

# INTRODUCTION

## THE FOREST IS WATCHING YOU



“Tuya, do you hear this sound?”

We were traveling on our reindeer for hours when suddenly the silence was pierced by a sound coming from deep in the forest. Tuya and I were looking for the pregnant reindeer, Sarī mīndī, who had disappeared the night before. We had separated into groups that morning; everyone went looking in different directions. Soon after we passed a few valleys, I completely lost track of where we were but trusted the foresight of this young woman; after all, she was born in this land. The sound I heard persisted, like a whistle, in my ears; it made me question myself. I kept thinking that it must be the sound of an animal I did not know about.

“Tuya, do you hear it?”

“What?”

“Hiiss, listen! Don’t you hear the sound coming from the forest, like a whistle?”

She stopped her reindeer and listened carefully to understand what I was talking about. When the footsteps of our reindeer stopped, we could really hear the forest, an endless silence accompanied by the sound of the wind.

“No, I don’t hear anything.”

Now that Tuya had stopped to listen, the sound had faded. Seeing my surprised face, Tuya asked again what it was that I heard, and I told her about the whistle again. After looking around for a while and thinking what it could be, she cried out, “Ahh, it must be Batiqšan then! People say she sometimes makes those sounds.”

“Who??”

“Batiqšan.”

Suddenly I remembered that I heard about Batiqšan in some stories, the forest spirit who protects the animals on her land and sometimes becomes visi-

ble to humans in the form of a short woman or girl with long hair. I was still not convinced that what I heard was Batıqşan, but Tuya was certain. After all, we were wandering in her, Batıqşan's, land—her forests. She likes to warn people that she is there, so that they do not harm the forest. I decided not to think about it anymore, and we just continued.

After looking around for Sari mīndi for another hour, following the tracks in the valley, Tuya said she hoped to find her in our final destination. I had no idea where we were going, not even aware that we had a final destination, so I just followed her without asking much. We continued this way for a while, stopping at important places, where Tuya was looking around with some old binoculars to see if she could spot the missing reindeer. When we passed another valley and crossed a river, she rode up the hill and got off her reindeer to look around. She looked very serious now, and I was very silent so as not to disturb her. It took her a few minutes until she screamed with joy, shouting out that she saw Sari mīndi over there in the forest. We were so happy and relieved, and jumped on our reindeer to rush to the forest. When we got close to her, Tuya jumped off her reindeer, took the fabric bag of salt out of her pocket, and walked toward the pregnant animal while making comforting sounds, like “hishh hishh,” and shaking the salt bag to attract her. Tuya slowly approached the animal, and when she was close enough for Sari mīndi to see the salt bag, the reindeer came near her too. In less than seconds, she was licking salt from Tuya's palm, and Tuya took hold of the rope around her neck. Now that she was holding the animal, Tuya looked so relieved and at peace, checking the animal to see if it was all fine. It turned out that we were at the site of last year's spring camp, where the animal had given birth. She had remembered and had come back here to give birth again, just like Tuya guessed.

“My mom will be so happy that we found her. She was very scared the wolves might attack her, you know, especially after what happened last year.”

“What happened?”

“My brother shot a pregnant animal by mistake, remember? Since then, my mother keeps thinking our pregnant animals might be taken. Luckily my brother went to a good shaman and made offering for forgiveness, but still, you never know if J̄er eezi [Land/world owner] is still angry or not.”

Tying the pregnant reindeer to hers, Tuya got back on her reindeer, and, happy, we started to rush back to the camp before it got dark. On the way back, we were at ease, just riding fast and daydreaming in our own worlds. It was getting colder and the surrounding nature was getting ready to fall asleep, just like me, until a sound woke me up, the same whistle again, much more obvious this time, coming from not far away. Suddenly I felt a rush of adrenaline in my body, a little scared this time about what it could be. I looked around and turned my back to check where Tuya was and if she could hear the same sound this time. When I turned my head and saw her looking at me smiling, it took me a few

seconds to realize that it was Tuya who was doing the sound. Seeing my face so pale, she stopped the whistle and burst into laughter.

“I thought you didn’t believe in Batıqşan.”

I laughed back, and we continued teasing each other for a while, talking about all the stories and anecdotes that we knew about Batıqşan. After all those months we had spent together, she knew that I was skeptical, but she did not know how nervous I was every night when I woke up to go to the toilet and walked into the darkness of the forest, constantly looking around me in case there was a little woman somewhere watching me.

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The reason I mention this incident with Tuya is to demonstrate that among the Dukha, everything is part of the same system: the animals (both domesticated and wild) and people are living together in the taiga, and their fate is connected to each other. This is why the fate of a domesticated reindeer can be related to the deeds of a young man, whose fate can be related to the encounters he had with wild animals and so on, which makes us question the separation between wild and domestic spheres. In this geography, nobody is alone; they are all responsible for the acts of one another, from wild animals to relatives among humans or domesticated reindeer. The forests are guarded by the spirits, and the animals in them by those guardian spirits, who would from time to time offer them to the humans as gifts or vice versa. In either case, a forest or a river is not simply a geographical object, but a living thing surrounded by invisible entities. More importantly, the taiga forest is an area hosting all these living beings, humans or nonhuman animals and spirits, bringing all of them together and embracing them. This book aims to shed light on some of those complicated relations between humans, animals, and landscape, hoping to bring new ideas to the discussion of domestication and wildness.

## CULTURE AND NATURE DICHOTOMY IN THE AGE OF ANTHROPOCENE

The distinction between nature and culture—or, in other words, whether humanity is separate from other living things on earth—has been one of the most fundamental questions occupying philosophers, scientists, and thinkers for centuries. How we define ourselves as human beings, with the philosophical arguments that it brings, has been one of the biggest debates of humanity, and although it has lost its popularity from time to time, with the current climate change crisis, the place of humans on the planet has become a hot topic once again.

What is it (or is there anything) that separates humans from other species, and what makes humans “human”? Although a philosophical question in itself,

in the Anthropocene age, in which global warming and other changes in the environment caused by humans is threatening life on the planet, the question has become a matter of urgency, an issue that needs to be faced with serious care and consideration. The term “Anthropocene” suggests that the role of humankind in geology and ecology has reached extremely high levels, placing anthropos as a dominant figure to such an extent that human activities are now affecting the structure and functioning of the Earth system (Steffen, Crutzen, and McNeill 2007). Thus, living in the Anthropocene—literally, the age of humans—to discuss what is a human and, as a consequence, what is a nonhuman has become an inevitable topic again.

Let us begin the journey of human effects on earth from the beginning in a simple way to have a clear picture of how we ended up in the age of humans and how humans have gained a dominant position among other species, deeply changing the relations among humans and nonhuman animals. When studying the relations between humans and nonhumans, domestication of animals and plants are considered as turning points in human history, forming the very beginning of a remarkable effect of humans on their surroundings. It is a development that has potentially created a permanent dislocation between humans and nature. Humans lived among and off wild animals and plants until as recently as twelve thousand years ago; the shift from a hunter-gatherer culture to pastoralism and farming is constitutive and representative of a radical change in human history, affecting almost all aspects of life (DeMello 2012). Most studies point out that hunter-gatherers viewed the wild animals around them as their equals while the shift from hunting to pastoralism and farming produced a fundamental change in human relationships with animals, causing those egalitarian relationships to change forever (Ingold 2000; Stammler and Takakura 2010). This is fairly understandable, since humans without their developed weapons or animals under captivity or ability to produce food were just ordinary members of the animal world. With the domestication of plants and animals, humans started to control nature and view animals as their property instead of their equal partners. According to Ingold (1994), both herders and hunters acknowledge that animals, like humans, have powers of sentience and can act autonomously, but the hunters respect the power of animals, while the herders try to overcome it. Similarly, other scholars think that with the domestication of animals, humans took on the role of masters, and animals became classified as property, possibly causing the absolute divide between human and animal that still persists today (DeMello 2012: 68).

Starting with domestication and agriculture, the tendency to position the human species in a different place from other living things has grown stronger through time, even finding its place among philosophers and thinkers in modern times. According to this common way of thinking, while humans are in a separate category, animals, nature, and wildlife—that is, all other living

beings—are in a different category. Animals belong exclusively in nature, while humans are the only exception, as the “essence of their humanity transcends nature” (Ingold 1994: 4). The Greek philosopher Aristotle viewed humans’ ability to speak as the main reason they are separate from animals and also as a reason humans have the right to control animals, since animals lack intelligence, language, and self-awareness. Similarly, Rene Descartes considered animals machines because of their lack of ability to speak, operating without consciousness (DeMello 2012). Animals were not only seen as machines but were also considered morally inferior to humans, lacking the capacity for moral and ethical behavior. This is why in early modern Europe, animality was seen as something inferior that must be overcome, so people committed themselves “to maintain distinct boundaries between themselves and animals” (Mullin 1999: 204). This way of thinking, even labeling people who commit crimes as “animal-like,” is quite ironic since nonhuman animals rarely kill or harm other species except to survive, while humankind so often kill and torture other animals, and even kill and abuse other humans (Dunayer 2013: 29). In short, most of those thinkers argued that human abilities such as language, awareness, reason, rationality, and the use of tools—in other words, the capacity to create “culture”—placed human species on a different plane from other nonhuman animals. This way of thinking naturally revealed the following idea: since we, as humans, are able to speak, think, act rationally, and create our own “cultures,” unlike other animal species, then we must be different from nature, and, needless to say, this difference places us in a superior position. The world is therefore divided into humans and others, forming the nature-culture dichotomy, as it is known. Divine religions like Christianity also helped maintain this idea of human superiority, placing animals in a lower position, lacking soul and consciousness and thus created to serve human needs (DeMello 2012: 37–38).

The belief in humans’ extraordinary and superior position was unsettled strongly in the mid-nineteenth century with Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, which made it difficult to make a clear distinction between humans and animals (Ingold 2000; Daston and Mitman 2005). From a biological point of view, Darwin clearly stated that the human was also an animal, not only bringing people and animals under the same category, but also revealing that we come from a common ancestor. This idea radically challenged the core of all philosophical debates until then. In addition, it brought new questions: Do animals suffer like human beings? Do they have emotions and higher mental or emotional capacities than previously assumed (Darwin 1859)?

Today, speaking from a biological perspective, we know that humans are indeed animals. It may also be accepted that humans are not necessarily in a superior position to other animals, as we tend to see ourselves. Human exceptionalism, placing humans in a superior position than other species, or speciesism in general, placing some species as lower and others as higher, is considered “bad

biology,” completely far from the scientific reality (Bekoff 2013: 16). Scientists who study animal behaviors through innovative studies have recently pointed out that there is no or little difference between many animal species and humans in terms of their mental or emotional capacity (Bekoff 2013). Researchers working with different species, such as primates, dolphins, elephants, or parrots, show that different emotions, once thought to belong only to humans, and sophisticated systems of communication or self-recognition, exist in many animal species. It is known that bees are capable of solving complex mathematical problems faster than computers; octopuses can perform complex behaviors; and fish also display long-term memory. According to Bekoff (2013: 20–23), the differences we make among species, considering some of them higher and more valuable, are based on our own understanding and penchant to draw lines separating them, and has nothing to do with reality. Today we even know that some primate species such as chimpanzees and gorillas are quite successful in language skills and possess high intelligence typical of humans. The gorilla Koko has an IQ of 90 (higher than many humans) and can understand English, communicating in American Sign Language using more than a thousand words (Patterson and Gordon 1993). Dolphins possess complex intelligence, self-awareness, and emotional skills, including the ability for abstract thinking and problem solving. They also have highly complex societies with complex relationships (Marino 2013: 95). King (2013) describes in detail in her study how animals such as apes and elephants feel grief and show clear signs of it.

## HUMAN-ANIMAL BOUNDARY

All that scientific research about animal cognition, emotion, and sentience does not seem to be enough to change our attitude toward animals, and the distinction between humans and nature strongly persists in many societies today. At this point, the question that naturally comes to mind, a question that occupies social scientists, is related to different cultures and how they interact with animals. Is the human-animal boundary or culture-nature dichotomy as strict in all societies as it is in the West? Is the concept of “personhood” specific to humans in all societies? How do different societies in the world perceive animals around them, and how do they communicate with them? In other words, is the idea that places humans in a special and superior position in industrial societies shared with other societies in the world?

From ethnographic research, we know that human-animal relations can be shaped very differently in different societies around the world, as the representation of animals and humans is quite diverse in many cultures (Fuentes 2006: 129) Also, as we all know, even in the same culture, the value we give to animals varies depending on how we categorize them—farm animals, wild animals,

pets—and this classification affects how we treat them (DeMello 2012: 14–15). Although the issue of how different societies interact with animals and their environment is too broad to make strict generalizations, there are still some societies living today where the separation between humans and nonhuman animals is not that strict, as not all societies share the fixed Western perspective on the human-animal boundary (Russell 2010:16). For example, for most hunter-gatherer societies, the perception of the world does not consist of two categories: human and nature. Many indigenous societies share a similar worldview where animals are considered sentient beings and treated with respect. This is related to the notion of personhood or autonomy, which is attributed only to humans in Western thought, while most hunter-gatherer societies do not maintain such rigid borders. Hallowell (1960: 21) was one of the first scholars to engage this issue; he noted that other societies view animals as “other-non-human” persons. His well-known work on the Ojibwa of North America draws out many examples of this. It demonstrates that personhood is not particular to humans, and the distinction between person and animal, or animate and inanimate, is less defined in other societies (Hallowell 1960).

The notion of personhood has also been explored under the topic of “animism,” first described by Tylor (1913) in his famous work *Primitive Culture*, as the practice of ascribing souls to nonhuman entities. In animistic thought, inanimate objects are considered to have a spirit, but this does not mean that all objects are given the same status in those societies. While some entities, like wild animals, are very human-like, other objects, such as the fire for cooking, have a “more abstract spiritual quality” (Pedersen 2001: 414). The degree of personhood attributed to different objects may change depending on the society; scholars today point out that in some societies, personhood is defined more inclusively, embracing animals and other beings that are considered inanimate in the West (Russell 2010: 16). People in those societies perceive animals as having agency and culture, in which they can speak and influence others. Ingold (2000: 51) took the discussion a step further, claiming that “for northern hunters, animals are not like persons, they are persons.” In many cultures, especially among hunter-gatherers, the idea that people can transform into animals or animals can transform into humans is also widespread. Additionally, in many societies, animals have a special place, and they are believed to act with agency or possess certain powers. For instance, according to the Hopi, snakes are messengers that carry prayers, and they have a vital role during a snake dance performance, where people ceremonially purify and dance with the snakes (Bahti 1990: 132). Many societies have animals as creative figures, or they have animal gods or spirits, or people are reincarnated as animals after death.

Despite all those perceptions about animals and the evidence science supplies for us about the capacity of animals, as I mentioned before, ironically the worldview of indigenous people is still considered backward and superstitious

today. Here, the main difference lies in the perception of different ontologies and how Western understanding of life is seen as superior. The hierarchical relations between different ontologies is so strongly affected by racist ideologies that even scientific data is not considered enough to change this understanding. This is, of course, related to the political dimensions of knowledge production. The development of scientific thought and the claim of validity for specific forms of knowledge have also been an important part of colonial exploitation, since Western culture constantly reaffirms itself as the center of legitimate and civilized knowledge (Tuhiwai 1999). On the other hand, today some anthropologists argue that this approach is not specific to positive scientists, but that anthropologists also evaluate indigenous ideas in a pretty ethnocentric way. Ingold (2000) points out how anthropology, as a product of Western intellect, discusses the egalitarian relations between hunter-gatherers and their environment but describes them as “metaphors,” implying that they are not really happening the way they are described. Nadasdy similarly talks about an “extraordinary experience” he had in his fieldwork when a rabbit he tried to trap in the forest escaped from his trap wounded and a few days later came into his cabin, looking into his eyes as if offering itself to him. Astonished about how the rabbit, who had run away from the trap that he had set up so far away from his hut, could find him, he told the story to the elders—who were unsurprised and began to tell similar stories. This behavior of the rabbit, which seems quite abnormal to biologists and even to the researcher himself, was one of the ordinary events that had been experienced many times by the hunters. At the end of the article, Nadasdy mentions that some of the researchers who have experienced such surprising experiences during the field research do not publish their experiences for fear of being unscientific. From the Western point of view these kinds of accounts are suspected of being inaccurate or the events recounted are considered a great coincidence, while for indigenous peoples this conscious behavior of animals is quite normal (Nadasdy 2007).

Although it is easy to read and write about it in front of a computer, I have had to face my own biases and preconditioned way of thinking about this subject many times during my fieldwork, realizing how much I take certain things for granted subconsciously. I would like to mention one of those incidents.

The Dukhas, like many communities in Siberia, have great respect for the bear and regard it as a relative. On the other hand, the bear is also hunted and consumed with pleasure, as long as the many detailed rules and taboos are followed when hunting it. One of the most important rules specifically applied to the bear is the agreement made between the bear and the Dukha hunters' ancestors years ago. According to this agreement, if a hunter sees a bear in the forest and the bear escapes and climbs the tree, the hunter will never shoot that bear. Similarly, if a person runs into a bear unarmed while walking in the forest,



he must climb the tree because the bear never attacks the person climbing the tree. This is considered an old agreement between humans and bears.

When I was talking to Batbayar, one of the young hunters about this rule in the taiga, I asked him if the bear really obeyed this rule, maybe a little facetiously without even realizing it, and the young hunter was surprised, answering confidently: “The bear is smart enough to know this rule, so he certainly won’t attack. My grandfather used to say that if a man climbs a tree and the bear attacks him, the bear suffers for the rest of his life. So the bears strictly follow this rule because they don’t want to suffer for the rest of their lives” (field notes, 2015).

As seen in this example, the reason I asked this question in the first place was related to my own understanding and deep-seated belief that the bear would never have the will and agency to follow such a rule. However, according to Batbayar, bears were nonhuman persons who could understand people and deal with them, and doubting this was pointless and even irrational.

Considering accounts such as these, it seems like it is time to reconsider clashing ideas about existence and things that we take for granted and to re-describe what culture is. Especially with the current crisis we are facing on our planet, maybe there is a need for this ontological discussion more than ever, redefining notions such as people, animals, and nature. Although we social scientists already know that worldviews are diverse and socially constructed, the definition of those worldviews and the way we describe them is mostly based on comparisons or understandings of our own culture, which means that the point of discussion usually starts with a culture (usually Western) as a base of comparison. However, as Heywood (2017) expressed in his article about the ontological turn, it is time to ask, if things are relative, what are they relative to, or what is the background against which they are relative, and thus try to look at concepts with a clear mind without comparing them to categories we already have in our minds.

## OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This book is a multispecies ethnography (Kirksey and Helmreich 2010), aiming to provide an understanding of human-animal-environment relations among a nomadic reindeer herder/hunter Dukha community in northern Mongolia through an emphasis on reindeer domestication and the importance of landscape as a uniting point to set the relations between people and animals. By focusing on the life of a nomadic hunter/herder society, the book aims to re-evaluate the concepts of domestication-wildness, taking them outside the box and reconsidering them from a different angle.

The theories of human-animal relations usually focus on herding and hunting as separate systems and evaluate the relations from this angle. The Dukha commu-

nity, on the other hand, combine these two subsistence types in their daily life, as they are principally hunter-gatherers who keep a small herd of domesticated reindeer for riding, packing, and milking, while the majority of their diet consists of game meat. This is why they provide a unique opportunity to look into hunting and herding systems and the way people perceive the difference between domesticated and wild animals.

While discussing the anthropological theories of domestication (and hoping to make a contribution to them), the book seeks to introduce a different way of thinking and understanding landscapes and nonhuman animals through real-life stories, without imposing previously learned categories on them. Although human-animal relations are at the center of those discussions, the book also aims to investigate how people communicate and connect to their environment, how they understand geography, and how their unique ways of interaction with the sentient geography is indeed affecting the relations between people and non-human animals, almost serving as a uniting point or mediator between living entities. The fundamental research questions of the book are these: How are human-animal relations established in a society that subsists by hunting and gathering but also keeps domesticated animals with them? How do people interact with their domesticated reindeer and wild animals? What does domestication mean for them? How do the hunter and the prey interact? What are the dynamics that keep people, domesticated animals, and wild animals together? What is the place of landscape in establishing those relations? How do people interact with their environment?

The research aims to look for answers to those questions by focusing on three main parts. First, it focuses on the relations between people and landscape, trying to understand what it means to live in a spirited land where the geographical entities are more than just objects. In the second part, once we have grasped the deep meaning of landscape for the Dukha, the book explores the relations between people and domesticated reindeer, focusing on the concept of domestication, what it means for people, and what factors affect or form the dynamics of this relationship between people and reindeer. In the last part, the book discusses the role of hunting for the society—how it is more than a way of surviving and how it deeply affects the relations between people to people, and people to wild animals.

Apart from the theoretical discussions and contributions on domestication, landscape, or environment studies, one of the most important aims of this book is also to show the current situation of a nomadic hunter-gatherer society. Today, due to the recent government policies that banned hunting in their region, the Dukha are struggling to survive in their landscape and are treated as criminals. The area they live in was declared a national park in 2011, and hunting has been severely banned since then. This situation, excluding indigenous people from conservation projects, is common all around the world and unfortunately

affects communities negatively, stripping them from their territories and way of subsistence. This book aims to show how the perception of the Dukha community on animals and hunting is different from the authorities by focusing on their hunting rituals, and to show how the hunting ban in practice is affecting their lives and social relations.

Beyond all the theoretical discussions, the general aim of this book is to confront its readers with a different way of being, living, and thinking about other species through the life of a nomadic herder/hunter society, challenging our understanding on categories of nature and culture.

## THEORETICAL DISCUSSIONS OF THE BOOK

Was domestication really an irreversible turning point, and do all societies living today communicate with domesticated animals through domination? The separation between domestic and wild has been discussed in anthropology for a long time, still remaining a hot topic today. It has been accepted as a “slippery and imprecise” concept by some scholars, like that of “culture,” since it is as complex and diverse as the concept of “wild” (Cassidy 2007: 3). While different opinions and views exist, most scholars acknowledge that domestication has both social and biological aspects.

As I have mentioned before, the most common theory, which I call “hunter-herder conflict,” claims that the hunters and herders interact with animals around them in divergent ways, and while hunters exhibit a relationship with wild animals based on trust, the herders have a more dominating relationship with their animals (Ingold 1986; Ullah 2005). This view is connected with the definition of domestication, as early researchers viewed domestication as a one-way process where humans controlled animal populations and directed them as they desired (Harris 1996). However, recent scholars disagree with differentiating hunters’ and herders’ relations with animals along such strict lines. Stammler (2010: 217–37) thinks that the relations between pastoralists and their animals contain characteristics that exceed domination and control, since both parties mutually affect the personalities and decisions of each other, thus “reducing their relationships with animals to just control would be unfair to herders.” Beach and Stammler (2006: 8) coined the concept of “symbiotic domestication,” essentially meaning that reindeer domesticated human behavior as much as they were themselves domesticated. Paine (1988) coined a similar term, “reciprocal learning,” basically claiming that both reindeer and human learn each other’s needs.

Although the behaviors that constitute the relationship between domesticated animals and humans is deeply contested, there is one area of agreement—the exceptional situation of the reindeer, considering their relative indepen-

dence, sharing the same form with their wild relatives. The reason that reindeer domestication is viewed as an exception is that even if the reindeer seek human contact, they can usually survive on their own in the same environment that hosts those wild relatives, so domesticated reindeer are not isolated from their wild relatives (Beach and Stammler 2006; Stepanoff 2012). Harris (1996: 455) writes that the restriction of gene flow between tame and wild populations is a necessary condition for domestication, and the case of the reindeer might be the only exception. All these views about the reindeer focus on the fact that reindeer were not removed from their original area, and for this reason the situation of reindeer is described as semidomestic by some scholars (Istomin and Dwyer 2008). Despite this fact, the role of landscape has not been discussed as a critical issue in reindeer domestication and its dynamics; this is something that I will discuss throughout this book.

*BEYOND DOMESTICATION:  
LANDSCAPE AS AN EMBRACING POINT*

To be able to understand the story of the Dukha and their reindeer fully, I believe that it is not sufficient to simply evaluate the situation from a domestication perspective; rather, we must learn what the reindeer mean for the Dukha as a matter of survival and the only means they have to remain in their ancestral land. In this sense, the exceptional situation of the reindeer remaining in their native land despite human contact is one of the most critical issues that define relations between humans and animals. One of the theoretical contributions of this research comes to the scene at this point, taking a look at the domestication issue from a different window, focusing on how the role of landscape affects the dynamics of human-animal relations from the core. But for this aim, we first need to understand what the landscape means to the Dukha. Why is it important?

Reindeer hold such a distinct value for the Dukha because the reindeer is the only domesticated animal that can survive in the taiga; as natives of the taiga, the people and reindeer share a common sphere. Moreover, the Dukha are dependent on the reindeer if they want to live in the taiga for reasons I will explain. However, the reindeer do not need humans to survive in the taiga, which becomes a factor that affects the dynamics of this relationship. The Dukha live in a geography called “taiga” in the northern forests, surrounded by boreal trees. According to the Dukha, their home “taiga” is perceptibly different from the rest of Mongolia, and they are the people of the forests, mountains, and wild rivers. It is their homeland, where their ancestors were left out (buried), where their sacred trees reside, where their family lineage continues—a sacred geography that defines who they are. Thus, one of the reasons for this radical connection between the reindeer and people is related to the connection people have with

the landscape: they believe that if they lose the reindeer, they lose their home. While evaluating the relationship between people and reindeer throughout the book, I first focus on the role of the landscape that brings all parties together, and thereby add a new perspective in the domestication debate, as we cannot totally understand what the reindeer mean for the Dukha without understanding what the landscape means for them.

### *“WILDERNIZATION” INSTEAD OF DOMESTICATION*

Once the book discusses the role of the landscape for the people and how they need reindeer to survive in their home, it focuses on the debate of domestication. The concept of domestication, if it exists at all, and what it means for reindeer herders can obviously change depending on the society being investigated, so it is necessary to leave the scholarly labels aside at times and look at the issue from new perspectives, starting from scratch. For this purpose, the book tries to critically investigate indigenous terms, classificatory discourse, and the actual social practice related to keeping reindeer in contemporary Dukha society without imposing other meanings on them or comparing them with existing categories. For instance, the words for domesticated reindeer and wild reindeer are two completely different words in the indigenous language of the Dukha. This study claims that the way Dukha define those different species has nothing to do with the tameness or wildness of the animal, meaning how the animal behaves, but instead is related to whom the animal belongs, the land or the people, rendering the categories of domestication meaningless for them.

After discussing this new theoretical perspective in detail, the book suggests that the concepts of “domestication” or “wildness” do not adequately serve the case of the reindeer and the Dukha and perhaps other similar societies. Since people do not keep the reindeer isolated from its natural habitat, it is people who live in the habitat of the reindeer, in the “wild.” Of course, the word “wild” is also an outsider view, but the taiga is considered a remote, wild geography by outsiders, and the Dukha are the only people who live there. Thus, at this point, we should rather completely avoid the words “domesticated” and “wild” or, if we insist on using those words while defining the relation between human and reindeer, we should define it as “wildernization of people” as opposed to the “domestication of reindeer,” as people did not take the reindeer to their *domus* but instead live in the habitat of the reindeer in the “wild.”

### *NURTURING CONTROL*

The next questions concern the nature of those relations: How do people and reindeer live together in this geography and what keeps them together? How do people interact with reindeer? What is the nature of their relations? The

dynamics of those relations depend on the season and on specific situations. While it seems that people are the ones who make the decisions in accordance with their own needs or that they are the ones dominating this relationship, this is not always the case. Through certain periods, people prioritize the needs of the reindeer, especially in spring and autumn when they need to stay at unpleasant hilly camps for the sake of calves. At other times, people choose to stay in areas that are more comfortable for themselves (and more practical in terms of connection with the village), but this time is more unpleasant for the reindeer. It can be said that humans and reindeer undergo a negotiation as a means of reaching some sort of mutual accommodation of needs.

However, it is hard to deny that although both reindeer and people have certain benefits and drawbacks deriving from this relationship, the decision to live together is made by people, as reindeer could easily live in nature without people. Besides, methods like tying clearly forces the reindeer into conditions they would not normally choose to be involved in. This is why instead of describing it as a symbiotic domestication (Beach and Stammer 2006), which evokes a more egalitarian relationship, I would suggest using the phrase “nurturing control,” since it is impossible to deny that there is a level of control involved in this relationship. However, given the specific power balances present in this relationship, I believe that this control is not a “dominating control.” I suggest that the relations between people and reindeer are more similar to a parenting model, in which humans use parental power over the animals. I call this a “nurturing control,” in which reindeer are protected from wolves or mosquitos and taken care of, but some sort of control is still imposed on the animal, a concept I will explain in detail in the book. I claim that although people are the ones making the decisions, the emotional power is possessed by the reindeer; this relationship is more similar to kinship relations (which are also not exempt from power hierarchies), and reindeer are considered part of the household. I will explain this with valid examples.

### *BILATERAL GIFT GIVING FROM THE POINT OF PERSPECTIVISM*

To survive in the vast taiga, in addition to the partnership with domesticated reindeer, the Dukha depend on wild animals to make their living. In the forests of the north, hunting is a way of life that enables people to survive and connects them to their environment. People are dependent on nature and, therefore, wild animals for their survival, and this dependence is reflected in their worldview and their behaviors. Through hunting, people re-remember how they are part of the system alongside all beings, and feel deep down that they can survive as long as this cycle continues. Hunting is one of the most significant ways of communicating with the environment for the Dukha.

A good hunter is a person who can connect with his environment in a respectful way, as hunting success is related to the social relations between people, animals, and spirits, requiring much more than technical skill. Some societies also believe that if the hunters behave well, the animals will offer themselves to the hunter (Kulemzin 1984; Laugrand and Oosten 2015; Nadasdy 2007; Ingold 1994 and 2000; Willerslev 2004; Hamayon 2012; Hill 2011). However, the Dukha do not believe that animals offer themselves to the good hunters. Instead, they view animals as gifts from the spirits—gifts that are given only to those who deserve it.

The theory of gift giving and how it functions is discussed widely in theories of hunting. Some scholars argue that animal autonomy is very important in hunting (Ingold 1994), while others claim that there is no direct personal relationship between the animal that is hunted and the hunter because it is the spirits that offer those animals (Knight 2012). I show that although the Dukha believe that spirits offer animal as gifts, the animals are still not regarded as the property of the spirits that have come to be shared with the hunter, as animals also receive humans as gifts when they die because the Dukha practice sky burial and leave their dead outside for the animals to consume. In the cosmology of the Dukha hunters, both animals and people are “children” of spirits, and animals are not in an inferior position in the eyes of the spirits. The spirits give animals to the hunter if they behave with respect, but this gift is not specific to humans, as humans are also given to animals when they die. I explain this gift giving, offering of bodies, and death in Dukha society with the idea of perspectivism (Viveiros de Castro 1998), looking into gift giving from this angle. The book discusses this bilateral side of gift giving as a factor contributing to the universal justice among people and animals. Based on this worldview, the morality of killing becomes much easier for the Dukha even if they attribute so much personhood to the animal, which I will discuss.

### *HUNTING AS CONFRONTATION*

The next consideration is how the hunter and prey interact when they encounter each other. Is this interaction only predatory or based on deception? Many scholars interpret the encounter between the hunter and their prey as a form of seduction in which the hunter attempts to impress the animal by imitating it. Hence, the hunter will try to abolish his human qualities before a hunt to deceive the animal (Willerslev 2007). I claim that this is not always true; for the Dukha, one of the most important steps before facing one’s prey is purification. The hunter tries to become as pure as he can before meeting his prey so that he can confront him as he is. This is evident in the rituals performed before hunting. A hunter purifies himself with juniper before the hunt and, instead of getting rid of his human qualities, he disposes of any unnecessary items that are

exterior to the person or taken from another person, in an attempt to become as humble as he can be. Since it is the deeds of the hunter that determine the success of the hunt, a hunter should make himself visible. This necessitates a process of purification—a purge of other energies and an abandonment of all material possessions. Hunting, for the Dukha, is a process of confrontation as opposed to a performance of deception. Only then can the hunter and the animal face each other and appraise each other, which is required for this system of hunting. As one of the hunters told me, “The animal understands the hunter, his intentions and his respect. You cannot deceive an animal.” So the idea behind hunting is explicitness, not deception, as will be discussed in detail.

### THE DUKHA: HUNTER-GATHERERS WITH REINDEER

The Dukha are a small group of nomadic reindeer herders and hunters who live in northern Mongolia in the northwestern section of Khövsgöl Province, an area characterized by its forests, rivers, lakes, and abundant wildlife, as well as by its remoteness (Pedersen 2009). Since it is bordering the Tuvan Republic in Russia, the area is also identified as South Siberia by geographers. The highland taigas have some of the lowest temperatures in Mongolia, dropping to minus forty degrees Celsius in winter. This geography, rich in biodiversity, is pretty distinct from the rest of Mongolia’s flat steppes and forms part of the northern taiga, making it possible for the Dukha to raise reindeer. They are the only reindeer herders in Mongolia and constitute one of the communities in the southernmost extreme of the world’s reindeer herding region, together with “the Tozhu in the Republic of Tuva, the Soyot in Buryat Republic of Russia and the Evenki in south Siberia and China” (Donahoe 2004: 1). Different scholars, both foreign and Mongolian, have written about various aspects of life among the Dukha (Badamxatan 1960, 1962, 1965; Sagdarsürüng 1974; Wheeler 2000; Kristensen 2004, 2015; Inamura 2005; Keay 2006; Pedersen 2001, 2009; Ragnin 2011; Endres 2014; Rasiulis 2016; O’Brien and Surovell 2017).

The subsistence of the Dukha is traditionally based on hunting wild game and breeding small stocks of reindeer for transportation and milk, usually known as the Sayan type of reindeer herding in literature (Vainstein 1980: 130). Thus, although they are popularly known for their reindeer herds, “they are principally hunters and gatherers who keep domestic reindeer for milking, riding and pack transport” (Ingold 1986: 6). They do not slaughter the reindeer unless an animal is too old or in times of severe scarcity, and they milk the reindeer daily from April to September, mixing the milk with tea. They traditionally hunt wild animals such as bear, deer, boar, elk, moose, sable, etc. to get their protein, and they collect wild potatoes and berries. One of the most significant uses of the reindeer is for transportation, both as riding and pack animals during nomadic



movements or when men go out hunting. In this geography with deep snow, reindeer are the only domesticated animal that can survive on their own and feed themselves, making them the most important partner for humans. However, as I will explain further, the Dukha are going through a transition period from hunting to herding, as the area where the Dukha live has been declared a national park, meaning hunting is forbidden as of 2011. Because of this ban and also the Dukha's emergence into mainstream society, today they buy supplies from the village, and their subsistence is supported by different diets.

The social organization of the Dukha, similar to other hunter-gatherer groups, is pretty egalitarian, with no formal leader making decisions. Although elders are well respected and followed, the Dukha do not name a leader, and the autonomy of each family is highly valued. Gender relations are also pretty egalitarian (although that would require a detailed study to claim so with confidence), as one can observe that women are involved in every aspect of society and hardly repressed. While the women are mostly responsible for daily chores such as cooking and milking the reindeer, and the men deal with hunting and chopping wood, there is no strict division of labor, as one can see women chopping wood or carrying things or men washing clothes. Hunting is usually practiced only by men, and collecting plants or milking is mostly done by women or children, while work related to taking care of reindeer is usually shared among the sexes.

Today there are only around two hundred Dukha who maintain a nomadic lifestyle in the taiga, living in tent-shaped dwellings called *alaji ög*. They are the smallest ethnic minority in Mongolia, with a population of five hundred people in total (Inamura 2005). The Dukha are originally from Tuva, and they speak a Turkic language called Dukhan, although all of them are bilingual today and speak Mongolian fluently. Dukhan, which belongs to the Siberian branch of the Sayan group of the Turkic language family, is under serious threat of disappearing (Ragagnin 2011: 23). Young children no longer learn the language, and most families use Mongolian; only the elders speak the Dukhan language among themselves. The elders in the community are worried about losing their native tongue, as the Dukhan language is very rich for describing life in the taiga, including reindeer herding, plants, and animals. They believe it is an efficient language to maintain a life in the taiga and that all this traditional knowledge might be lost with the language. The loss of language affects the spiritual life of the Dukha as well, since it holds many terms related to shamanic rituals, and the shamans communicate only in Dukhan with spirits during rituals (Küçüküstel 2016).

The Dukha are divided into two major territorial groups, one in the western forest, called Baron Taiga, and the other in the eastern forest, called Zuun Taiga, with approximately forty-six families in total (Solnoi, Tsogtsaikhan, and Plumley 2003: 7). The population of the taiga changes dramatically between summer and winter, decreasing to as few as twenty families in winter. Most people who have school-age kids have to move to Tsagaannuur Sum, the nearest vil-

lage to the Dukha camps, and spend the winter there with their children, usually leaving their reindeer behind with relatives. Some families send their children to boarding schools or leave them with relatives who live in the village, but school is still the biggest factor that ties families to the village. From the Sum center, it takes between twelve hours and two days by horse to reach the Dukha camps, depending on the season.

## A BRIEF HISTORY

The Dukha originally lived in the border zone between Mongolia and Tuva in Russia, seasonally migrating in the taiga region. They have been called by various names, such as Tagna, Urianghai, Todja, and Soyod (Kristensen 2015:12). Today they call themselves Duxa or Duha, and referred to as Dukha in English. Mongolians commonly call them Tsaatan, which literally means “person with reindeer.” However, the Dukha find this name a little offensive and prefer to be addressed by their original name.

The Dukha used to move freely in their traditional herding and hunting territory in the taiga between present Mongolia and the Tuva Republic in the Russian Federation until the 1940s. With the establishment of Mongolian People’s Republic in 1924 and Tuva joining the Soviet Union in 1944, the border was closed, and the Dukha got stuck on one or another side of the border, separated from their relatives. Russia joined World War II at that time, and the situation in Tuva was pretty hard, including food shortages. On top of those problems, when the Soviet government started collectivization campaigns, the Dukha were afraid of losing their domesticated reindeer, and most of the families tried to escape to the Mongolian side of the border (Inamura 2005: 142).

However, the Mongolian government did not want them within their borders and started a campaign to expel the Dukha from their territory, thinking that, as ethnic Tuvans, the Dukha should live in Tuva. According to the older people, between 1927 and 1956, most of the Dukha returned to and were expelled from Mongolia a few times (Wheeler 2000; Farkas 1992). The elders remember their parents speaking of this period as a time when most families had to hide in the forests and were confused about what to do, going between Tuvan and Mongolian territories, both their traditional land. Despite experiencing all these hardships, most families still preferred to stay on the Mongolian side, as the reindeer in Tuva were collectivized by the Russians and men there were forced to join World War II (Wheeler 2000: 44).

After all those struggles, in 1954 the Mongolian government finally accepted that the Dukha would stay in Mongolia and granted them citizenship, as well as made an effort to turn them into “civilized” people (Kristensen 2015: 14). This was a relief for the Dukha, who could finally live in peace without

escaping from the border officials, but soon after, Mongolia also started collectivization campaigns under Russian influence. In the mid-1950s, the Mongolian government established *negdels*<sup>1</sup> throughout the country and collected the livestock of the pastoralists to make it “communal property” (Wheeler 2000: 47). This is when the Dukha had to integrate into the state for the first time and started to receive salaries in return for what they did. With the establishment of *negdels*, everybody was working in different jobs: most Dukha were working in the fish factory in the village or as state hunters or herders. The only people who could stay in the taiga were the ones working as “state herders”; they had to give reindeer milk and cheese to the government regularly. Although they were under government control and the state officials would come to the taiga to count their reindeer every six months, most elders remember this short period as rather comfortable, since they had a stable salary to buy some products and access to education and health care. However, the reindeer are few in number, and their economy is not really a pastoral one that provides meat production for selling. Reindeer-herding was not “viewed as something profitable” by the government, and, in the late 1970s, the local government ordered “the slaughter of half of the reindeer to provide meat to the local school” (Wheeler 2000: 52). This incident caused the number of reindeer to drop radically and created a deep feeling of insecurity among the Dukha. The elder informants all mention how they were deeply affected and shocked by witnessing the slaughter of so many reindeer that they had taken care of personally. On the other side, most of the Dukha state hunters, who lived in the village and went on hunting expeditions, suffered from different traumas because their traditional hunting way was not accepted as profitable and they had to kill great numbers of animals even on one trip. Many Dukha felt that they would be punished by the spirits, and some people think that the effects of those days are still present, as the spirits are still angry.

When a democracy was established in Mongolia in the early 1990s, the country went through a serious economic crisis, and the *negdels* were closed. In 1995, the reindeer were “privatized” again, leaving the Dukha on their own again, without any support from the government, such as health care or a stable income (Wheeler 2000: 56). This was a very hard period for the Dukha, and they had to struggle hard to get on their feet again. They had very few reindeer and almost nothing they could sell or trade, so they had to rely on the forest again, as in the old days. Some of the families who settled in the village decided to move back to the taiga, and their relatives gave some of their own reindeer to them, which in the end meant that everyone was left with few reindeer. After years of getting used to government support during socialist times, it was very difficult to maintain a completely independent and self-sufficient life in the taiga because the children had already started going to school and most of them had settled in villages, being dependent on the village. This also created a need for cash in the society.

After the initial period of adaptation, with the introduction to a market economy, the Dukha started to find new ways to get by and especially at the beginning of 2000s, when the country had returned back to a stable condition after the collapse of the socialist regime, foreigners started to visit the country, and the Dukha had a new income: tourism. Although not stable or enough to survive on, the families started to receive an income from the souvenirs they sold to tourists or the reindeer they rented. The Dukha began to also receive international attention, and a lot of NGOs and social workers visited the taiga to work with them. The Mongolian government also started to support them in different ways, buying solar panels for all the Dukha families, building a radio connection to the village, supporting the education of the young, and giving scholarships to university students. With the help of that support and the introduction of tourism, they could adapt to the new economy and get back on their feet, living once again independently, finding the balance between maintaining their traditional livelihood while earning enough to gain access to “modern life.” However, the Dukha had to adapt again to a different system when their area was declared a national park in 2011 and hunting was banned in the area. I will examine the details of the hunting ban in the book.

Today the Dukha are involved in a free economy and, despite following their traditions, changes in the society are inevitable. Once tourists started to visit the Dukha, a new door opened for all to benefit from making an income. Today the Dukha are in a transition period, keeping up with the changes happening in the world. Children go to school; young people use smartphones and watch Korean movies on television; and elders enjoy the comfort of shops or a house once in a while when they go to the village. Thus, the need for cash is inevitable, although it is rarely used between community members, and this obvious necessity to use money renders the Dukha helpless because, as I will mention in the rest of my book, they do not make any economic profits from the reindeer. Hunting and herding the reindeer is great for surviving in the taiga, but the moment they step out of the forest, the need to use money emerges, especially because children go to school, and this gap between need and supply makes people feel desperate.

Tourism came out as a remedy at this point for the Dukha. Suddenly there was a way to earn money just by staying in the taiga with reindeer; this encouraged many people to stay put. If they did not have this opportunity, since reindeer do not supply any economic benefits and hunting is banned, I believe people would inevitably move to the village and raise Mongolian livestock or work in paid jobs, and slowly merge into the mainstream society, letting their traditional way of life eventually completely disappear. It is undeniable that tourism has affected the relations among Dukha negatively, as not everyone can benefit from it equally.

I noticed that the tour companies who brought the tourists benefited most from this business. The Dukha were usually not able to make much profit, only

selling a few carvings that made from reindeer antlers, if they could. With the tour companies earning the most, there were also well-known families who were hosting more tourists since they had more connections with the tour companies and villagers; these families started to earn much more compared to the rest of the community. Staying in the taiga for a few months, I could easily observe that it was mostly the same families receiving the tourists. Thus, while some families started to earn pretty well from tourism, it was not possible to earn this amount of income for most of the other families. Similarly, some families were selling souvenirs because their husbands were very good at it, but single women or elders could hardly earn anything, selling once in a while if they were lucky.

Naturally, this started to create discomfort in the society, and although nobody ever spoke out openly, I could sense from listening to the gossip that people accused some families of being greedy or taking all the income for themselves. However, a few times I witnessed two well-known families passing on tourists to other families and sharing other sources quite generously. They clearly had more income than the others, but they were also the ones who hosted the community members most of the time. Entering their tents, one could always see guests eating with them, so in a way they were forced to give away what they had earned by always sharing food in their home with other people.

Tourism also affects the health of the herds, as it disturbs the migration patterns of the Dukha. Since the tourism season is in the short summer months, people want to take advantage of this period as much as possible. Thus, they do not migrate as far as they used to, thinking that the tourists will not visit them if they are too far away, and this definitely disturbs their traditional system. Many people mention that the reindeer are not as healthy as before as a result of this change because they cannot graze well and are bothered by the heat of summer in lower altitudes. Some elders think that one of the reasons they have few reindeer nowadays is related to the fact that they do not migrate as often and as far as before. However, despite all those problems, change is inevitable for the Dukha, as for any other community around the world, and, despite modifying the traditional system, it also keeps people in the taiga and helps them survive while maintaining their traditional way of life. They are also still dealing with the recent hunting regulations, and it has been one of the biggest challenges of the society in recent years, affecting their main subsistence, distressing people, and even changing social relations in the community.

In addition to all the changes imposed by outsiders, the Dukha are struggling with the effects of climate change, as are many other societies in the Arctic. Most of those changes are related to having milder winters and less snow. Since domesticated reindeer can live only in cold temperatures, the changing levels of snow and temperatures are putting them in a vulnerable position, forcing them to adapt to new ways of herding. Despite living far from the factors causing climate change, unfortunately the Dukha, like other similar societies, are affected by its results more than many other populations.

## METHODOLOGY

This book is based on classical anthropological methods of empirical field research, mostly participant observation and in-depth interviews that I conducted during several stays between 2012 and 2016 for a total of almost one year. I have also used other research methods, such as focus groups, life histories, and oral history, throughout my research. Although different topics of inquiry may necessitate different organizations of fieldwork, as a researcher studying hunting and herding patterns in the society, I divided my fieldwork into different seasons so that I could observe the seasonal cycles. As a qualitative researcher aiming to understand human-animal relations, I was aware from the beginning of my research that this would require extensive observations, and for this reason I have lived among the Dukha with a family from the start of my research, which means that I was immersed in the life of the taiga. Living in a small tent with three other people meant that I had no personal space or a suitable environment for writing my notes or reading things, which was a challenge at the beginning but also brought many advantages with it, giving me a chance to observe every single aspect of life.

I always stayed with the same family during my research, a single mother who lives with her daughters and often looks after her grandchildren. After a few visits, the mother of the family told me that I could consider myself her daughter, so during my stay I was in the position of an elder daughter instead of a guest. This is why in the rest of the book I will mention the family members that I stayed with as “my adopted mother,” “my adopted sister,” and so on. Once I was part of the family, I had my own duties in the household, and I could learn almost every aspect of reindeer herding by trying and experiencing it. I believe it would be very hard, or maybe even impossible, to comprehend what it means to be a reindeer herder if I myself had not gone out to herd the reindeer in freezing temperatures, tried to catch them when we were back in the camp, or witnessed the birth of a calf. It was only at those times that I could grasp why some questions are hard to answer and can only be comprehended by experiencing life there. Of course, participating in those activities was hard at the beginning of my research, as people would not trust me with certain tasks, especially concerning the health of the reindeer, and treated me like a clumsy child. However, since I got through my training period during my visits, I was trusted more toward the end of my research.

Using participant observation was more challenging for me for hunting, as I had a great disadvantage being a woman in this field. The women traditionally do not go hunting among the Dukha. Although this is mostly for practical reasons instead of a strict taboo preventing the women to join in hunting, I did not feel very comfortable asking to join long hunting trips very often because I was nervous about being a burden on them in such extreme conditions, making

sounds or walking slowly, and I was also anxious I might break a taboo by accident and cause misfortune on the hunt. This is why I used more participant observation for reindeer herding, and more in-depth interviews for the hunting.

During my research, my spouse came two times to visit me, and when we decided to set up our own tent on one of his stays, having our own household was also a different experience because I felt like I was really living there as part of the group. We had our own share of the meat after hunting trips and had our own visitors as an independent household. On top of this, he was a great mediator for entering the hunting domain, as he often went on hunting trips with the men and brought me great insight into the world of the hunters. It also gave me a chance to experience how the women feel while waiting for their husbands to return from a hunt. Joining this whole system of a hunter's preparation and return helped me learn everything by experiencing instead of asking. I benefited from his visits very much, especially for the hunting part, not to mention the emotional support I felt when he was there.

Communication with people was also a challenge at the beginning of my research. As I have mentioned in the preface, I decided to learn Dukhan, the native language of the Dukha, which is a branch of Tuvan, instead of Mongolian, as it was easier for me as a native speaker of Turkish to learn it, not to mention the advantages of learning their native language. The first time I went to the field in 2012, Ariuntamir, a Mongolian research assistant who was also an anthropology student at the time, accompanied me to help me communicate; I have since improved my speaking skills drastically. When I returned to the field, I could already communicate in Dukhan on my own, but I found it hard to understand deep spiritual subjects. For this reason, I asked for help from one of the girls in the taiga, and I was very lucky to receive the attention I needed from her. Naran, a twenty-three-year-old Dukha who studied at the university in Ulan Bator, was very interested in learning English. So I proposed to her a language exchange deal, where I would teach her English for an hour every day and she would teach me Dukhan. My adopted mother also helped me a lot with language, as I asked her many things during the long nights spent by the fire. Naran also helped me write my research questions in Dukhan, which was a great idea because after a short time I could ask anything I wanted about my research questions and learned many words about the topic. Since there are not Dukhan language dictionaries, this was sometimes complicated, but we used the help of a Mongolian-English dictionary, from which I would show her a word in English, and she would translate it to Dukhan after understanding what I meant by looking at the Mongolian word. Naran also helped me transcribe the interviews. Thanks to my lessons with Naran, I improved my Dukhan a lot. Zaya, a young Mongolian woman who is married to one of the Dukha men and speaks fluent English, also helped me with my interviews when needed, including the informal interviews I made with her husband, a good hunter in their home.

My decision to concentrate on the Dukha language instead of Mongolian had both advantages and disadvantages in my fieldwork. First, I cannot deny that my learning their native language, a disappearing language that no one seems to want to learn anymore, helped create a great rapport with people. Everyone was very happy and proud that I could speak their language, and they were very content to translate for me. When some Mongolians came to the camp, they were shocked that a foreigner spoke the Dukha language instead of Mongolian. Talking in Dukhan was also extremely vital for my research topic because I could try to understand what certain words, like “domestication” or “sacred places,” meant for them and how language holds key knowledge about the traditional subsistence patterns. For example, the variety of words describing the reindeer or hunting techniques were so rich in Dukhan that I do not even know how we could talk about those concepts in Mongolian. Plus, as I mentioned above, the connection between Dukhan and my native language, Turkish, created an additional tie between us, and I could comprehend some words so much more easily, as it reminded me of words from Turkish. On the other hand, my Mongolian has always been weak, and I felt the need to understand more Mongolian, especially among young people. The young people almost always speak Mongolian among themselves, and although I could understand the simple daily words, most of the time I would stare around with blank eyes when they spoke Mongolian, until someone would translate it to Dukhan for me. Thus, focusing on Dukhan instead of Mongolian was a disadvantage in communicating with young people.

Apart from these practical decisions on methodology, I also encountered some ethical dilemmas during my research about different topics. Although most anthropology associations and universities have published basic codes of ethics, which I did my best to abide, novel ethical issues arise in many situations. Making the right decision is not always straightforward. In any case, the position of the researcher in qualitative research always plays a direct and intimate role in data collection and analysis, as widely discussed in the field (Dwyer and Buckle 2009). For this reason, I should clearly state that everything in this book was written from my own perspective and does not claim to represent the whole of Dukhan society. I do not use the real names of my informants to respect their privacy in the book, meaning all the names used in the book are nicknames.

#### NOTE

1. *Negdel* is a term for the agricultural cooperatives in Mongolia in which most nomadic people were connected after collectivization.