



INTRODUCTION

Luck, Spirits and Places

This book aims to investigate the persistence of Orochen-Evenki¹ reindeer herders' and hunters'² ritual knowledge, discursive and embodied practices, movements in the taiga and interactions with various places in the taiga as part of daily strategies driven by the anxious desire to attract and sustain luck and well-being. The prominent Russian émigré ethnographer Sergei Shirokogoroff (1929: 331) noticed during his fieldwork in the early twentieth century that among Tungus in pre-Soviet times any visitor was always asked certain standard questions: 'What animal tracks have you seen? Have you had a good luck-*mahin* or have the spirits sent you anything?' The final question concerned the visitor's health. Shirokogoroff (*ibid.*) adds that the questions regarding animal tracks and good luck were always met with detailed answers. When documenting the remnants of religious practices among the Evenki of Soviet Buryatia, the Evenki ethnographer Shubin (1969: 172–173) stated that although hunters had ceased to maintain the memory of shamans and were mostly atheists, nevertheless even young people were still 'not free of their belief that the success in subsistence practices still depends on the good will of spirits and they continued to perform traditional rituals'.

As a student of anthropology I hoped to be able to investigate how the new political regime and the market economy in Russia had affected the Orochen's shamanic ritual behaviour and perception of landscape in the taiga. However, the Orochen of the Zabaikal'ia had suffered some drastic reprisals during the Colonial and Soviet times. After the years of brutal Soviet collectivization and persecution of religious practices, no tradition of ritual specialists such as shamans survived in that region. Only a few individuals strove to develop their capacity to heal people by attending training sessions during shamanic gatherings that were held in the Aga Buryat Autonomous Dis-

strict, located in the south of the former Chita Province. As part of the revitalization of indigenous identities and the mobilization of communities, local indigenous leaders have started to conduct public ritual performances ‘in the Orochen way’ at the funerals of their relatives and indigenous festivals supported by the administration.

To my surprise, various rituals and divinations resembling those described by Shirokogoroff are also creatively re-enacted by the Orochen. Orochen subsistence life is replete with concern about luck (Oro. *kutu*, Rus. *udacha* or *fart*, deriving from Latin *fortuna*), health and the goal of restoring lost relationships with spirits who are responsible for humans’ success and well-being. Although Shirokogoroff (1935: 187, 207) described Tungus rituals as a ‘shamanic art to control spirits’, he also stressed that every hunter must know the simplest methods of ‘managing’ spirits and avoiding their harmful influence. During my fieldwork I found out that this knowledge of how to pursue subsistence activities through interacting with spirits inhabiting the landscape, obtaining luck and securing one’s wellbeing is highly valued again today.

The demise of the Soviet state entailed the collapse of a centralized system of resource redistribution. One important response to new opportunities provided by new laws was the privatization of collective property by local villagers in order to appropriate territories for subsistence and to increase their reliance on taiga resources (for neotraditionalism see Pika 1999). This created a feeling of uncertainty and shortage and led to competition over resources. In an unstable and unpredictable economic environment, anxiety over luck has become a crucial concern for Orochen that shapes their interactions with other humans, animals and spirits as well as with places in the taiga. My ethnographic study will describe the efforts and strategies of the Zhumaneev-Aruneev kin group of hunters and herders in securing their subsistence and territorial base in the taiga and the village in the face of the complex social, economic, ecological and political changes that have affected the Zabaikal Province (former Chita Province).

Anthropologists have aptly noted that in the Western view, the notion of luck or fortune implies the idea of a chance-like incident that is accidental, infrequent, uncontrollable, bounded to individuals and often decontextualized (see Da Col 2012). To the Orochen, luck or *kutu* is based on the morality of humans’ and nonhumans’ interaction in their living environment. Hence, *kutu* must be analysed with regard to networks of relationships that involve different agents such as humans, animals and spirits; material objects and places; and practices of exchange. Humans can maintain social relations with ‘other-than-human

persons' and attribute to them all the qualities that human beings have (see Hallowell 1960). Furthermore, humans and nonhumans (material objects, places, animals and spirits) have a 'living energy' (Oro. *musun*) that can impact their health and ability to move or influence other beings (see Vasilevich 1969; Varlamova 2004). Animals and spirits perceive reality in the same way humans do, and it is said that sometimes their strength (Oro. *chinen*) to perform various activities exceeds that of humans. Therefore, nonhuman beings, whether animals or spirits, are believed to have a 'soul' (Oro. *omi*), that can manifest itself through intentionality, volition and cognitive abilities.

The loss of *kutu* (or any other element such as *omi*) by a human can result in the poor performance of any daily task, the loss of one's 'life energy' and passion for life, and even idleness, illness and death. A *kutuchi* (lucky) person is one who is able to enact his skills and knowledge in practice, always succeeds in hunting, is able to feed a family and relatives and remains healthy. Such a person successfully manages relations with domestic animals used in subsistence activities, like reindeer, horses and dogs. Hence, *kutu* is an intrinsic component of human personhood and emerges from humans' interactions with nonhuman beings, animals, places and spirits. It can also be shared with the people with whom a person cooperates and thus helps to sustain kin or wider social relations. *Kutu* can increase and decrease throughout the life course and according to a person's behaviour. In the absence of *kutu*, however, it is impossible to sustain life. The fluctuation of *kutu* is evidenced by the supply of game, which is plentiful at times and at other times limited by the master-spirits who control the animals' rebirth. Every hunter is given what is needed, and no hunter should exceed the number of animal souls allocated to him or her by selling meat or hunting for pleasure. Vorob'ev (2013) describes how the Evenki of Chirinda, who turned from reindeer herding to hunting wild reindeer, believe that any hunter who has killed a large number of wild reindeer should stop for a while, or else that luck (Rus. *fart*) in hunting will end. Hence, the author attributes the 'few remaining taboos' among the Evenki mostly to their beliefs concerning luck (ibid.).

In Russian ethnographic literature, such as the comparative studies of Tungus, Manchu, Turkic and Mongol-speaking groups of Siberia and Inner Asia by Mikhailov (1987), Alekseev (1975), Gurvich (1977), Zelenin (1929) and Petri (1930), the 'master' (Rus. *khoziain*) is at the same time described as a spirit (Rus. *dukh*) or animal that rules over certain places, or a spirit that resides in manufactured objects. According to these authors, such a master-spirit (Rus. *dukh-khoziain*) could be in charge of different geographical locations such as a wa-

tershed, hill or lake, or of celestial objects like the sun or the moon, which influence both wild and domestic animals and even the destiny of humans. The place ruled by the master-spirit is viewed as his household, where he can control the animals' procreation and rebirth, and influence almost all spheres of human life, including travelling, dwelling, storytelling and interacting with animals.

The Orochen I stayed with also have vernacular notions of *odzhen* (Oro.) or *khoziain* (Rus.) – during our conversations both terms referred to a master of all kinds of spirits, humans and animals. In Tsintsius' (1975: 437–438) Tungus-Manchu dictionary the Evenki word *odzhen* is translated as 'owner' or 'master' (Rus. *khoziain*), 'ruler' (Rus. *nachalnik*, *pravitel'*) and 'master-spirit' (Rus. *dukh khoziain*).³ Today the Orochen believe that reclaiming taiga territories from the state obliges them to establish cooperation with the local master-spirits. Orochen hunters and herders obtain luck (Rus. *dobyt' udachiu/fart/talan*) through their maintenance of successful relations of cooperation with the master-spirit of a certain place. Orochen acts of cooperation between humans and master-spirits, such as offerings of tea, bullets, coins, matches or other items – have been described since the early colonial encounters (Mainov 1898: 206, Georgi 1779: 13, 38).

Luck can be obtained (Rus. *dobyta*) from master-spirits, but a person can also catch it (Rus. *slovit'*) with the virtuoso use of knowledge and skills in harvesting game animals. The latter are referred to as *dobycha*. People who experience a lack of success in hunting in a certain area can use the following words: 'What can I do there, there is nothing to catch' (Rus. *A chto tam delat' tam mne nechego lovit'*).⁴ Unlucky people express their situation with the phrase 'I could not find luck' (Oro. *Kutuia davdachav bakami*). Similarly, Alekhin (2001: 132) cites an Evenki hunter's teaching: 'You must catch luck, while it is available' (Rus. *udachu lovi, poka est'*). Indeed, obtaining luck would be impossible without the hunter's efforts, expressed through the hunter's movements, predictions, behaviour and emotions, as well as discursive strategies intended to maintain the environment where luck can be acquired. Hunters and shamans plead for luck, make offerings, skilfully seize luck (i.e. souls) from the master-spirits, and use various means to avoid misfortune, performing these efforts in rituals like the *sinkelevun* and *ikenipke* described by Soviet ethnographers (Vasilevich 1957; Anisimov 1951).

Master-spirits (Oro. *odzhen*) share the animals with the hunter. Orochen hunters often say that the master-spirit does not give but rather shows animals (Rus. *pokazyvaet zveria*) to the hunter (see also Alekhin 2001: 132). Therefore, they also say that a hunter must be

able to overcome individual animals and attune himself to different places in the taiga to catch luck. The master-spirits are entertained by skilful performance in hunting a particular animal and will most probably be generous thereafter.⁵ Furthermore, the hunter must be modest and assume the position of a person in need who is willing to maintain reciprocal relations. Hunters entice the master-spirits to provide them with game by telling stories of prior hunting successes before setting out on a hunting expedition. In doing so they entertain spirits that may be generous to people and send them luck (see Zeleinin 2004: 27, 1929: 123; Potapov 2001: 115).

It has long been known, however, that most hunters' luck is limited by the master-spirit's effort to maintain a balance of animals in certain places. The idea of the master-spirit's control over animals' rebirth and humans' hunting success is widespread in the literature on circumpolar peoples (see Ingold 1986: 243–276; Jordan 2003: 123–125, Kwon 1998: 119, Hamayon 1990: 365–372). Hunters may be unlucky for lengthy periods and not succeed in killing animals. In such situations, they have to be content with what the master-spirit gives them and live from what others share with them. Enduring misfortune, however, can be seen as an affliction caused either by malevolent spirits or humans, or by a violation of taboos, that can be very dangerous for a human's health and life.⁶

The flow of luck can be predicted through dreams, omens and divinations, and luck can be acquired through rituals or through sharing, besides being 'caught' by the skilful performance of hunting and herding. Orochen believe it is important to make good use of the flow of luck, as one lucky incident attracts another, whereas one misfortune tends to attract other misfortunes.⁷ Hunters strive to obtain and preserve their luck by making daily offerings to the master-spirits and by showing respect to animals through the proper way of hunting, proper treatment of the animals' bones and certain discursive strategies and bodily movements. In order to sustain luck, a person must hunt only for his or her own needs and take any animal that encountered, without preferences for certain species. Hence, it is said that one should take what is given by the spirits, but not more than one is able to consume. Luck can also be sustained through moral behaviour like showing respect and sharing (Oro. *nimat*) with other humans and nonhumans. From this perspective, luck is a virtue and a moral precept that guides a person to lead a proper life and shapes his or her daily behaviour.

Hunters and herders see such interactions as the proper way of making a living by creating symmetrical relations of reciprocal shar-

ing with other humans and nonhumans. For the Orochen, luck must be redistributed among relatives and friends, since this practice will serve to generate future luck (see also Hamayon 2012). The sharing of luck includes the sharing of meat and other animal products, the transfer of hunting skills and knowledge, and the organization of joint hunting expeditions. It involves people living in the same camp, people of the same clan and people who participated in a hunting expedition or were encountered en route. Among various forms of help and support, *nimat* (sharing) is described by many ethnographers as a cultural rule or norm that is crucial to the process of hunting.⁸

The lucky hunter shares the meat first with all other hunters who participated in the hunting expedition and then with his relatives in the village. In some small villages like Bugunda, meat was parcelled in a special communal shelter and shared among all seven households. Usually the children participated in delivering meat to each house. Even people encountered on the road by the hunters are seen as part of the environment of luck, so meat was shared with them too in the taiga camps on the hunting trip, although the same people would not receive a share in the village. All beings, including birds like ravens, receive their share when met in the taiga during a lucky hunting trip (see Shirokogoroff 1929: 44). People who like to hunt alone and thus avoid sharing are considered malevolent and called *stramnye*.⁹

Sharing includes local forms of hospitality: anyone visiting a household in the village is always invited to drink tea (Rus. *chaevat'*), which also means getting a full meal of soup, meat and sweets. This form of sharing is generally observed in all the villages of Zabaikal'ia, though it does not usually include a direct offering of meat. Thus people who lack meat at least have a chance to eat meat by joining others in a meal. In some cases, people say directly, 'boil meat, I am going to come for food' (Rus. *vari miaso, pridu kushat'*). Hence, sharing also recognizes the right of others to maintain their well-being. The idea of *nimat* also includes various forms of cooperation and the sharing of tools in joint subsistence activities, as well as selling groceries on credit, lending out various items or making presents. In his report on the Orochen of Buryatia, Neupokoev (1928: 21) notes that rich reindeer herders would give two or three reindeer to those who lacked animals or lost them in an epidemic, and that reindeer were also given as a gift after recovery from an illness or a period of bad hunting luck. A gift could be given as a matter of respect between individuals or clans, but also as support to the poorest families (Shubin 2007: 23). Moreover, giving gifts among hunters can be seen as a way of sharing luck. As Shubin (*ibid.*: 25) notes, after receiving a gift a hunter,

if in good health, was required to embark on a hunting trip for large game. Sharing also includes taking ‘purchase orders’ (Rus. *zakazy*) from others when travelling to cities or villages. On such occasions, a hunter or herder would ask a person to bring needed items from the village or city, implying his or her own readiness to do similar favours on another occasion.

By sharing with other humans and serving as a conduit for luck, a person sustains his own luck. Nevertheless, one must take precautions so that luck is not ‘given away’ accidentally. To avoid this, meat should not be passed from one person to another by hand; rather, the person asking must be the one to pick it up. Rastsvetaev (1933: 34) notes that an animal killed by a lucky hunter was left on the ground to be butchered and transported by those who were supposed to receive a share. In many cases the hunter’s wife would butcher, divide and then deliver the meat to relatives. A hunter who kills more than one animal and is willing to share the second with other hunters must take at least one of the animal’s hind legs for himself. Hunters say that this is what wolves do – eat a leg of a reindeer they have killed in order to sustain their luck.

Lost hunting luck can be restored by taking part in the hunting expedition of a ‘lucky hunter’. Such cooperation may occur between people with close ties, such as relatives, friends or comrades (Rus. *naparniki*), when an exchange relationship has been established. In this case, the desired results are achieved through establishing a productive network and creating a ‘positive sense of relatedness’ with other beings (see Foucault 1980: 119). Master-spirits are believed to be generous to those who have not accumulated a large baggage of sins and are really in need. Hence, hunters not only take a ‘lucky boy’ along on a hunting trip to elicit the spirits’ generosity; they also take very little food, meaning that hunters may eat almost nothing while spending weeks in search of animals. It is said that spirits take pity on those with an empty stomach. During hunting trips, hunters exchange opinions about other hunters’ abilities to bring luck or failure, also relating how other hunters’ sins in the taiga have affected the hunting luck of the whole group. As one hunter said, ‘I will never go hunting with Vasia, as he always takes big bags of potatoes to eat. How could we then be lucky?’ Hunters who had brought about failure or who could ‘spoil the place’ were referred to as *pakostnoi* (Rus. *pakostit’*, spoil), which is one of the most negative things that can be said about another person.

Some say that villagers have begun to compete for resources by using ‘black activities’ (Rus. *chernota*) to spoil another person’s well-

being, health or luck. Adverse actions by other humans and nonhumans can influence luck, which one can ‘lose’ (Rus. *poteriat*) or ‘spoil’ (Rus. *napokostit*) as a result. Most villagers stress that the *porcha* (spell) and *zglaz* (evil eye) are very widespread in post-Soviet villages. *Porcha* is understood as a conscious magical attack to cause illness in another person. *Zglaz* is seen as a negative influence on human activities that a person with ‘bad energy’ or ‘bad luck’ unconsciously passes on to another. Therefore, it is said that to avoid harm one should not allow one’s belongings, animals, children or activities to be praised, since some people’s words can attract misfortune. Only when a curse or evil influence is neutralized can luck be easily gained.

In an environment of shortage and competition for resources, hunters believe that the taiga suffers from constant overhunting and the sinful behaviour of humans. They see animals as ‘taken’ by ‘poaching’ or only in order to gain monetary value.¹⁰ Orochen hunters and herders trying to succeed in the post-Soviet context have occasionally resorted to aggressive practices of domination when harvesting game animals. This can happen on certain occasions, for example, when somebody experiences constant misfortune or wants to increase his or her wealth. Usually the Orochen regard such behaviour as negative and mention it with reference to the notion of *ngelome* (‘sin’, don’t do it, bad, terrible, Rus. *grekh*) or ‘poaching’ (Rus. *brakonerstvo*) (for the Katanga Evenki, see also Sirina 2008: 128–132, for the Surinda Evenki, Alekhin 2001).¹¹ A sinful person may also let meat spoil, waste game animals, treat animals’ remains disrespectfully, use ‘wrong’ ways of hunting or refuse to either share or trade meat. It is very dangerous to commit such sins as plundering storage platforms – especially platforms or mortuary sites linked to the deceased – or steal offerings from ritual sites. Any form of stealing or using something that belongs to someone else, including things and places used by others (especially a deceased person) is considered *ngelome*. Furthermore, as Alekhin (2001) noted, any kind of aggressive behaviour towards wild or domestic animals was also considered a sin by the Evenki of Surinda.

Many Orochen tell stories of how the baggage of personal sins resulted in disability and death to people and even whole families. Local spirits often intervene to drive hunters away from certain places by attacking them in dreams, sending a bear into their path or making strange noises that madden or disable the hunter. Once frightened by a bear, a person may lose luck, suffer protracted loss of health or even die. Some stories tell of a foolish hunter attacked by a spirit who sent reindeer that pushed him out of a river basin and chased him back to

the village. In another case, a bear attacked the hunter in dreams and made him ill. The vernacular concept of ‘poaching’ among hunters and herders contrasts with formal regulations that define ‘poaching’ as hunting without a formal license. The Orochen perceive poaching as an ‘unequal contest’ and a sin committed when a hunter uses overly elaborate hunting equipment, wastes game, makes animals suffer, acts disrespectfully towards animals and their remains, or leaves a place of butchering ‘untidy’. Any of these actions may spoil the luck of other humans and animals. Hunting is regarded as a gift when luck has been obtained and animals are hunted and later consumed or disposed of with respect, but it can become dangerous when a hunter harvests animals yet refuses to engage in reciprocity with humans and nonhuman beings. The Orochen consider competing with an animal and outsmarting it in a ‘contest of equals’ (Rus. *na ravne*) the proper way to hunt and the proper way to acquire luck without threatening a hunter’s relationship with the master-spirits of various animals. During the contest the hunter should not show emotion (Rus. *azart*) but be persistent when hunting for game, especially when trailing a wounded animal.¹²

Any kind of sin may provoke an aggressive reaction by animals sent by the master-spirits or by ‘malevolent spirits’ (Oro. *arenkil*, sing. *arenki*) of deceased people that roam the taiga.¹³ A ‘sinful person’ (Rus. *greshnik*) lacks the support of the master-spirits and therefore is highly vulnerable to such evil attacks. *Arenkil* can attack humans who refuse to share. Constant misfortune, illness or long-term loss of luck may signal a curse from malevolent spirits or souls sent by powerful humans (like shamans), which can cause disease and even the death of family members. Luck can also be either ‘spoiled’ or affected by *arenkil* that are accidentally encountered in the taiga (Shirokogoroff 1935: 137–138; Tsintsius 1975: 51). The Orochen identify the *arenkil* with the souls of hunters or herders who did not reach the world of the dead because they died suddenly or accidentally, or were not escorted by the proper rituals.¹⁴ These souls had to remain in this world and became malevolent. These spirits are considered to be always hungry for human souls and eager to diminish people’s ‘living energies’ or luck, so someone who encounters such a spirit may fall ill or even die. Old campsites, ritual sites or places where tragic incidents have occurred can be inhabited by *arenkil* and therefore can affect the lives of contemporary humans.

Today the risk of encountering such spirits is increased, as various rituals of respect were neglected for half a century during the Soviet era. Alexandra Lavrillier (2003: 103), who carried out extensive field-

work among the Evenki (Orochen) of Amur Province and southern Yakutia, similarly notices that the local Evenki communities of Amur Province explain their poor economic conditions as due to their failure to honour their spirits. Buryats in Mongolia also attribute their current misfortune to spirits who have returned to seek revenge for the abandoning of ritual practices (Buyandelgeriyin 2007). The Orochen avoid places thought to be infused with misfortune and manifestations of *arenkil*. People often take precautions by leaving offerings or cleaning themselves with smudge sticks when moving through the taiga with their reindeer so as not to lose their luck and to avoid encountering misfortune.

Not only is luck the outcome of human-nonhuman interactions, but it can also be emplaced and affected by various material objects that have their own agency. Such agency may manifest itself in certain environments and situations and thereby influence the activities of humans. Any crafted items, cloth or tools, but also camps, paths or tracks on the ground are seen as extensions of a human's or a spirit's personhood. In the Orochen lifeworld, all living animals who dwell on the land, leave or hide tracks, harvest resources or build dwellings are said to create 'living places' (Oro. *bikit*) (for *bikit* see Tsintsius 1975: 79). Hunters often use the word *bikit* to describe the living place of an animal such as a wolf, bear, sable, squirrel, rabbit or reindeer (or a group of animals).¹⁵ Knowledge of these places is gained by observing the movement of animals or examining their marks and tracks. Over time, the hunters thus eventually glean information about an animal's personality, character, social life and preferences. They adjust their movements to the animal's *bikit* to create an environment where a person's luck in herding and hunting can be realized. Hunters compete with an animal by hiding their intentions, movements and emotions through observance of prescribed ways of behaving and talking. Hunters are aware that either animals or the place itself will respond to their actions.¹⁶ Hence, while hunting, hunters regularly readjust their movements and camping practices in order to 'fix' animals in the landscape and achieve the best possible hunting luck. Luck is achieved by successfully overcoming an animal through certain ways of walking, talking, and either leaving or hiding tracks.

Humans can also emplace their own luck or misfortune in different places when leaving tracks on the land and building camps. In this way they establish their own 'living places' or *bikit*. A human's *bikit* is maintained through daily walks and the use of certain paths, camps or storage platforms. Creating new ritual sites for carved idols or decorated trees also serves to generate luck for one's living place in the

taiga. By modifying of the physical condition of objects or places, a person can emplace it with one's own 'living energy' and luck. One of the old ways to protect a person's well-being involved 'placing his or her soul' inside a certain object called *omiruk* (Oro. *omi*- soul). This object could be a doll made from bone, wood or iron, and it is said that 'if one's soul is placed inside another item, then one may be wounded but will recover quickly' (Vasilevich 1969: 225).

In her study of the Evenki and Eveny, Lavrillier (2012: 116) used the term *onnir* meaning a 'spirit charge' or a spirit's 'imprint' or the effect of its 'imprint': 'humans are thought to leave their imprint on hunting and herding tools, on the land they walk, on the clothes they wear, on the meat they take when hunting, on skins they tan, on the items they sew, on the reindeer they herd, ride or treat for illness and so forth, and on all the ritual gestures they perform' (ibid). Similarly, a hunter can place his or her 'energy' inside objects by making tools. These items then become independent agents, affecting anyone who uses them in a positive or negative way. A new user of a tool may either bring his or her own identity to such items or inherit its destiny from the previous user (see for example Varlamova 2004: 60).¹⁷ A close family member or friend, with whom a relationship based on exchange and sharing has been established, may acquire luck by using the tools of a lucky person.

Those who succeed in establishing a cooperative relationship with the master-spirits are likely to sustain their well-being for as long as they continue to live in the area. People described such experiences of luck, together with the ensuing moral responsibilities toward the master-spirits, as placing one's 'energies' in the places people use for their subsistence. Indeed, recognizable traces left by former reindeer herders and hunters on the land, such as mortuary scaffolds, storage sites, camps and trails, can be seen as imbued with the agency of ancestors, which can be harmful if treated without respect. Places, objects and their nonhuman constituencies can stand as agents of their own right, mediating 'energies' of former users. These places and objects may thus affect the activities of people and animals by the simple fact that people and animals use these places (see Vorob'ev 2013: 46). Living and acting in a place for a long time and experiencing luck there brings a new identity to that place, imprinting it with new experiences.

The proper treatment of domestic reindeer, each of which has its own individual agency, also reinforces the interdependent and intimate human-animal-landscape interaction. Hence animals like reindeer are not seen simply as property, but also as the embodied ex-

pression of a person's social relations and spatial interactions, which are infused with ideas of cooperation and luck. As humans constantly compete with and attune themselves to game animals and strive to catch luck, they also must be skilful enough to herd domestic animals and attune their daily practices to the reindeer's needs. 'Reindeer luck' can be also achieved through proper interaction with animals when attracting them to the camp for regular visits or using them as transport in hunting. The loss of a herd is considered a great misfortune affecting a person's health and living energy. Hence, elders say that 'without reindeer, one has no face' (Oro. *Ororver sokordenesh, badeves sokordenesh*). In a similar vein, they add, 'no reindeer, no Orochen' (Oro. *Ororver achin, Orocher achin*). Selling or killing reindeer therefore often means the loss of luck. For this reason, moral rules require that reindeer can be exchanged with other herders or killed only as an offering to the spirits.

In the Russian and the Soviet understanding, hunting practices of indigenous peoples were reduced to technical activities, without acknowledgment of a connection to religious beliefs, which were seen as superstitious relics of the past anyway (see Potapov 2001; Petri 1930). Most of the recent research conducted among Siberian indigenous communities has focused on the indigenous economy of reindeer herding and the constraints imposed by the Soviet and post-Soviet state, whereas research on hunting practices or the combination of hunting and herding remains scarce.¹⁸ At the same time, recent field reports document that many indigenous communities of herders and hunters have given up herding in recent years in favour of hunting or even fishing (Takakura 2012; Vorob'ev 2007, 2013).

The ontology of luck and its connection to hunting skills and techniques, place-making and discursive strategies has been little explored in studies of hunting societies in Siberia and North America. In her analysis of the ethnographic record, Hamayon (2012) argued that in pre-Soviet Siberian societies luck implied the mode of obtainment rather than of production. Hence, game and other things, be they material (such as rain or good pastures, for herders) or immaterial (such as love, fertility, health and success in other domains), cannot be produced since they are limited in quantity and uncertain in availability (*ibid.*: 101).

In the few existing studies on hunting communities like the Khanty and Yukaghir or groups that combine hunting with reindeer herding like the Eveny and Sakha, the theme of luck remains very marginal or else the term is completely omitted (see Jordan 2003; Vitebsky 2005; Willerslev 2007). Luck is mostly described as a moral impera-

tive based on the hunters' positive relations with other humans, game animals and master-spirits, which is also a common trope in many studies of subarctic hunters in North America (Feit 1994, Ridington 1990, Nelson 1983). In Vitebsky's monograph on Eveny hunters and herders, we find that hunting luck was achieved when animals offered themselves to a worthy hunter at the behest of the master-spirit called Bayanay (2005). Hunting constituted an engagement with the master, owner or ruler of animals more than with the animals or places themselves, since animals were seen as the master's spirit's 'incarnations, manifestations, or refractions' (Vitebsky 2005: 262). The previously underdeveloped themes of the 'materiality of luck' and loss of fortune because of a curse were addressed in recent ethnographic studies of the cattle-breeding Buryats of Mongolia and China. Empson (2011) described how fortune was retained in material forms: it could be harnessed as an inner force persisting in herds or the land, and could also be conceived in kin relations, especially with children. Swancutt (2012) described how the rise and fall of fortune involved efforts to improve or fix it through rituals, divinations and innovative magic remedies.

The most elaborate description of hunting luck among North American subarctic hunters is provided by Richard K. Nelson (1983) in his ethnography of the Athapascan Koyukon. For the Koyukon luck is not a skill or quality, but rather an 'essential element' in the spiritual interchange between humans and spirits that is based on a moral code (*ibid.*: 26–27, 232). Luck as a 'nearly tangible essence' heavily affects every phase of Koyukon subsistence that is based on the constant interplay between humans with a certain measure of luck and the spirits of animals (*ibid.*: 358). Nelson (*ibid.*: 232) also adds that luck is a 'finite entity' that can be retained, lost, transferred and recovered when interacting with other humans and animals. 'Even equipment for hunting and trapping enters into this spiritual interchange, where the behaviour or event associated with a particular trap (or trapping place) may influence its luck for catching animals' (*ibid.*: 141). In his detailed ethnography, however, Nelson focuses mainly on indigenous hunters' technical adaptations, like their hunting and trapping skills and their knowledge of animals.¹⁹ In many ethnographic studies of North American subarctic indigenous societies, hunting luck is seen as the outcome of a satisfactory and positive relationship and is often guided by reciprocity (see Ridington 1988: 105; A. Sharp 1986: 258).²⁰ According to Firket Berkes (1999: 84–87), the Chisasibi Cree are to show respect for animals in several ways: the hunter maintains an attitude of humility during the hunt; the animal is approached,

killed and carried to camp with respect; offerings are made and the animal is butchered and consumed, and its remains disposed of, with respect. At the same time Berkes describes hunting success as a cyclic, fluctuating and limited phenomenon: 'it peaks with age and experience and then declines since success is passed on to a person's sons and other hunters' (ibid.: 82).

In this book, I approach luck in the active mode by showing the dynamics of hunters' and reindeer herders' interactions with other beings, humans, animals and spirits. Various examples illustrate how certain tactile and bodily techniques serve to enhance luck and well-being. For the Orochen, success in subsistence activities, health and well-being also relies on the creation of objects and places as containers of luck. They pursue various strategies to escape misfortune, remove a curse or perpetuate the experience of luck. The success of such strategies relies on cooperation but does not exclude domination. To understand the Orochen ontology of luck, I will present connected ethnographic case studies that show how luck is obtained and preserved in daily subsistence practices as well as through the interaction among humans and nonhuman beings. The book will show how the anxiousness for luck permeates people's practical activities, discursive strategies, practices of place-making and spatial experiences in the taiga and the village. To this end, I analyse the assemblages of skills and kinds of knowledge, empathy and awareness that people use to obtain and contain luck when competing with animals and other humans or moving through the landscape. I also show how weather predictions, the adjustment of campsites to the shifting environment and the creation of networks of cooperation and exchange with different people serve to realize subsistence opportunities.

Success is also contingent on various rituals, healing practices, divinations and practices of domination. The use of a combination of domination and cooperation in order to achieve success in subsistence may have been influenced by the complex post-Soviet political and economic environment based on the overexploitation of resources, a black market economy and a history of the state's massive penetration of Orochen cultural practices and subsistence. However, I argue that these ambiguous interactions shared by other Siberian, Inner Asian or Canadian subarctic groups. The book re-examines commonly held ideas found in countless ethnographies of hunters and gatherers that have provided iconic descriptions of how animals give themselves up to hunters as long as they are treated with respect. To the contrary, I will demonstrate that interactions between humans, animals and spirits, as well as with material objects and places, are based on complex

relations that involve cooperation but also contests with other beings, as well as domination, which creates experiences infused with anxiety, ambiguity and risk.

Outline of the Book

The chapters address the vernacular notion of luck through a series of interrelated ethnographic case studies. Chapter 1 introduces the field site in the Tungokochen District of Zabaikal Province and describes the local identities and contemporary way of life in a post-Soviet village that is marked by competition over taiga resources. It also describes how the state dominated the lives of indigenous people in the region through early colonial policies, administrative changes and Soviet reforms. It introduces the most important members of the extended family of reindeer herders and hunters I stayed with and describes their characters and ways of subsistence. It underlines the skills, knowledge, adjustment and respect for autonomy one must develop to maintain the environment of luck and build mutual trust.

Chapter 2 introduces the book's main ideas and presents linguistic, semantic and ethnographic insights into interlinked concepts that recur in the text, such as luck, strength, soul, mastery, movement and sharing (Oro. *nimat*) as well as nonhuman beings like animals, malevolent spirits (Oro. *arenkil*), master-spirits (Oro. *odzhen*) and living places (Oro. *bikit*). I demonstrate how luck is not achieved simply because of the master-spirits' goodwill, but instead emerges from a complex process of competition during which it must be obtained and then secured. This process involves the enactment of practice-based knowledge and skills as well as empathy, which generate success in the hunter's and herder's daily interactions with animals, spirits and places. It also involves predictions, divinations, dreams, use of various amulets and practices of sharing that attract and sustain the flow of luck. I demonstrate that the desired results can be achieved not only through a positive relationship of hunters and herders cooperating with the master-spirits, but also using various forms of domination referred as sinful behaviour, and clandestine practices too.

Chapter 3 describes how people act either cooperatively or more autonomously according to their experiences of luck and trust, which is crucial to understanding the existing relationships in local subsistence practices. In this context, I describe how luck can be channelled through the sharing of tools, knowledge and skills, and is reflected in cooperative relations. Hunters' and herders' storage practices reveal

how they adapt to an insecure socioeconomic environment through accumulation, autonomy and concealment of wealth, although such accumulation of goods, as the opposite of an ethos of sharing, may endanger the possession of luck.

Chapter 4 describes how movement is semantically, practically and metaphorically linked to ways of catching luck. Walking is considered an important skill, an expression of physical strength and a moral value that ensures success in subsistence. I describe the connection between walking and the hunters' and herders' competence in hunting and herding, and contrast it with the pejorative colonial concept of the 'Walking Tungus'. Walking, along with the use of signs and paths, is key to both the success of cooperative endeavours and the autonomy of hunters and herders living in remote taiga areas.

Chapter 5 describes how hunters and herders catch their luck in hunting in what is seen as a dynamic personal competition between the hunter and an individual animal. Luck is viewed as contingent on the hunter's adjustment to the animal's living place (*Oro. bikit*). Reading and interpreting tracks is one of the most important skills in the interactions between animals and humans during hunting and herding. For the Orochen, the habitats of game animals are not just patches of the environment but vibrant places to which humans must attune their senses and movement when hunting for a certain animal. Hence, hunters and herders adjust their daily activities and camps according to their awareness of both wild and domestic animals and spirits living in the vicinity. The experience of luck and well-being when using certain taiga places conveys to humans a sense of mastery of their own living place (*Oro. bikit*).

Chapter 6 examines how luck is achieved through the successful prediction of, and influence upon, the weather. I show how hunters adjust their movements and camping sites according to their knowledge of the weather and the seasons to ensure that they make the best use of certain hunting areas and certain animals. Orochen temporality cannot be described as a fixed and abstract calendar; rather, it is a flow of intertwined incidents situated in places to which a people have to adjust their activities in order to succeed in their subsistence activities.

Chapter 7 describes hunting and herding luck in relation to humans' ambivalent interaction with both domestic animals (reindeer and dogs) and predators (bears and wolves) in the face of a shortage of and competition for land in the post-Soviet environment. The Orochen perceive their interactions with domestic animals like reindeer and dogs as cooperation based on a person's competence, reciprocity

and respect for the animal's agency as well as the animal's autonomy. Reindeer herding and dog breeding are closely connected with hunting. Therefore, these economic strategies can be seen as a coherent, interdependent mode of subsistence that relies on an integral system of skills, knowledge and notions of personhood. In a context where interactions with both wild and domestic animals are based on a person's intimate engagement with them and their living places, there is no clear-cut distinction between wild and domestic animals.

Chapter 8 describes how vernacular ideas of health and wellbeing are connected to the use of the landscape. Various old and newly established ritual sites have become important sources of knowledge, health and strength since shamans' absence as communal intermediaries during the past half century. It focuses in particular on how rock art sites have become important sources of luck and well-being for the Orochen of Tungokochen, serving as a continuous monumental manifestation of the Orochen cosmology.

Chapter 9 offers concluding remarks on some overarching ideas addressed in the chapters and discusses these in relation to the ethnographic literature on hunters' and gatherers' ideas of luck, reciprocity and domination. In this chapter I argue that both modes – cooperation and domination – can be understood as reciprocal relations that guide hunters' and herders' enacted and emplaced strategies for interacting with different beings and maintain hunting success and well-being.

Notes

1. The ethnonym Evenki was chosen by the Soviet state as an administrative category in the 1920s after the end of the civil wars. It was used as a unified reference to many scattered groups in Siberia and the Far East that spoke dialects of the Tungus-Manchu language group.
2. By hunters and herders I mean both males and females hunters. Though I spent most of my time with male hunters, nevertheless most Orochen females that were raised in taiga camps were actively involved into hunting of fur as well as game animals.
3. Among Turkic speakers, *odzhen* means 'mastery' and 'power', referring to a quality of places, spirits and humans (for *eeze* among Altaians, see Halemba 2007: 64–67, for *eze* among Mongolians, see Humphrey 1996: 85–86).
4. The Russian word *lovit'* is usually used in games, when a person throws an object, shouting '*lovi*'- catch it. The word *poimat'* (also translated as catch) is mainly used with reference to trapping or snaring game.
5. Swancutt (2012: 179) similarly states, 'Buryats hold that shamanic spirits and Buddhist gods often express their pleasure when observing a person acting virtuously by sending that person blessings and boons of fortune'.

6. Similarly, Swancutt (2012: 13) notices that the Buryat of Mongolia and China believe that ‘the strength of a person’s fortune and wilful courage (Bur. *zorig*) can protect the entire surface of a person’s body, deflecting curse attacks from penetrating the person’.
7. Orochen hunters often talk about the closing road or closing luck (*perekryt’ udachiu*) (see Alekhin 2007: 132).
8. On *nimat* see Sirina (2012: 316–335); Shubin (2007: 21–26); Turov (2000: 48–59), Vasilevich (1969: 69); Rastsvetaev (1933: 30–37); Dobromyslov (1902: 80).
9. The old Russian word *stramnoi* means bad, unacceptable, inconvenient and unpleasant.
10. The idea that hunters are not necessarily ecologists is not new in studies of circumpolar people (see Brightman 2002 [1993]; Krech III 1999; Feit 1973).
11. Hunters and herders hold vernacular conceptions of ‘poaching’ that clash with formal state regulations defining ‘poaching’ as hunting without formal permission or license. How Siberian hunters and herders negotiate access to resources with the state by relying on their own moral rules and logics rather than observing formal regulations needs to be further explored in future research.
12. It is also believed that both animals and master-spirits may get very angry when a hunter makes an animal suffer (see also Zelenin 1929: 41).
13. In a comparative Tungusic-Manchurian dictionary, Tsintsius (1975: 122) refers to the *arenki* as an evil spirit, devil, monster or ghost.
14. See also the ethnographic compilation of Evenki rituals for the escorting of souls in Ermolova (2010).
15. Anisimov (1959: 18–20) writes that the Orochen, like many other Siberian groups, link certain places to specific animals.
16. As Anderson (2000b: 234) states, ‘their [i.e. Evenki herders’] actions, motivations, and achievements are understood and acted upon by nonhuman beings’.
17. A lost item or using a tool can be dangerous for those who handle it without asking its master. As Nadia Zhumaneeva said, ‘the thing wants to return to his master’. She gave me the example of a knife found in the taiga that was later used in stabbing the one who found it.
18. At the late stage of editing of my manuscript, a Russian ethnologist published a monumental comparative monograph (Sirina 2012) on Evenki and Eveny land use, traditional subsistence and worldview. The volume provides a rich archival, historical and classical ethnographic overview supported by Sirina’s field experience, which gives a good background and deeper linguistic understanding of many Evenki notions – *nimat*, *omi*, *arenki*, *odzhen*, *seveki* – used in my book on Orochen people.
19. In his earlier ethnographic work, Nelson (1973: 311) compares the hunting skills of Athapaskans and Eskimo, referring very briefly to their notions of luck and success.
20. Many ethnographies of North American Indian communities mention a type of ‘power’ associated with ‘medicine’ – *inkonze* (Chipewyan), *inkone* (Dogrib), *inkon* (Slavey) or *ech’inte* (Dene) (e.g. H. Sharp 2001: 53–54; Helm 1994: 78; Goulet 1998: 60–82). They describe ‘power’ as a superior quality that ani-

mals have but humans lack. Humans may just have a little of it or, as among the Dene, are deprived of it at birth (H. Sharp 2001: 46). Although it is believed that people can never become stronger than animals, they may regain 'power' during their lives through interaction with nonhuman beings (ibid.). Generally every person in the indigenous community is expected to find his or her own way to meet animals in dreams or visions and gain 'power' by maintaining a lifelong relationship with an animal-helper (Brightman 2002: 169–170; Tanner 1979: 125–126; Hallowell 1966: 455; Speck 1935: 187–188). For the Dene Tha, as for most American Indian people, a nonhuman being encountered in a vision or dream becomes a person's guide for life, helping in hunting and warning of misfortune to come (Goulet 1998: 78–80). This 'power' relationship is described as a matter of respect and exchange. Animals are believed to constantly monitor the actions and words of humans for signs of respect or disrespect towards them. For a detailed translation and analysis of *inkoze*, see Smith (1998: 429; 1973), Rushforth (1992: 486), Ridington (1990).