Ulaanbaatar. Batbayar and Batjargal both use their increased

mobility to take trips to the countryside in weekends purely for relaxation purposes, which seems a sign of integration into sedentary city life. The increased mobility because of the increased financial means are seen with most of the Mongolians I have met multiple times. I however know that this clear finding is a side effect of the type of Mongolians I followed (see chapter 2). They are all highly educated and earn a good living, by Mongolian standards, in Ulaanbaatar. This increased mobility after living in Ulaanbaatar for a time was useful for me because it meant that Batbayar was able to take me to these relaxation spots outside of Ulaanbaatar on several occasions. Batbayar was able to travel a lot because he could now afford it. That was at least the way he viewed it. Picnics in the beautiful countryside surrounding Ulaanbaatar were a luxury that he could now afford. He had a car that could take him there, he had the time to do it in the weekends and the financial means to afford the gas, the food and the drinks required. During one of these trips we went to an area just east of Ulaanbaatar famous for its natural beauty, dinosaur bones and holiday camps. When we drove past one of these holiday camps, which are basically places where you can rent a beautiful pre-prepared 'ger', like we in the West can rent a cabin, I asked him what sort of people used these places. He told me that they were almost exclusively used by people who live in Ulaanbaatar and are trying to escape the busy city life for a couple of days to recharge. They are quite expensive, which I found out later on when I rented a 'ger' with Batjargal for a night (see Image 20), which excludes a significant proportion of the residents of Ulaanbaatar from using them. They are a means of escape for those who can afford it and who have the means, mobility wise, to get there. But mainly for the people who want to escape on some level. Munkhbileg did not seem to have any interest in regaining some of her former nomadic culture through the use of these camps. She was happy to spend her days within the city limits enjoying its luxuries. This is a consequence of her absorption of city-life rather than fighting the transformation. Batbayar has been in the city a long time and no longer has these inclinations towards nomadism, but he does still enjoy picnicks in the countryside. As is evidenced by the fact that he took me to beautiful sights outside the city on more than one occasion.



Image 20: An example of a beautiful holiday-camp-‘ger’, I rented this one with Batjargal (left) during one of our trips around central Mongolia. *By Jelle Blom.*

When taking away the financial constraints of mobility it would clearly increase and that has been the case with these migrants. For many migrants this is not the case however. Many migrants in Ulaanbaatar live in poverty. Given the link between financial means and mobility this would lead me to think that they are experiencing immobility until their financial means would improve enough to be able to afford a reliable car or other forms of transportation. The poverty in Ulaanbaatar and the lack of welfare support means that more and more people are attracted to the bright lights, as explained in 4.2, but are then stuck there because they cannot afford to get out again. They are stuck hoping for jobs that are not easy to find.

When I drove into these ‘ger areas’ in the weekends, before it was pointed out to me that this was dangerous, their immobility became clear, many people were just relaxing there. Using a flat piece of dirt to play basketball, throwing a football at an improvised

basket. Apparently they did not have the means to relax outside of their neighbourhood and this lack of mobility does not only constrain them in terms of relaxation, that is just a very visible example.



Image 21: My colleagues playing basketball on an improvised court (a parking lot). *By Jelle Blom.*

They are also unable to travel for work because of the financial constraints. I talked at length with people who were working on a research project for the Asian Development Bank (ADB) about the poverty issue. In relation to mobility it became clear that their immobility causes problems for the development in the city. The poverty not only means that every space that a 'ger' will fit into has been occupied by one, but also that this impedes the city's ability to develop these 'ger-areas'. The people living there have no other place to go. They live in dangerous areas, close to factories, on busy streets and in areas that are regularly flooded as the Tuul river carries more water in the spring. But even though they live in a symbol of Mongolian mobility their immobility causes problems for them and the city's

developers. I talked to Ankhbayar (see 4.1.1) about this, who works for the Mongolian government, and he shrugged it off as if this is the natural order of things. He did not think that these people should be given more money but was under the impression that these people should find better paying jobs and that the government is doing all it can. I gathered from the ADB researchers that Mongolia is not known for being a welfare-state and has very little policy in place to take care of the underprivileged. These jobs are scarce and especially in areas which are accessible from these neighbourhoods. The cycle of poverty, along with the exponential growth of low-income migrants, will mean that many Mongolians will flood into these areas and will then be stuck.

Mobility after the migratory move is, in my view, therefore related to the income potential of the migrant. Many migrants come to Ulaanbaatar for a job and find it and are therefore able to be mobile. The bright lights of the city still keeps them in Ulaanbaatar, where the jobs and schools are, but they are able to travel for work. Batjargal, a water engineer, travels all often within the country and I went with him once to experience how easy it is to travel in Mongolia. With his increased financial means, and me paying for gas, it was quite easy to travel to the factory where he had to take a water sample. An average journey still takes at least a day because of the bad, or non-existent, road infrastructure but we were able to get there and back to Ulaanbaatar in two days. For a migrant without a well-paying job this would be impossible to do alone. In Mongolia there are unofficial systems in place to increase the mobility of the migrants in Ulaanbaatar. Hitchhiking is very common and used frequently by Mongolians, for a small fee anyone can hitch their way anywhere. Although the journey then takes a lot longer because of the badly maintained roads and this often leads the people sleeping besides a car by the side of the road. Another one of these unofficial systems is that any car can serve as a taxi. For a fraction of the price of an official taxi they can take you anywhere you want to go. These systems increase the mobility of Mongolian migrants, but generally they are still stuck in Ulaanbaatar until they find the financial means necessary to increase their mobility which would then further increase their financial means.

4.4. Concluding (im)mobility

In this chapter I described the experiences of the Mongolian migrants I followed during my time in the field. It became clear that internal migration, in the case of Mongolia at least, is not as straight forward as I originally expected. Often the migration is not made in a single move but rather as a series of smaller migratory moves that don't even need to be geographically closer to Ulaanbaatar. These smaller migratory moves serve to decrease the problems that occur with, what I have called, the perception of distance. The distance between rural and urban is not necessarily big, but it is emotionally. This perception of the distance plays a vital role in how Mongolians experience their migration and mobility. For students it seems as though the perception of distance is easier to overcome, because they often do not use 'stepping stones' but make the migratory move in one step, but this is not necessarily the case. Students make a single migratory move to Ulaanbaatar out of necessity rather than convenience. It is therefore not easier to overcome but necessary for a higher education.

The perception of distance is greatly influenced by Mongolia's nomadic past. The decrease of mobility that seems inherent to a sedentary life can be seen as a restriction of the freedom the nomadic lifestyle offered. This restriction is only taken away when the sedentary life has resulted in some financial gain and integration into city life, and maybe even the social status required, which results in increased mobility. This 'sedentary' life is caused by the 'bright lights of the city'. Ulaanbaatar attracts migrants because of the 'promise', in the minds of many migrants, of work, family or a higher education. The city and the sedentary life that comes with it then continue to make the migrants feel like it is holding them in. They cannot return to the rural lifestyle because there they cannot find a job or an education. The mobility experienced by Mongolian migrants differs depending on the stage that they are in. Before migrating, and during the migration process, to Ulaanbaatar they experience a high level of mobility. This is followed by a decrease in mobility caused by a sedentary life in the city, this is the stage where many Mongolian migrants seem to find themselves, and after adopting the sedentary life and increasing their financial means they regain some of their former mobility. So in fact their initial migration has decreased their experienced mobility.

5. The Household Livelihoods of Mongolian Migrants

I lived with Batbayar (see 4.1.1) and his family for four months. When I first arrived on that cold February day I had the idea that I would try to find my own apartment in Ulaanbaatar. A couple of days later this turned out to be a sleeting dream, it was impossible for me to find an apartment in my budget. Luckily for me a colleague at the Tuul River Basin Authority named Batbayar was willing to rent me his second bedroom for the time I was in Mongolia. I did not know it at the time, but simply living with them offered me more insights than I could have ever gathered from normal research. I slept in the kitchen, which doubled as a second bedroom, ate with Batbayar and his wife in the living room, which was also the master bedroom, and sometimes was a babysitter for Batbayar's two year old grandson. For four months I was part of their family and on that cold February day I had no idea how important that would be.



Image 22: Celebrating the second birthday of Batbayar's grandson (middle). Batbayar's youngest daughter Muggi (right) and her husband (left) in the living room. *By Jelle Blom.*

5.1. The importance of family

The household plays a key factor, both in this thesis and in the lives of Mongolians.

Mongolian apartments in the city are typically quite small and often times packed with various family members, the same is true for the apartment I lived in. The one thing I noticed straightaway about the Mongolians I stayed with is that they are very giving people, they always want to share everything they own with a visitor and especially if this visitor is a family member. This is the case whether it concerns cloths, alcohol or food. This attitude is also seen in the dynamic between a father and his adult children. The children come over once a week to clean the entire apartment and, most days, come over to cook dinner. When I asked the youngest daughter of Batbayar, who also became a personal friend of mine, about this she answered with a surprised look on her face: *don't you do that in your country?* I said we did, but generally not to these extremes. She explained that it is a Mongolian tradition to take care of family and elder family members in particular. When she had finished her education and became an accountant she could contribute even more to reward her parents for the support and care they had given her over the years. This family connection is quite strongly visible in a country where maternity leave is accepted to extend to a year.

In some ways the bond between Mongolian family members is strong. Every member of the family is available for a lift, a meal or just a chat at any time, day or night. This level of family involvement was sometimes disorientating, because I was not used to this level of involvement in western society, and wonderful at the same time. The inherent need to take care of each other goes deep, but rarely seemed to include financial help. The pride of a Mongolian often times stands in the way of asking for financial aid from family members; that is what it seemed to me at first. The importance of family in Mongolian society is accentuated by the fact that Mongolians do not use surnames, instead they use the name of their father. This is often confusing to Westerners, especially since they also usually use an abbreviation of their given name. Financial assistance is not as common as it is in Western society but it does happen, a much more common form of aid for Mongolians are non-monetary remittances.

Box 2:***Mongolian Balikbayans***

Balikbayan is a Filipino concept of sending boxes of useful stuff back some to family members (Blanc, 1996) often seen in transnational migrants. It means to return home or to repatriate. It is form of remittances which is also quite common in Mongolian life. Instead of sending financial aid to family members, it is common to help their daily life by sending stuff. Although they do not use the famed Balikbayan-boxes but the principle still stands.

In Paragraph 5.1. I gave the example of Batjargal buying stuff for his mother before visiting her. This form of non-monetary remittances was new to me. And I asked him via Skype, whilst writing this chapter, why he had bought so much. It seemed improbable to me that an older lady would need a box filled with Coca Cola bottles. It turns out she ran a small neighbourhood shop in which she sold the stuff Batjargal had brought her. She did this not to make money (she sold it without a profit-margin) but simply to keep in contact with the people in the neighbourhood. An older lady living alone needs social interaction and this was her way of insuring this.

I learned from Munkhbileg that the Mongolian version of Balikbayan often involves bringing the metaphorical boxes themselves. Many intercity busses care a lot of stuff that people are bringing home. Whether it is blankets or food or, most commonly packets of cigarettes. Cigarettes are an acceptable trading commodity for many Mongolians and used as a form of non-monetary remittances. And I often used this fact to my advantage when trying to make contact with Mongolians.

Remittances are a key form of income for many migrant households around the world. The Mongolians have their own take on it. Instead of sending money to the rural-families people tend to bring physical things with them. Whether it be a box of chocolates, soda or cloth (see Box 2). The best example I came across whilst in Mongolia was when I visited Batjargal's (see 4.1.1) mother, on a separate trip. Before we went to where she lived (a 'ger-area' outside the city limits) we went to a supermarket where Batjargal bought several cases of soda, bread, ice-cream and other things to bring to his mother. This was their version of remittances (see Box 2). We arrived with a trunk filled with goods she could then use or sell on. This form of non-monetary remittances seemed very appealing to me and it became clear that this case was no exception. Remittances play a key role in the livelihood of any multi-local household around the world, but the Mongolian version was new to me. A family member helps with repairs, cleans, cooks and brings supplies instead of just sending financial aid. It seemed to me that this was part of the reason why Mongolian families are close.

Munkhbileg (see 4.1.1) is also very close with her family, she babysits for her

niece regularly and helps her parents run the household. Her parents now also live in Ulaanbaatar, joining her after she got her university degree. She, by contrast, did receive financial help from her parents during her first years as a student in Ulaanbaatar. She could not afford to pay the tuition without them. She was very thankful to her parents for this. Although this is the only one of my migrants who got financial aid from family members I doubt that Munkhbileg is an exception. From what I observed it is against the morals of many Mongolians to ask for financial help, but that does not mean that it does not happen. After I returned I asked my Mongolian friends about the lack of financial aid in families. They told me that it is a point of shame for Mongolians to ask for money but that it does happen (particularly with close family relations, like with Munkhbileg). The pride that I originally noted prevented them from talking about this to outsiders, like myself. It is very difficult to gather information about this because of issues relating to cultural aspects like pride and privacy. Financial aid is something that is not talked about. I heard that this closed off attitude is found in some other Asian countries as well and therefore I related this to cultural aspects which plays a key role in Mongolian society.



Image 23: My colleagues at the Tuul River Basin Authority, sharing food at lunchtime. *By Jelle Blom.*

The importance of family in Mongolian society is not quantifiable for me, outside of financial aid or remittances, but certainly plays a key role in it. Families in Mongolia are a safety net, they share their possessions and their emotions much more than in the Western societies I have experienced. The family bond plays a key role in the livelihood of Mongolians.

5.2. Economic Struggles

The consequences of the exponential increase in rural-urban migrants in Ulaanbaatar have been substantial. This is mainly because of 'ger-areas' which continue to expand on the outskirts of town. The city simply cannot keep up with the number of people coming in. A lot of people now live in these 'ger-areas'. One such migrant is Chinzorig (4.1.1). He came to Ulaanbaatar with hopes of finding a job to keep his family financially afloat. I met him on Sukhbaatar-square in the centre of Ulaanbaatar whilst looking for the way to the National History Museum. He showed me the way and decided to give me a tour. Communication was often times tough because he barely spoke English, this meant that a simple conversation took hours. Which is exactly what happened. He had learned some English whilst working for a mining company owned by Australians. Many of these companies now work in Mongolia to extract its natural resources. He lost his job however and came to Ulaanbaatar where he recently found a new job as an engineer.

He spoke with hesitation about the reasons why he came. It is still very shameful to Mongolians to share their economic struggles with outsiders. I gathered after a while that his wife found work in a shop quite quickly and was the sole breadwinner for a while. Through her he found a job delivering supplies. The story of Chinzorig I noted above would be familiar to many Mongolian migrants, often coming to Ulaanbaatar for financial reasons. For Batjargal this was a different story. After he finished his studies and became a water engineer he earned a decent wage, by Mongolian standards, almost immediately. But for Batbayar the story holds up but with a slight twist. When he finished his studies he had to move to Kharkorin for his work. This shows that other bigger cities offer some employment opportunities as well. The rural areas however do not offer enough employment opportunities for the population (Neupert & Goldstein, 1994) and this has not improved in recent years (Bayanchimeg & Batbayar, 2012). This has to do with the history of

Box 3:***Mongolian communism and its effects on migration***

Mongolia was a communist state from 1924 until 1992. The Mongolian state was closely aligned with the neighbouring Soviet-Union and was then called: *The People's Republic of Mongolia*. With the help of the Soviets, Mongolia gained independence from China (still the enemy in the minds of many Mongolians) under the leadership of Sukhbaatar. Who now has a city named after him and a statue on the central square in Ulaanbaatar. All of which led to the rise of the communist party in Mongolia and Mongolia becoming a *de facto* satellite state for the Soviet-Union.

The communist party supported agriculture and herders in rural Mongolia, but also invested greatly in the cities, which still have a very 'Soviet-feel' to them, especially in the North of the country. The infrastructure leading to Russia was also greatly improved and cities on that line (mainly Darkhan and Sukhbaatar) became transport hubs. The process of urbanization started in Soviet-times and expanded rapidly after the collapse of state-funded and state-owned farming systems in rural areas. As a result of this most of the rural population lost their jobs after the collapse of communism (Janzen, 2005). Since then a steadily increasing migration flow can be seen from rural areas into the major cities, especially Ulaanbaatar.

Many 'modern' Mongolians have distanced themselves from their communist past in recent years. This is evidenced by the number of pro-democracy songs playing on Mongolian radio stations. But nevertheless the communistic past still lives on in statues, architecture and urban planning.

communistic regimes in the country (see Box 3) and the consequences of the collapse of that system.

In push-pull terms the economic downturn in rural Mongolia after the collapse of communism has been a major push factor. The pull factor of the city is often not the knowledge of job openings but rather the hope. Job opportunities are more plentiful in the city, but the city cannot create enough jobs, leading to increasing unemployment within the city limits. This economic reasoning is not specific to Mongolia and is also not a new idea, as Bartel (1979, p.785). said *"Migration is closely related to job mobility (in fact, between one-third and one-half of all moves are caused by the decision to change jobs) and that when the decision to migrate or the returns to migration are explored, one must take account of this relationship."* Amongst the migrants I followed in this thesis economic considerations certainly play a role but are often overshadowed by the need for education. This need for education can be seen in many ways in Mongolia. Not only is it a driving force behind migration but it is also seen by the technological advancements that are rapidly being made in Mongolia. Batbayar told me that this is

key for Mongolians as an education is the first step towards improving their livelihoods.

On the streets of Ulaanbaatar the poverty is very visible and some images will seem unfamiliar to western eyes. In Ulaanbaatar families can lose their children who then need to survive on their own (with help from projects by UNICEF (2010) for example). I experienced this first hand when I passed a group of children in rags at temperatures of minus ten degrees Celsius. I felt bad so I gave one some spare change and immediately ten more children between the ages of five and ten came out and also begged for some money. After this I found out that many of these children are of migrant families and the children become lost from their parents and can never find them again in the metropolis or the parents simply cannot afford to feed their children so they have to make it on their own. Many of these children beg and steal to earn some money and some sleep in the heating vents that supply the apartment blocks because of the cold winter temperatures. This example of the economic struggles faced by families (at least some of them migrants) is difficult to comprehend but a reality in Ulaanbaatar. But it is also an indication to the importance of families within the livelihood of Mongolians. The children begging on the streets have lost the safety net I eluded to earlier and are having trouble surviving because of this loss.



Image 24: Two girls playing with pigeons who still have their safety net. *By Jelle Blom.*

5.3. Multi-Local Livelihoods

In June 2014 I found myself in a Toyota RAV4 with Batjargal (see 4.1.1) and his family heading towards Sukhbaatar in the North. We were on our way to visit his in-laws who still lived there. I was excited, this was not only a long road trip through a beautiful part of Mongolia, but it would also give me a deeper understanding of the complexities of the lives of Batjargal and his family. Ultimately that is what I wanted to accomplish during my fieldwork in Mongolia. Back in the preparation phase I often wondered in which ways the family dynamics would differ from that of a Western family. This trip gave me the best chance of finding out just that. I felt that at that moment I was almost a part of the family. I played with the children during stops and chatted to Batjargal and his wife as the open plains of Mongolia rolled by.



Image 25: Batjargal and his two youngest children during a stop on our trip. *By Jelle Blom.*

The strong commitments between rural-based and urban-based members of the same household constitute a 'multi-spatial households' (Tacoli, 1998). In Mongolia this is most certainly the case. The family bond that I alluded to before, does not stop when the family does not occupy the same physical space. This became clear when I arrived in Sukhbaatar to visit the parents in-law of Batjargal. The whole family had arrived to make it a family reunion to which I was lucky enough to be invited. The family stays in contact constantly with the help of mobile phone technology and seemed to be very close. The mobile phone has done a lot to create or maintain this bond across physical space. In Mongolia it has become an essential part of life. Even in very remote areas there are telephone networks available and for a relatively small population it has a lot of mobile phone providers. This particular household was very multi-local with members coming in from three different cities. The multi-locality of the household meant that many members of the family did not come for one day or one night but rather stayed a week or even longer. The emotional bond was obviously very strong and they welcomed me into their middle trying to communicate with me. This was very exhausting for me because of the size of the family and the strain it costs to carry on a conversation with someone who has little grasp of English. This was not only a pleasant time for me but also showed me some interesting features of multi-localities in the Mongolia household dynamic, one of which was remittances, as I mentioned in Paragraph 5.1. and on this trip we did not leave before loading the car with groceries. These intimate forms of non-monetary remittances strengthen the bond between various family members and reinforce the emotional space connecting the family. The emotional space is what connects a household over distance and it seemed that in Mongolia this plays a key role in the life of a migrant.

This rural-urban linkage is not evident when talking to some other migrants. Munkhbileg for example still has some distant relations in her place of origin but has not visited there for many years. This could partly be because her parents have since moved to Ulaanbaatar as well, but this could also be because of her assimilation of city-culture. The relationship Mongolians have with their past differs per person and it is therefore no surprise that the relationship a person has with their place of origin also differs.



Image 26: Batjargal (red sweater) and his extended family playing with a boat in Sukhbaatar.
By Jelle Blom.

As with general livelihood-research, the literature on rural-urban linkage often quantifies this as an economic strategy. The rural-urban linkage transfers assets from urban to rural or vice versa. With the remittances I discussed in 5.1. and a support network in both physical spaces this can be seen as a livelihood strategy for a household (see Kruger, 1998) for Mongolians. I found however that this is not seen as an livelihood strategy by those involved but rather as an extension of the family bond. The rural-urban linkage is made from a family perspective and not as a household livelihood strategy to maintain the bond. This is at least what I gathered from Batjargal when we visited his family.

5.4. Livelihood decision-making

Batjargal's family has not made a decision to send their daughter, Batjargal's wife, to Ulaanbaatar as part of a livelihood strategy it did however turn out to be one. Not only did it improve her families livelihood, but it also allowed a higher mobility with which they visit each other. But the decision was made not to improve the lives of the household just that of Batjargal's wife. Munkhbileg (see 4.1.1) and her family were clear in their support of

the plan to send her to university in Ulaanbaatar, this would increase her chance of finding a high income job and that was their goal. She told me that her father was especially supportive to her going to university. He wanted a better life for his daughter. In short he wanted to help his daughter develop her personal development. This family bond resounds throughout this chapter and plays a central role in Mongolian society. The decision-making process of Munkhbileg's parents was to create a better life for their children but it is a livelihood decision.

With the goal to *“enhance understanding of individual, household or community efforts to achieve day-to-day survival and long-term betterment in a developing country”* (Bryceson et al., 2003, p.3) the livelihood approach needs to understand decision-making. I tried to analyse the role of individual and household decision-making with regard to livelihoods of the migrants I followed, since little is known about the decision-making process. Many migrants come to Ulaanbaatar for economic reasons. This decision to come to Ulaanbaatar is a livelihood strategy. Many are convinced Ulaanbaatar will offer them significant opportunities to improve their financial situation or come as a last resort. This strategy is in theory a key reasoning behind this migration but amongst the migrants I followed only Chinzorig came to Ulaanbaatar as part of a livelihood strategy to improve his family's financial situation. Munkhbileg and Batjargal came to study and stuck around, Batbayar studied in Ulaanbaatar and came back after a detour through Kharkorin and Ankhbayar came because his job relocated to Ulaanbaatar (see 4.1.1). So Chinzorig is the only one who made an individual decision to move to Ulaanbaatar as part of the financial aspect of a livelihood strategy, but the other moves are also part of a livelihood strategy all be it that it was an individual decision with consequences for the entire household. Livelihood decisions are often made without the person being aware of that this is a choice about their livelihoods.

A not purely financial decision, but nonetheless a livelihood strategy, is the decision to come to Ulaanbaatar to go to university. This is a decision that improves the financial aspect of the livelihoods of families in the long term. I argue that the decision to send their children to university, or support the move, is a livelihood decision by the parents but this is not an economic decision. Livelihood does not necessarily mean economic. It is a decision which revolves around the family bond; they send their kids away to improve the lives of the

kids by giving them the opportunity to increase their education. I understood from the migrants I followed that this form of a livelihood strategy decision, where an individual decision is made which has consequences for the entire household, is very common in Mongolia. Long-term survival strategies for Mongolian households often eventually involve a move to Ulaanbaatar. For migrants who come to Ulaanbaatar to get a higher education this often leads to relatively safe financial stability and an improvement to both the household's livelihood and an individual's livelihood long term, but the choice is not made as a traditional livelihood-choice. The choice is made as an individual decision to further personal development but has consequences for the collective.

Although the migrants I followed in this thesis have improved their livelihoods in Ulaanbaatar, many are not able to do so. The decision to come to Ulaanbaatar is often forced upon a migrant because of the economic struggles jeopardising their livelihood in the countryside. This economic struggle sometimes continue in the city where people cannot break through the poverty cycle and scrape a living together which sometimes is not enough. The decision to come to Ulaanbaatar was often a livelihood decision to alleviate poverty but the poor areas of the city keep growing and the municipality seems unable to provide for these families. The livelihood strategy to come to Ulaanbaatar could be seen as a gamble. There are many cases in which the move has indeed been successful in terms of improving a family's livelihood but there are also many cases in which the cycle of poverty continues when Ulaanbaatar is reached. The day-to-day survival takes priority and the long-term consequences of a migratory move to Ulaanbaatar are often left unconsidered.

Family in general plays a key role in a migratory move; *"Results showed that perceived migration norms ... (are) strongly and directly related to migration behaviour. This finding provides rare directly-measured confirmation of the assertion by less developed country migration scholars that migration behaviour is the result of a 'household decision' (Stark 1991) which our earlier research has shown is conditioned by family interaction (De Jong et al. 1998)."* (De Jong, 2000, p.317). This quote from the study by Gordon F. De Jong (2000) summarizes that the migratory decision and the behaviour of the migrant are depended on a household decision. In the case of the migrants followed throughout this thesis this seems to be the case. Although in many cases this seems to be an individual choice rather than a household livelihood strategy. But the family's attitude to migration

leads to an openness to migration. Munkhbileg confirmed that her family's prior migratory move made it easier for her to make the move towards Ulaanbaatar. Batjargal also stated that in his family the openness to migration helped make the migration possible and that this pattern is also true for his wife. Migration is therefore affected by, or even encouraged by, the attitude of the rest of the household. This is shown statistically by De Jong (2000) and Stark (1991) and at least two of the migrants I followed have the same story to tell. The migratory decision and family connections are linked in the decision making process that a migrant goes through before migrating.

5.5. Concluding Livelihoods

A livelihood decision is not always part of a grand scheme made by the family of a migrant. I found that is more often a choice made by an individual that influences the livelihoods of the rest of the family. The family does have influence by supporting a migratory move; the importance of family in Mongolia plays a key role in the society. The family also offers a safety net for Mongolian migrants without which a successful livelihood strategy could rarely be undertaken or a livelihood decision made. This dynamic between personal development and family development plays a key role. When discussing livelihood strategies, as a family plan, it often seems that half of the story is missing. Livelihood strategies for Mongolian migrant families are more complex than one single strategy. Most decisions dealing with rural-urban migration are made by individuals either to enhance their own personal development or by the desire to do what is best for their children not as a plan to further to goals of the household. But this decision by the individual still has side-effects for the entire household.

6. Conclusions

My time in Mongolia has been tough and wonderful, often at the same time, and has shown me how to deal with setbacks in methodology and fieldwork. It also showed me that there is much about the personal experience of migrants that researchers often neglect. In this concluding chapter I will answer the main research question of this thesis *What are the mobility experiences of rural-urban migrants in Mongolia, centred around Ulaanbaatar, and how does their mobility affect their household livelihoods?*

The experience a rural-urban migrant in Mongolia has with regard to their mobility depends greatly upon the migrant. Some migrants, especially those with a nomadic background, experience high levels of mobility in the pre-migration phase. They are constantly in the 'in-between' state that Deleuze and Guattari (1987) described. The experiences of the migrants I followed in this thesis reflect this. The nomadic lifestyle offers a 'freedom' that a sedentary life cannot. But the dichotomy between nomadism and sedentarism has turned out not to be so simple.

Just as migration is not a straight forward line from A to B and the experience a migrant has with their mobility changes accordingly. A key role in the experience is not the geographical distance between rural and urban, but more the perception of that distance. Emotionally the distance is often greater than can be overcome in one migratory move. That is why many migrants use 'stepping stones' to get to Ulaanbaatar. One notable exception to this is migrants who come to the city for a higher education, they always come in a direct route because there are no other realistic places to find a higher education in Mongolia. Their experienced mobility changes when arriving in the city. The magnet that is Ulaanbaatar feels, to the migrant, like it is holding them in, reducing their mobility significantly in certain periods. This can only be overcome if their financial situation improves through working in Ulaanbaatar which gives them the opportunity to increase their mobility slightly because they can afford the means for transport. But in general the rural-urban migration of Mongolian migrants to Ulaanbaatar decreases their experienced mobility. Migrants have a different experienced mobility in different phases of their stay in Ulaanbaatar. Their experienced mobility therefore cannot fall under one 'umbrella term' like mobility. Mobilities is more accurate. Not only because their experienced mobility changes over time but also because their experience differs when discussing different forms of mobility. In

terms of migrant mobility the city offers limitations to the 'nomadic freedom' many migrants experienced in the countryside, but in terms of the possibilities for transport Ulaanbaatar offers more. This is because of the significantly better infrastructure in and around the city. The city also offers more mobility in the virtual world allowing me to still be in contact with some of the Mongolians I have met during my fieldwork. The job-mobility for Mongolian migrants is also greatly improved by life in the city. The experience a migrant has with their mobility depends therefore what type of mobility is researched. That is why experienced mobilities would be more accurate than experienced mobility.

This nuance is shown when regarding mobility as a 'motor of change' (Ernste, Martens & Schapendonk, 2012). The change in their mobility is not always for the better, the city makes them immobile at some stages. A clear example of migration creating immobility is the experienced immobility of refugees. Hyndman and Giles (UNHCR, 2006) stated that the immobility suffered by refugees whilst waiting for a resolution to the conflict or resettlement averaged 17 years. But in general, most mobility studies suggest that the initial migration to the city increases a migrant's mobility. In Mongolia this is not necessarily the case. As Ernste, Martens and Schapendonk (2012, p.513) say: "*mobility and immobility are intrinsically related*". Adding to what Hannam et al. (2006) say when they conclude that mobility and migration change both the place of origin and the place of destination, I add that mobility and migration, in the case of rural-urban Mongolian migrants, also changes the migrant. Almost forcing them to assimilate into city-life attracted by the magnetic power of the city. Many Mongolians like Batjargal still want to experience nomadic lifestyle at times, that is why there are so many holiday camps in the Mongolian countryside, it is a way to keep the nomadic elements of society alive. This creates friction and nostalgia among many migrants, on the one hand wanting to take the best the city has to offer (work and education mainly) but wary of the fact that this process will transform their cultural identity.

Their cultural identity goes hand in hand with the nomadic past of the Mongolians. Their cultural identity might transform to more of a sedentary life but it still retains elements of nomadism. The dichotomy I mentioned earlier is therefore not a dichotomy but a continuum. Sedentarism and nomadism are just opposite sides of a spectrum of mobility. As an example of this I use the example of Ankhbayar who said that *my ger has never moved*. This symbol of Mongolian nomadism and mobility might be stationary in the city but it still

has the possibility of moving. This is not the case for most houses or apartments so this is an important distinction. Ankhbayar gave up parts of his mobile life for a sedentary life but has not lost all his nomadic history, symbolized by his 'ger'. I therefore say that Ankhbayar is stationary instead of sedentary. Stationary is defined by a place on the spectrum of mobility between nomadism and sedentarism which allows for influences from both extremes. Many Mongolians are stationary in the city, and gave up some of their 'nomadic freedom', but do not lead fully sedentary lives and are therefore able to maintain some elements of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) 'in-between' state of living. Stationary lives do not necessarily lead to immobility. Using this spectrum of mobility can help scholars focus more on the nuances instead of the distinction between nomadism and sedentarism. Every migrant, or every person for that matter, has a place on this spectrum which influences their cultural identity and their experience with mobility. The cultural identity, the experienced mobility and their place within the mobility spectrum inevitably changes the experience of a migrant with regard to their migration.

The livelihood approach studies households from the perspective of livelihoods (de Haan & Zoomers, 2005) but has a link with migration. The rural-urban migration is often seen as a livelihood strategy orchestrated by the entire household. In the case of the Mongolian migrants I found this is rarely to be the case. It is part of a household strategy but the decision is often made by an individual member in order to gain personal development. This is not to say that the household does not have influence in this process. Migration is often made through generations which leads me to conclude that the importance of a family's attitude towards migration, especially in Mongolia, has influence over whether or not an individual member of that households undertakes the migration towards the city. This family process is not driven by a household livelihood strategy but more by the desire to do what is best for the younger generation. Mongolians often feel that the future of this younger generation is in Ulaanbaatar. In contrast to the findings of Bryceson et al (2003) I found that in the case of Mongolian migrants it is rarely a household livelihood decision but more a sequence of events and attitudes that has rural-urban migration as a consequence.

An individual's decision making process influences the livelihood of the rest of the household. This influence is more a side effect of the individual decision. In the case of Mongolia I found that an individual can make decisions which directly correlate to the

furtherance of the collective household livelihood, but often times makes decisions to further their own goals. A decision for the personal development of that individual has consequences for the rest of the household, a collective effect. This interplay between an individual's decision making for personal development which affects the collective also works the other way round. A decision made by the collective on a household level does not only affect the collective but also affects the individuals. As clarification I put these relations in a diagram (Figure 1) in which the side effects of decisions are clearly shown (with broken arrows). The decision making in Mongolia is often based on individual choice instead of collective reasoning.

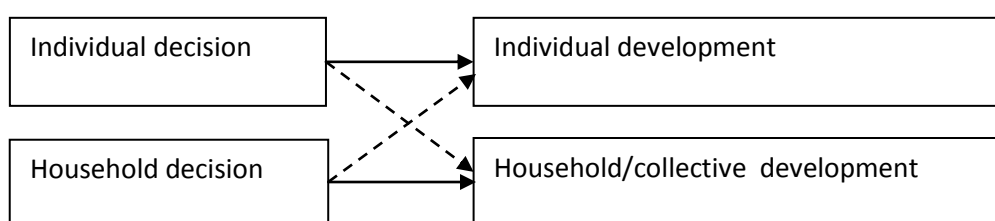


Figure 1: Diagram with the relations between an individual decision, a household decision, individual development and household/collective development. The black arrows signify a change.

The link between a household's livelihood approach, their mobility experience and their eventual migration therefore exists, but the decision is often made by an individual member of a household instead of as a collective decision. This individual decision has side effects which changes the entire household. The household still has great influence and the bond between family members still exists, in the case of Mongolian migrants, which leads to an extension of the family in geographical terms. This creates the multi-local households which Tacoli (1998) talks about. This multi-local household and its family bond is also what led me to visit Batjargal's in-laws in June 2014. The multi-local household, and its process of livelihood decision making, is influenced by their initial mobility. The attitude and willingness to migrate is part of that household. Coupled with the high mobility experience inherent to a nomadic lifestyle, this makes the migration process possible. The mobility experience therefore influences the household livelihood and individual members within that household. This multi-local household is held together by the strong emotional bond between Mongolian families which offers a safety net without which it becomes much more

difficult to succeed in the urban environment of Ulaanbaatar. I would therefore state that the experienced mobility and livelihoods of Mongolian migrants are intrinsically linked.

The bond between Mongolian family members was still very evident on my last day in Mongolia. I had already said my most of my goodbyes and Batbayar was driving me to Genghis Khan International Airport. During the drive we barely spoke a word. My brain was occupied thinking about how he and the rest of Mongolia had affected me. In the four months I stayed in his house I truly became a part of his family. My individual decision to do my fieldwork in Mongolia had changed him and his household and he in turn was my safety net in Mongolia. I was left wondering whilst the beautiful Mongolian landscape rolled by. I wondered if I would ever see them again after I became mobile again and flew back home. Then I remembered the adversities I already faced as a researcher and a human being during my time in Mongolia and how I had overcome them. A migratory move does not always sever the ties between households. Now with my move I created another multi-local household just on a larger scale. The motor of change that is mobility had already changed the research and now it became evident that it had also changed me. At that realisation it was time to say goodbye to Batbayar and soon I was on my way back home.

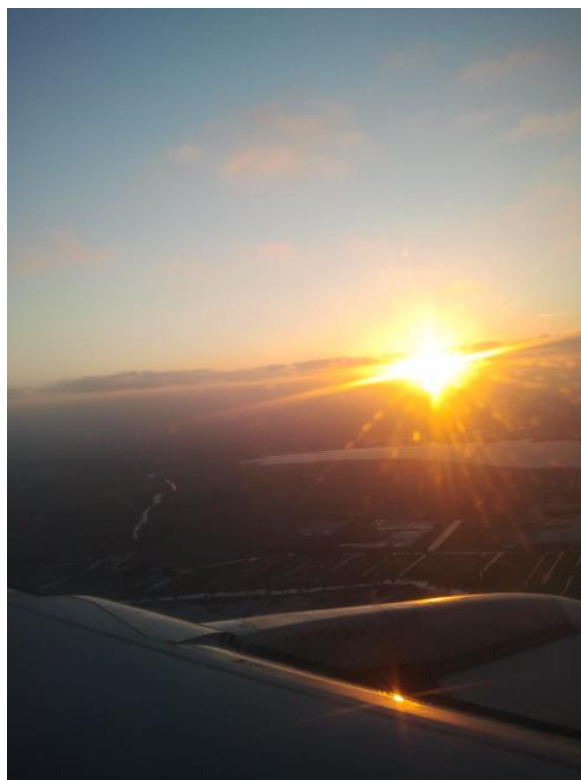


Image 27: The last glimpses of Mongolia. *By Jelle Blom.*

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Appendix I: Data

The data I gathered during my fieldwork in Mongolia can be found on this CD. This includes audio files of some interviews with Batjargal, a digital version of the notes I had taken after interviews that were not recorded, the questions for the initial survey and a short journey when and where I have met the five migrants central to this research.