

Understanding Asia: State-Society Relations

Open Secrets: Ambivalent affect and Deflective strategies in Kazakhstan's nuclear histories and presents

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Tuesday, 15. October 2019
16.00 - 18.00

Building X
X-C3-107

Between 1947 and 1989 the Soviets tested approximately 456 nuclear weapons on a vast tract of land in north east Kazakhstan. To secure remaining nuclear expertise on the site and town, the National Nuclear Centre (NNC) was set up in this isolated, once closed and secret town to spearhead Kazakhstan's 'nuclear renaissance' and monitor the site. Here I track the various strategies used by the Soviets to contain and 'disappear' this secret site before moving to more recent attempts by the government-sponsored NNC to be more open. Juxtaposing these narratives and strategies with accounts from long-term residents and more recent arrivals in the town provides more ambivalent engagements with the town, site, and official attempts to contain wastes in a Soviet past and move onto a brighter nuclear future. ■

Prof. Dr. Alexander's work is largely on changing configurations of state, market and 'the third sector' in Kazakhstan, Turkey and Britain. She's examined these through privatisation, migration, the built environment and wastes (how they're imagined, managed and deflected). Her most recent fieldwork was on housing protests in Almaty and on the former Soviet nuclear test site in NE Kazakhstan. She's currently completing a project on thrift and starting another on forms and fears of failure. ■