that there will be opportunity for future studies of Inner Mongolia by students prepared to dig yet deeper into the historical, social, and cultural ramifications of local land use and power relations.

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*Post-Soviet Chaos: Violence and Dispossession in Kazakhstan*
Joma Nazpary

‘Life stinks here’, a young Kazakh man tells the author, ‘Everybody has become a Raskolnikov without his conscience’ (p. 1). This epithet sets the flavour for the excellent account which follows. In it, Joma Nazpary flexes his analytical training as an anthropologist to puzzle out whence the crime and whither the punishment. Chaos, or *bardak*, is the leitmotif of life in post-Soviet Almaty, Kazakhstan, and its meaning is at once symbolic, metaphorical and dangerously literal. Through snippets of conversations combined with in-depth interviews, the author draws on a wealth of ethnographic data to address ‘the way in which dispossessed people understand and react to what they term “chaos” and the variety of coping strategies they use’ (p. 2–3). While the narrative is anything but upbeat, Nazpary retains a judicious sense of calm which is both engaging and undramatic. The result is a very strong monograph.

According to the dispossessed of Almaty, the surrounding chaos results from the changes following the Soviet era, as well as from the corruption of the former elite and their Western supporters. Nazpary’s reading of this chaos and its composition is necessarily nuanced: while *bardak* manifests itself as ‘a total void’ or a space in which the ‘progression of time has been cancelled altogether’, the material cause is traceable to the ‘sudden and brutal emergence of market forces in a non-market society’ (p. 4). The violent anomie which Nazpary documents is experienced by the long-suffering burghers of Almaty as a ‘radical ontological disruption’, and only the few who are able to ride the waves of success accumulate great wealth. Drawing directly on Gramsci’s concept of a ‘crisis of hegemony’, the author contends that a new historical conjuncture must be added to Gramsci’s list of conditions precipitating such a crisis: the ‘chaotic mode of domination’.

The short second chapter is devoted to methodology and an exposition of the ethnographer’s style of social interaction, which seems well suited to the character of Almaty. ‘I had hundreds of casual discussions with people in the neighbourhood’ (p. 21), he writes, and these friendships give Nazpary’s narrative a convincing energy and dynamism. In the next chapter, the most salient features of *bardak* are described and assessed, including wealth differentiation,
lawlessness, violence and corruption. From the local perspective, an important characteristic of chaos is the ‘extreme contingency of conditions of life: the total unpredictability of the future’ (p. 60).

Chapter Four explores reciprocal exchange relationships and their use among the dispossessed as a system for dealing with the all pervasive chaos. Such networks are twofold by nature: there are networks of the nouveaux riches, on the one hand, and networks of the dispossessed on the other. The author points out several paradoxes surrounding exchange networks: while their existence is born out of chaos and the state’s inability to provide, the networks are inherently anti-chaotic. Likewise, while relations outside networks are characterised by violence and money, intra-network interactions are predicated on trust and reciprocity. Reciprocal exchange in Almaty is enacted through networks of two types: reproductive and strategic. While ‘the former contributes to the maintenance of social bonds between people, the latter is directly involved in survival’ (p. 88), and individuals are primarily defined by their role in a network rather by ethnic or social terms.

In Chapter Five, Nazpary takes a sober look at the economic strategies used by young dispossessed women, most of which involve some form of sexual service (through partners, sponsors or prostitution) for personal economic gain. These sexual strategies are symbolically potent, and their prevalence in post-Soviet Almaty is portrayed as another manifestation of the evils of rampant capitalism. Alongside the prevailing poverty, the emergence of consumerism and the desires it generates are major factors in directing women towards sexualised economic strategies. The author shows how moral attitudes to sexualised women both instigate and legitimise domestic and public violence against them. The symbolic significance of sisters and daughters earning their livelihoods as sex workers is yet another sign of the moral chaos brought about by unrestrained capitalism. Women practising sexualised economic strategies of survival are thus both producers of reproductive chaos and creators of shame and disgrace to their ethnic communities, and are vilified on both counts.

The penultimate chapter deals with ideological and cultural responses to post-Soviet change. By illustrating that foreignness is related to wealth, sexual promiscuity, consumerism and a host of other negative associations, the author demonstrates how rejecting a social life dominated by bardak gives the dispossessed a romantic and nostalgic image of the Soviet past. Nazpary’s argument is sophisticated, and he notes the implicit denial in these idealised imaginings: ‘while nostalgia becomes an element of utopia, the projection of utopia onto the past provides evidence of its possibility in the future’ (p. 144).

Chapter Seven, on ethnic tension, addresses the Kazakhification of the state and the struggle for urban space. The primary instruments of Kazakhification which Nazpary documents are the monopolisation of high posts in state institutions by Kazakhs and the Kazakh dominant language policy. Tensions over urban space are caused by the massive migration of Kazakhs to the cities