

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH IS RESPONSIBLE GUESTING



THE WEDDING BY LAKE SHARA-NUUR

4 July 2013. An opaque milk-white curtain advanced rapidly from the western end *Aldyy Ush* of Agar Mountain and brought with it gusts of wind and heavy rain drops. Soon, the storm was at its height, tearing the white foam off the lake's waves and bending the tall grass to the ground. People rushed to hide in the yurts and cars, except for a few who tried to salvage dishes from the long tables that had been set out for a wedding feast. All decorations—tablecloth, colorful balloons, and posters with well-wishes for the newlyweds—flew away. Broken glassware dotted the green meadow at the lake shore. A wedding procession had left Ulug-Khem, the bride's home province (*kozhuun*) in central Tyva, earlier in the afternoon. One of the procession cars broke down on the way and caused a delay in the festivities. Finally, in the early evening, we glimpsed approaching cars driving by Imaalyk Mountain. They instantly disappeared again in the storm. A half an hour later, a chain of cars emerged from the dense fog at the encampment (*khonash*) named Kara-Chyraa and situated by Lake Shara-Nuur. Anna Laṅaa greeted her son Temir “Samba”¹ and daughter-in-law Dolaana with milk tea and invited them into her yurt. I could read complex emotions on the face of my uncle, the groom's father, Khorlai Darganovich Laṅaa. The joy of meeting new in-laws and celebrating the wedding of his son, the youngest of six children, was mixed with disappointment at having to cancel the planned horse races and Tyva wrestling (*khüresh*) matches due to the late hour.

While people waited for the storm to pass over, evening set in. The sweltering heat of the summer day vanished with the setting sun. Nevertheless, the chill in the air was unable to scare off the festive mood during the wedding feast. The feast encompassed steppe pastoralism in various ways. First, it did so

through its location in the Soyans kinship group's homeland surrounded by revered mountains and lakes. Second, the choice of dishes demonstrated a variety of livestock reflective of the local ecology. Though the food list included store-bought sweets and pastries, the main courses consisted of meat dishes. A cow, a horse, and several rams were slaughtered for the feast. Cooked mutton (meat on a bone) was also included in the mandatory gift bags for guests alongside deep-fried pastries (*boorzak*), sweets, and alcohol. Samba's relatives, in their speeches, tried to explain to guests from another province the importance of holding the open-air wedding in Shara-Nuur, in the foothills of Mountain Agar. The place is named after Lake Shara-Nuur, which stretches along the mountain; the steppe extends from the lake to the blue line closing the southern horizon, the Khaan Kōgei mountain range. The territory between the Khaan Kōgei and the River Tes, north of Agar, is where multiple generations of the Soyans have lived, circling around their seasonal pastures.

After exchanging the dish of honor *uzba*² between the in-laws, the groom's father made his speech. Khorlai Laṅaa³ emphasized the importance of his son's wedding in Shara-Nuur, saying:

We inherited this land from our ancestors. Shara-Nuur is a rare place in Tyva. It has spacious pastures with hot grass.⁴ There are lakes in Shara-Nuur: a lake with medicinal salt water and mud and freshwater lakes. There is the Naryn River. Our five older children live in the village and town. Everybody has their own family and job. I have told my youngest son that we, his parents, are not young, and he will stay with us and take care of our livestock and seasonal encampments.



Figure 0.1. A yurt of herders Khorlai and Anna Laṅaa at the summer encampment of Kara-Chyraa, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, 13 July 2013. © Victoria Soyan Peemot

He presented Samba with a gift—a four-year-old bay gelding, Dorug. The horse was an offspring of the stallion Dargan Lajaa gave to his youngest son Khorlai Lajaa as a gift at his wedding, which had taken place in Shara-Nuur in 1978. Thus, the racehorse Dorug represented the continuity in the relationship between three generations of horsemen and their horses and homeland. In addition to Dorug, Samba has received different livestock from his parents; some of the animals were, in fact, his property, which he received as birthday gifts and accumulated over the years. The guests-herders also gifted livestock to the newlyweds.

Samba's wedding was special for the Soyans because it was the first one to take place in Shara-Nuur during the post-Soviet period. The previous wedding in Shara-Nuur had taken place in the summer of 1990. It was the wedding of my



Figure 0.2. Groom's father, Khorlai Lajaa, gives a speech during the wedding, Kara-Chyraa, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, 4 July 2013. © Victoria Soyan Peemot



Figure 0.3. The dish of respect at weddings is the backside (*uzba*) of the Tyva breed sheep in a set with a tibia, two ribs, and vodka, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, 4 July 2013.

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grandfather's nephew, Seren-Shimet "Sereet" Kaldan. In the weeks preceding the wedding, women from Shara-Nuur gathered at the yurt of the groom's parents to prepare a new yurt for the newlyweds. The women sewed covers and felt carpets, while the men wove horse-hair ropes. On the wedding day, I was on herding duty. Still, when the sheep flock was resting in the afternoon, I had time to race on horseback with my friends to the wedding location. More than twenty years have passed since that summer. The socialist state collapsed. The emergence of a new state brought with it changes to lives of herders, who returned from collective to private livestock ownership. These herders assessed the traumas that their community had endured during socialism, and they re-negotiated identities around their homeland, pastoralist life, and livestock. In a challenging period of adaptation to new economic realities in the 1990s, transhumance to Shara-Nuur was financially unaffordable and herders thus remained in the vicinity of the village Ak-Erik. In some years, there were only two to three yurts in Shara-Nuur. During the summer of Samba's wedding, ten families lived in different encampments around the lake. The number of herding families in Shara-Nuur is growing, though. For instance, there were thirteen different encampments with a varying number of single-family yurts in the summer of 2016. After Samba's wedding, my uncle and horseman Roman Aldyn-Kherel told me that our people have not celebrated weddings at

encampments for many years, and that celebrating weddings at the summer encampment (*chailag*) shows that the young couple have chosen to be herders and follow their livestock. He wished that his sons too would celebrate their weddings in Shara-Nuur. As Roman Aldyn-Kherel wished, his son Dörbet-ool and daughter-in-law Aialga celebrated their wedding in Shara-Nuur in 2016.

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I began this book with the story of a horseman's wedding because it reveals mutual belonging between the pastoralist community, domesticated species, and shared homelands in southern Tyva. The further tracing of stories from the Kara-Chyraa encampment, which hosted the wedding, and the racehorse Dorug, gifted to the groom by his father, affirms the multigenerational relationship between the horsemen from the groom's patrilineage (the Soyan kinship group), their equines, and seasonal landscapes. These relationships have transformed in response to changing political circumstances over the past decades. I was able to observe the changes because the Soyans are my patrilineal kinship group and Shara-Nuur was my grandparents' spring-to-autumn grounds where I grew up riding horses and herding livestock.

In this book, I aim to propose a model for understanding how the Soyan horsemen relate to their horses and homelands. I investigate three main arguments. First, I argue that the boundary between humans and sentient nonhumans, including animals and landscapes, is transcendent among pastoralists in the Saian and Altai Mountains; this allows for land-based human–nonhuman kinship with its customary regulations. Second, I argue that the Soyan horsemen negotiate their identities in a continuous process of becoming-with their horses and homelands in southern Tyva. Third, I argue that the human–nonhuman becoming-with is shaped by a joint response to changing sociopolitical and ecological circumstances; the existing practices, which I discuss in the coming chapters of the book, allow me to approach the Soyan becoming-with their horses and homelands via the notion of interconvertibility. I borrow the term “interconvertibility” from Timothy Ingold (1986: 139) who uses it to refer to human-landscape relations. The term helps to draw attention to the strong sense of belonging with horses and homelands my Soyan kin and interlocutors have emphasized during research. To clarify these main arguments, I seek answers for the following research questions: What are the practices that support belonging between humans, horses, and landscapes? How does an Indigenous normative framework regulate the more-than-human relationship? What are the implications of the horses' status as beings close to humans and landscapes simultaneously? How do political circumstances impact more-than-human communities in Tyva? The following sections introduce the theoretical and methodological framing of the book.

INNER ASIAN ONTOLOGY AND EPISTEMOLOGY: GUESTING WITH MORE-THAN-HUMAN KIN

Ontologies of Indigenous peoples are inseparable from their epistemologies (Kovach 2009 [2021]; Salmón 2000; Siragusa, Westman and Moritz 2020; Smith 1999; Virtanen 2022; Virtanen, Pigga, and Torjer 2021; Sh. Wilson 2008). Briefly put, the questions *What do I know?* and *How do I know it?* are underlined by one's relationships with the kinship group, home landscapes, and nonhuman animals. Consider, for instance, how Margaret Kovach (2009 [2021]: 47) brings Indigenous epistemology, ethics, community (which also includes land and place), and "the experiencing self in relationship" as "the four foundations of Indigenous conceptual framework." The ongoing debates on animism suggest a shortcut between ontology and epistemology. Anthropologists Martin Holbraad and Morten Pedersen, in their discussions of the "ontological turn" (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, also Holbraad 2010; Pedersen 2011, 2012), have emphasized that it aims to equip a person with a certain way of "seeing things," meaning that it refers to a methodological approach. The authors (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017: ix–4) write as follows:

The ontological turn in anthropology must be understood as a strictly methodological proposal—that is, a technology of ethnographic description. As such, the ontological turn asks ontological questions without taking ontology (or indeed ontologies) as an answer. . . . So, this is the central concern of the ontological turn: It is about creating the conditions under which one can "see" things in one's ethnographic material that one would not otherwise have been able to see. And that, we should emphasize from the start, is at its core a methodological intervention, as opposed to a metaphysical or indeed philosophical one.

In his earlier research, Pedersen (2001: 413) approached ontology as "theories or understanding of what exists." To understand what constructs the ontological realm of the Tyva pastoralists, I employ here the concept "ontology" with important notions: first, that "not all human beings share the same ontology," thus suggesting a multiplicity of ontologies; and second, an understanding of social ontology where "the social is not confined to the domain of human beings" (Pedersen 2001: 413–14). Pedersen distinguished between Northern North Asian animism, which for him is "a boundless whole" and Southern North Asian totemism, which is more "a bounded grid" (2001: 413–14). He approached Tyva as part of the Northern North Asia (NNA) region together with other Indigenous peoples living in Northeastern Siberia and the Russian Far East (e.g., the Yukaghir, the Chukchi, the Even, and the Yakut). Tyva is situated between northern and southern North Asia not only geographically, but also in terms of its religious syncretism: shamanism, which is practiced by the

NNA peoples, and Buddhism, which is practiced by the Mongolian-speaking peoples in Mongolia and republics of Buryatia and Kalmykia in the Russian Federation. Alex Oehler makes comparable observations on co-existence of shamanic and Buddhist practices in the human–nonhuman relationships among the Soiot people in the eastern Saian Mountains (2016: 17–18).

Numerous scholars have discussed human–nonhuman (animals and landscapes) relationships in the context of Siberian and Inner Asian hunter-pastoralism (e.g., Anderson 2000; Brandišauskas 2017; Broz 2007; Donahoe 2003; Stammler 2005; Fijn 2011; Humphrey and Sneath 1999; Kristensen 2015; Oehler 2020a; Oehler and Varfolomeeva 2019; Pedersen 2011; Stammler 2005; Stépanoff 2017; Takakura 2002, 2010a, 2010b, 2015; Vitebsky 2005; Willerslev and Pedersen 2010; Willerslev 2007). French anthropologist Charles Stépanoff (2017: 376), who conducted research among the Tozhu reindeer herders in Tyva, called for “a holist interpretation that takes account of the triadic nature of the ‘pastoral niche,’ characterized by an interaction between humans, animals, and the landscape.” In his analysis of the relationship between Tozhu herders and their reindeer, which he defined as a joint commitment, Stépanoff noticed how interspecies knowledge makes it possible to coordinate the movements and transhumance routes of herders and reindeer herds in the taiga (Stépanoff 2012). Equally thought-provoking is Alex Oehler’s concern about balancing human–nonhuman relationships through care, pace, and rhythm in the context of the Soiot hunter-herders in the eastern Saian Mountains (Oehler 2020b, 2020c). Academic discussions on human–nonhuman relationships as interrelations of multiple agencies have given rise to an inexhaustible amount of theorizing. Anna Tsing (2015: 22–24) noted, for instance, that “for living things, species identities are a place to begin, but they are not enough: ways of being are emergent effects of encounters.” She adapted the concept “assemblage” when discussing human–nonhuman communities and drew analogies with musical polyphony, in which “autonomous melodies intertwine.” Tsing (2015: 24) observed: “When I first learned polyphony, it was a revelation in listening; I was forced to pick out separate, simultaneous melodies and to listen for the moments of harmony and dissonance they created together. This kind of noticing is just what is needed to appreciate the multiple temporal rhythms and trajectories of the assemblage.”

Drawing on the extensive body of research on history of the term in social sciences, Tim Ingold (2020) discussed the nature of relationships between the things in “the assemblage” and in “the gathering”—the term he proposed. Ingold (2020: 28, emphasis in the original) wrote that “*the constitutive relations of the assemblage are of exteriority, those of the gathering are of interiority.*” He pointed out that the assemblage implies the hierarchical relationship between heterogeneous elements where “everything is outside everything else, and things make contact only at their exterior surfaces, leaving their inner natures

unaffected” (2020: 28). He argued that the gathering speaks for “the process of formation . . . [where the elements] enter into relations with one another on their own level, such that for each, these relations are enfolded in its own constitution” (2020: 28). Ingold’s definition of the gathering allows for using the term to define Inner Asian land-based human–nonhuman kinships because here, too, an element-agent is engaged in a process of formation with other element-agents to the extent that their identities become enfolded in each other. I draw attention to Ingold’s emphasis on “the process.” Likewise, I approach the Tyva horsemen’s relationships with horses and homelands as the process of becoming-with where, leaning on Haraway’s terminology, individual agents cannot preexist their mutual relating (2007: 6). In other words, the Inner Asian pastoralists, their homelands, and their horses are engaged in the process of mutual identity negotiations.

I make this inquiry into the ontological realm of Tyva pastoralists leaning on the existing practice of responsible guesing (*aaldaar*), which I apply here as a theoretical concept to define the more-than-human relationship and a methodological approach in research with more-than-human communities. Before laying out *aaldaar* ontology and epistemology, I need to clarify briefly what the position of landscapes and horses is in a more-than-human guesing practice.

CHER TÖREL: KINSHIP THROUGH SHARED HOMELANDS

The Tyva concept of *cher törel* acknowledges the sociality of landscapes by approaching them, first, as sentient; second, as one’s kin; and third, as a connecting bridge between humans and nonhuman beings. I start by focusing on the meanings encompassed by the expression *cher törel* that underlie its translation as “land-based kinship” in the English language. Next, I discuss practices that render an understanding of homelands as kin to its human and nonhuman inhabitants. I focus on practices that reveal an understanding of landscapes (mountains, rivers, lakes, and others) as sentient beings—respected and superordinate to human–nonhuman communities.

The word *cher* conveys a multiplicity of meanings, and it can be translated into English as “the Earth,” “the land,” “landscape,” “the ground,” and “wilderness.”⁵ *Törel* means “a relative” or “kin.” It comes from the stem *tör-* meaning “to give birth or to be born.” It is part of the expression “a birthplace” (*töreen cher*). Thus, the concept *cher törel* encompasses the meanings “those who are born in the same land” and “those who are related through shared belonging to a homeland.” Perhaps, the expression “land-based kinship” best conveys these meanings in English. *Cher törel* refers to people who originate from one province in Tyva. Among the Tyva people, geographical belonging often reveals one’s clan kin-

ship. The clans have continued to express a sense of belonging to their home grounds despite the socialist politics aimed at deconstructing relationships and that included, in the case of some clans, displacement. The latter happened due to the border demarcation in the 1930s between Tyva and Mongolia or the need to vacate territories next to the river Ulug-Khem (Enisei) in the 1980s when the land was flooded to create a reservoir for the Saiano-Shushenskaia Dam. The resilient sense of belonging of Tyva clans to their clan grounds was noticed by anthropologist Caroline Humphrey, who conducted field research in Tyva at the end of the Soviet period. At the time, she defined rural communities in Tyva as “patrilineal localized clans” (1989: 6).

I suggest expanding *cher törel* to include a “land-based human–nonhuman kinship” based on numerous practices that maintain relationships with sentient landscapes and nonhuman animals, with an emphasis on horses. Some practices rely on nonhuman animals’ ability to facilitate communication between humans and landscapes. In doing so, they engender relationships between people, animals (horses), and homelands. Pastoralist communities in southern Tyva, where I conducted my field research, have a deep sense of belonging with their homelands because of their clans’ inhabiting the same grounds for multiple generations. This enforces a relational perception of landscapes as one’s birthplace, active or abandoned encampments, places where one’s kin lived, seasonal pasturelands, hay-cutting places, watering places, close and far-off range pastures for various livestock animals, and transhumance routes that connect seasonal grounds. Landscapes have other meanings as well: places of worship, locations to gather edible and medicinal plants, or the habitats of non-domesticated species. All these understandings reveal the inherent sociality of landscapes for Tyva pastoralists—homelands are understood to keep and share knowledge about human and nonhuman inhabitants, who engage with them in reciprocal relationships.

The sociality of landscapes allowed me to translate *cher*, in addition to “land,” as “homeland” and “landscape.” Researchers of Inner Asian pastoralism have noticed the sociality of landscapes, which is revealed in the ways people engage and interact with them.⁶ Anthropologist Morten Axel Pedersen (2016: 222), who has conducted field research among the Mongolian-speaking Darkhads and the Tyvan-speaking Dukha in northern Mongolia, emphasized the interactions with landscapes among pastoralists, in which “meaning is ‘drawn’ or ‘elicited’ from the landscape via a continual engagement with it in the form of both everyday and more ritualized nomadic practices.”

When “drawing meanings” from landscapes and interacting with them, pastoralists approach them as potentially powerful. Caroline Humphrey noticed how pastoralists in Mongolia interact with landscapes in a way that acknowledges their potentiality. Humphrey (1995: 135) wrote, “[L]andscapes are more in the nature of practices designed to have results: it is not contemplation

of the land (*gazar*) that is important but interaction with it, as something with energies far greater than the human.” Tyva pastoralists’ practices demonstrate similar reciprocity in relationships with landscapes and acknowledgment of their high status and potential power. It is revealed, for instance, in personification of a landscape as a sentient nonhuman, nonanimal being—a master of the land (*cher eezi*). *Eezi* is the third-person possessive form of the singular noun *ee*, which means “an owner” or “a master”; for example, *ögnüj eezi* translates as “the master or the owner of a yurt.” Plural forms are *eeler*, “masters,” and *eeleri*, “masters of something.” Various landscapes have nonhuman, nonanimal masters (*cher eeleri*) who are understood to have power within their own territories and be potentially helpful or harmful to humans.⁷ However, in multiple situations when my local interlocutors talked about masters of the land or addressed them directly, I noticed that the word “master” (*ee*) is omitted, leading to a superposition of concepts “land” (*cher*) and “a master of the land” (*cher eezi*). Regardless of the best way to address them—with or without personification as “master” (*ee*)—pastoralists understand their homelands as sentient and superordinate beings. These landscapes—mountains, rivers, lakes, and mineral springs—are considered hierarchically above humans, possessing more power. Herders in southern Tyva and western Mongolia, where my fieldwork sites are situated, consider the Tanjdy-Uula and Altai Mountains the most powerful landscapes. They approach them as superior beings who overlook the lives of humans and nonhumans in their own territories. In addition, pastoralist communities develop special relationships with landscapes, which are part of their clan grounds. For instance, the Ak-Erik Soyans venerate Agar Mountain, which occupies a central place between their winter and summer grounds. The Soyans who live in Erzin kozhuun have special relationships with Kezhege Mountain. Soviet ethnographer Leonid Potapov (1969) observed that the Tyva people referred to the prominent mountains as elder kin; this was especially noticeable when a woman married into another clan. She had to observe similar regulations in relationships with elder male in-laws and the clan’s venerated mountain. Potapov (1969: 60) further noticed that the Soyans explained the form of endogamy practiced by the clan as “the will of the Kezhege Mountain.” Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon ([1996] 2003: 85) argued that the concept of “master” (in Mongolian it is *ejin*) has allowed people to approach landscapes as sentient beings with whom they engage in relationships. They ([1996] 2003: 85) emphasized, “What is important is that the idea of masters allowed people to talk about inner or concealed power of entities in the world and to have human-like intentional relations with them. In this view natural objects ‘gave’ things to human beings, who were to use them in ways corresponding to the given parameters of nature.” This observation by Humphrey and Onon is paramount to understanding the pastoralists’ approach to landscapes as sentient, social, and powerful. In addition to personifying landscapes as masters of the land, the Tyva pastoralists acknowl-

edge the sentience of landscapes in numerous practices: food offerings, asking for help, prohibitions on activities that could be offensive, for instance, leaving trash or speaking ill about them, and understanding some nonhumans as communicative bridges between homelands and human–livestock communities. In the steppe ecologies, horses and wolves have this ambiguous status of mediators between human–livestock communities and sentient landscapes.

Approaching homeland as kin is not unique to Tyva pastoralists. Other Indigenous peoples share similar conceptions about their homelands, which emphasize the sociality of landscapes. Opaskwayak Cree researcher Stan Wilson (2001: 91) wrote about “[t]he (literally) grounded identity of Indigenous peoples” and coined the concept “self-as-relationship.” Wilson’s observation about self-as-relationship echoes in work by Elizabeth Fast, a Métis from St. François-Xavier, and Margaret Kovach, who has Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux ancestry. Kovach and Fast (2019: 23) observed, “A self that is [in] deep relationship with place, kinship, and community can be found in myriad Indigenous cultures.” Anthropologist Enrique Salmón, who is from the Rarámuri people in Mexico, defined the reciprocal, more-than-human relationship as kincentric ecology. Salmón (2012: 22) gave the following definition:

The Rarámuri believe that human breath is shared by all surrounding life and that our emergence into this world was possibly caused by some of the nearby life-forms. From this awareness, we understand that we are responsible for the survival of all life. As a result, we are cognizant of human kincentric relationships with nature similar to those shared with family and tribe. A reciprocal relationship has been fostered, with the realization that humans affect nature and nature affects humans. This awareness influences Rarámuri interactions with the environment. These interactions, or cultural practices of living with a place, are manifestations of kincentric ecology.

Salmón’s definition of kincentric ecology, or kincentric relationships with nature, is well suited to the Tyva pastoralists’ understanding of the interrelatedness between humans and nonhumans, including landscapes. In this study, I adapt the Tyva notion of land-based kinship (*cher törel*) to convey a focus on south Tyva pastoralists’ belonging with their homelands and horses. On the one hand, landscapes engage in kin relationships with their human and nonhuman inhabitants. On the other hand, humans and nonhumans are understood as kin because they share the same homeland. This brings into light the sociality of landscapes and their ability to be and to convey a relationship. The concept “land-based kinship” (*cher törel*), adapted here as a theoretical framework for human–nonhuman belonging, allows me to study relationships between humans and nonhumans (sentient landscapes and nonhuman animals) as reciprocal, continuous, and intersubjective. The concept is instrumental for understanding identity negotiations between pastoralists, horses, and homelands.

GUESTING: *AALDAAR*

Approaching guesting as a research methodology is based on the observation that is, perhaps, shared by all fieldworkers—we are received as guests first and, only after that, as researchers. Dmitry Arzyutov (2017), for instance, shared his experience of doing fieldwork in the Iamal Peninsula; he described how movements in the tundra follow a map of the reindeer herders' social relations. Arzyutov suggested that guesting is an exchange of news, goods, and help; he also noticed that arriving at someone's encampment and entering a dwelling are part of the ritual (2017). Arzyutov's discussion of ritualized actions in the context of Iamal guesting makes it similar to the Tyva guesting practice. It is structured both spatially and temporally and, in some situations, requires specific verbal and symbolic communication that relies on values and types of guest-gifts. In Tyva, the gifts are distinguished as being either a general gift (*belek*) given for a birthday or a wedding or a special gift (*sartyk*). The latter defines several categories of gifts: a gift brought by kin from a travel somewhere far, a gift for a new mother, and a guest-gift.

I will briefly walk readers through the guest arrival ritual I followed in Tyva. Before fieldwork, I planned and bought mandatory guest-gifts. When my companions and I arrived at the herding family's seasonal encampment, we parked our car within its unmarked territory at a fair distance from a yurt. We waited beside the car for the hosts to come out, calm their dogs, and invite us into their yurt. Once inside the yurt, we moved to the western part of it, which is understood as the domain of the man-owner. This part is also reserved for guests. A special invitation by the hosts allowed us to move further to the northern part (*dör*) where respected guests are allowed. While having tea and snacks, we engaged in casual conversation. After that, we shared the purpose for our visit with the hosts and received their agreement to help us. At this point, we brought in our guest-gifts for the hosts. Customary regulations define a guest-right as implicit among pastoralists in Tyva and Mongolia—hosts are obligated to provide shelter and food for guests and to meet their needs. Thus, when guests/researchers ask for help, the hosts/interlocutors understand it as a demand. This engenders a potential power imbalance between hosts and guests, which I attempted to balance by approaching research visits as responsible guesting and by acknowledging my relationships with communities and holding myself accountable to them.

The Tyva verb “to guest” (*aaldaar*) means “to visit an *aal*.” Herding communities in southern Tyva understand *aal* as a multispecies socioecological unit consisting of a herding family and domesticated animals. Field research in south Tyva suggest three main types of the *aal*: the single-family *aal* with its yurt; the *aal* consisting of two yurts belonging to parents and a married son, and a multi-yurt *aal* of two or more families that may or may not have kinship ties (Peemot

2019: 51–52). I will refer to the *aal* as a multispecies community interchangeably in this book. Tyva customary regulations define *aaldaar* as a specific type of guesting, which allows for asking help among kin. With the practice of *aaldaar*, the guesting-hosting relationship can be initiated by one of the involved parties; however, reciprocity is compulsory for all, so asking for help is in fact a demand for help. I expand on understandings of the guesting (*aaldaar*) practice and introduce it as a theoretical concept that helps in analyzing the normative regulations of relationships within land-based, human–nonhuman kinship (*cher törel*) systems. I suggest that a researcher (myself) inadvertently participates in the *cher törel* kinship relationship and follows its regulations. This notion frames *aaldaar* as a (responsible) knowledge exchange between a guest/researcher and hosts—human–nonhuman communities in the Saian and Altai Mountains.

To broaden applications of *aaldaar* as a theoretical concept and methodological approach, I draw on Tyva pastoralists' practices, which reveal the relationship "economy" between humans, nonhumans, and landscapes. In conversations with hosts/pastoralists, I noticed that they understood hosting and sharing knowledge with me as an obligation and a way to increase the life energy (*kbeř-a"t*). This reveals that sentient homelands are part of the host and guest/researcher relationship. A similar triangulation of relationships exists between humans, nonhuman animals, and (masters of) homelands; in this case, sentient homelands are hosts to their human and nonhuman kin whom I join as a guest, kin, and researcher. This notion is revealed in the order of my interactions during field research. The first thing I do when arriving at a new place is to give my offerings to sentient landscapes. After the initial acquittance with them, I interact and share guest-gifts with my human hosts.

Researchers, who study with pastoralists and hunters in Inner Asia and Siberia, have discussed the normative regulations of multispecies relationships and defined these regulations as a "cosmic economy of sharing" (Donahoe 2003: 122), "the morality of respect" (Brandišauskas 2011: 128), "a demand sharing principle" (Willerslev 2013: 53), "an aesthetic of propriety" (Empson 2012: 10), and "the concept of balance among sentient entities, including landscapes" (Oehler 2020c: 237). Observations made by them are applicable in the case of Tyva pastoralists, too. For instance, a suggestion by Donatas Brandišauskas about acknowledging bonds between humans, nonhumans, and landscapes to understand health among the Orochen people in eastern Siberia (2011: 128) applies equally to Tyva pastoralists who believe that a person's health depends on how well he or she observes customary regulations of relationships with powerful landscapes.

Rane Willerslev's observation about "sharing on demand," which is practiced between the Yukaghir hunters, game animals, and powerful nonhuman nonanimal beings, brings it close to the *aaldaar* in Tyva. Willerslev (2013: 53)

wrote: “Sharing is not limited to the human community, however. It also provides the moral framework for engagement with the nonhuman world of animal spirits follows the same principle of sharing.” In the context of the Soyot communities in the eastern Saian Mountains, Alex Oehler has discussed “economic transactions” that aim at balancing the human–nonhuman relationship. Oehler (2020a: 25) wrote:

One way to describe this balancing work is by looking at economic transactions that occur within and between human and spirit households. A local master spirit provides for the members of his or her own household, but he or she can also respond to the needs of human masters and their dependents by sending animal gifts to human hunters. Where this occurs, the spirit household engages in a reciprocal exchange that is answered by gifts coming from the human household. While both human and spirit masters operate in the same landscape, each possesses its own physical and independent locus from which to observe the movements of its own, as well as each other’s animals.

I have considered the approaches discussed above when deciding how to define *aaldaar* as a theoretical concept in English, so the definition includes important features of *aaldaar*: the more-than-human sociality, compulsory reciprocity of relationships and gift-exchanges, and multigenerational continuity. Perhaps, Oehler’s observation about “the concept of balance among sentient entities, including landscapes” comes closest to conveying the complexity and hierarchy of relationships in the *aaldaar* practice in Tyva. A focus on balancing brings *aaldaar* close to what Caroline Humphrey and David Sneath (1999: 141–47) called the “social relations of obligation” which are “marked by the giving of goods and services, and also requests for the same” among kinship groups in Mongolia, Tyva, and Buryatia. Humphrey and Sneath (1999: 142) further observed that relationships are defined by implied obligations and not as “exchanges” because they lack an understanding of exchanging an even amount of, for instance, help. The Tyva *aaldaar* practice also relies on obligations and overlooks the value or amount of the help provided. Drawing on similarities between Humphrey and Sneath’s definition of relationships among kin as entailing obligations and regulated interactions within kinship systems, I define *aaldaar* as social relations within the land-based more-than-human kinship system. Its constituents are humans, nonhuman animals, plants, and sentient landscapes, which are perceived as the most powerful, superordinate, beings in kinship.

THE GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

As a field research method, *aaldaar* defines where, with whom, and how I conduct research. For this study, I worked mostly in southern Tyva and most of

my interlocutors were my kin. From the initial fieldwork in 2015 and in the following years, it became more and more obvious that I have not started new relationships in the field. Instead, I looked for an already existing net of my relationships and continued an exchange of responsibilities and gifts that began before my arrival at someone's doorstep. In these circumstances, visiting herding families with a research purpose has simultaneously been a process of guesting with kin in my homeland and, because I came asking for help (to share their knowledge with me), it was the *aaldaar* type of guesting.

During my fieldwork in the Saian and Altai Mountains, two notions came to my attention: first, that knowledge shared by my interlocutors was a gift, and second, that sharing knowledge was an obligation for both the hosting community and me as researcher, guest, and kin. In the current study, I use the terms “gift,” “exchange,” and “a gift exchange” to refer to the activities that maintain “social relations of obligation” (Humphrey and Sneath 1999). Customary regulations of more-than-human relationships, which I define here as guesting (*aaldaar*) with sentient homelands and my kin communities in southern Tyva, help clarify that sharing gift-knowledge is a reciprocal obligation. It is continuous and extends beyond an individual to his or her relational intergenerational networks. This notion highlights the fact that my research with kin in Tyva was both a continuation of relationships and the obligation to support them, wherein I represented my kin network. The people with whom I have worked approached their participation in this study as an exchange of obligations between them (their families) and myself (my family); this exchange is often understood as triadic and involves sentient homelands. Although it was not stated explicitly, the knowledge they shared with me was understood as a gift.

Sweeney Windchief, in the preface to the edited volume *Applying Indigenous Research Methodologies: Storying with Peoples and Communities*, emphasized that the gift-knowledge comes with an obligation to take care of the gift. He mentioned a story about a “tall, black, and strong” horse he received as a gift from his uncle to honor the completion of his doctorate (2019: xix–xxii). Windchief vividly described his delight upon receiving such a gift and his subsequent worry at the responsibility of caring for the gift. A year later, he gifted the horse to another uncle who liked the animal a great deal; in the following years, they talked often about the horse, now named Tǎ, which means “Moose” in Assiniboine. Invoking the gift horse as a metaphor, Windchief had noticed how gift-knowledge can either become burdensome or bring joy depending on a receiver's skill in taking care of it. Windchief (2019: xix–xxii) shared:

Knowledge is a gift. When someone shares knowledge, they are honoring the person that is receiving it. Using Tǎ (the horse named Moose) as a metaphor for knowledge is not too farfetched when we consider the responsibility that comes with a researcher receiving Indigenous knowledge. Much like Tǎ,

knowledge can be heavy, strong, beautiful, and, if in the hands of someone who is not prepared for it, knowledge can become a burden. When gifted to someone who knows how to care for it, it can bring joy, help one's livelihood, and benefit people's lives beyond that of the one who carries it.

I find Windchief's comparison of gift-knowledge with the gift-horse inspiring. In my research with horsemen in Inner Asia, I constantly received knowledge (stories) about horses as gifts. During field research, I encountered horse stories that are "heavy, strong, and beautiful." I discuss one of them—the story of the racehorse Ezir Kara—in chapter 4 because it is about the shared multi-species past and it continuously affects the ways in which Soyay horsemen negotiate their identities with their horses and homelands.

STORYING WITH NONHUMANS

Doing research with my kin in southern Tyva and with pastoralists in the wider Saian and Altai mountainous region of Inner Asia, I noticed that our conversations often built on shared knowledge about places, people, horses, and events. In these conversations, we complemented and learned from each other. I consider storying to be my main field research method. This builds on the work of Indigenous scholars who approached storying as a collaborative knowledge production process (Kovach and Fast 2019; San Pedro and Kinloch 2017; San Pedro and Windchief 2019). Timothy San Pedro and Valerie Kinloch (2017: 377–78) defined storying as "the interweaving and merging process (e.g., braiding, yarning) that occurs in the space between telling and listening, the giving and receiving of stories." According to them (2017: 377–78), "Storying is the convergence of theory and practice, theory and method, which allows us to be invited into relationships where we dialogically listen and give back to the stories shared and questions that arise with others." By relying on encounters, observations, and conversations with pastoralists during my fieldwork, I approach storying as a more-than-human practice because pastoralists' stories habitually emplace a person's life in his or her homelands. Human-landscape storying often includes knowledge about the person's horses—their number, specific features (conformation, coat colors, prevailing gaits), and ownership of award-winning racers.

The notion of sharing stories between a community and a researcher raises the question of a "reflexive feedback loop." Katherine Swancutt and Mireille Mazard (2018: 3), in their discussion on the epistemological foundations of anthropology, talked about a "reflexive feedback loop," which they defined as "a mode of anthropological transmission in which professional visitors—fieldworkers, missionaries, ideologues—transmit elements of their theoretical

perspective to native thinkers. These thinkers, in turn, offer anthropologizing perspectives back to us, indirectly reflecting the diverse ethnographic influences that shape anthropologists' views." Acknowledging the fact that "professional visitors" base their theorizations and assumptions on knowledge shared by their interlocutors, I approach the reflexive feedback loop between a researcher and community as another way to understand the storying methodology that I have used in this study.

THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING: WORKING IN TYVAN, WRITING IN ENGLISH

In conclusion to this section on research epistemology I will share my concerns about translation. I draw attention to the challenge of writing in English about research conducted with an Indigenous community in its own language. It is an issue that involves communication in the field, post-fieldwork transcription and translation of data, and respect for the interlocutors' mother tongue. When working with the Tyva communities in Tyva and Mongolia, I observed the following: the presence of distinct regional dialects of the Tyvan language, linguistic diversity in herding communities, and rich vocabulary related to the environment and herding life (Harrison 2023). Here, I briefly share observations on dialects and languages spoken by the communities in the transboundary region (Bavuu-Surun 2018). I start with my own language background because it is important when working with communities who speak different dialects of Tyvan; my interlocutors regularly noticed and commented on specifics of my speech. I am from southern Tyva, which has a distinct dialect characterized by the impact of the Mongolian language on vocabulary. This feature is shared by communities in southern and southeastern parts of Tyva along the border with Mongolia. While I generally do not face difficulties in communicating with Tyvan-speakers when doing fieldwork, problems with mutual understandings caused by linguistic differences occurred in Tere-Khöl kozhuun, Kachyk sumu of Erzin kozhuun, and Bayan Ölgii province in Mongolia. The Tere-Khöl people speak a dialect that often lacks the pharyngealization common to other Tyvan dialects. This makes it difficult for an outsider, like myself, to distinguish between words in pharyngealized–non-pharyngealized pairs. An example of such pair are words "a name" (*at*) and "a horse" (*a't*) which are differentiated by the absence or presence of pharyngealization except in Tere-Khöl. However, I have noticed that Tere-Khöl interlocutors adapted their speech so that I, a non-local listener, could follow the conversation. For more on the Tere-Khöl dialect, see the work done by Mira Bavuu-Surun (2018: 30–32) and Polina Seren (2006).

Interlocutors from the Kyrgys clan, who live in the Kachyk River area of Erzin province, are bilingual. They speak both Mongolian and Tyvan; however,

they more often use Mongolian when speaking among themselves.⁸ Horsemen in the southern Erzin and Tes-Khem provinces speak Mongolian in addition to their mother tongue. Generally, members of herding communities in Tyva understand and speak some Russian, too. However, the most linguistically diverse community was that of the Tyvan-speakers in Bayan Ölgii province in western Mongolia where the Kazakh people are the ethnic majority. Thus, the Tyvan-speaking minority speaks at least three languages: Tyvan, Kazakh, and Mongolian. While conducting fieldwork in the summer of 2016, I was exposed to this language diversity. When Tyvan families held a summer celebration called “Tethering the foals” (*Kulun baglaary*), the Kazakh neighbors joined them, offering their help in catching the foals. *Kulun baglaary* is a yearly ritual to celebrate the first time when foals are tethered, and mares are milked in the beginning of summer. The festivities included preparing food to offer to the Altai Mountains, catching the foals, a ritual of asking for well-being from the Altai Mountains, praising homelands and horses in songs, the feast, and milking the mares. During the festivities, the herders sang numerous songs praising the horses and homelands in several languages. Among those songs were, for instance, “The River Eevi” (in Tyvan), “Besh Bogda Mountain Stands High” (in Kazakh), and “My Snake-Brown Horse” (in Mongolian).

When including quotes from field interviews, I had to revise transcriptions and translations of the first fieldwork conversations with herders because initially I did not pay attention to linguistic details. Sometimes, while transcribing from an audio file, I automatically “corrected” the pronunciation of herders. When I need now to quote Tyvan-speakers, I made it a rule to listen (again) to the original recording and, if needed, correct the transcription. In translation too, initially I made the mistake of using the habitual counterparts of Tyva concepts in Russian and English. An example of such “habitual” translation is the Tyvan word *khei-a”t*, which translates into Russian as “dukh” and into English as “spirit.” I translate *khei-a”t* as life energy because this definition, though it is not a literal translation, fits better understandings of *khei-a”t* among the Tyva pastoralists. I discuss life energy (*khei-a”t*) in chapter 1.

As a good example of cross-cultural translation, I consider the work done by the Czech linguist Alena Oberfalzerová (2006). In her study of the language of rural communities in Mongolia, she provided each word with a translation, an example of how it is used in practice, a description of the situation in which the phrase was spoken, and the general context. Oberfalzerová (2006: 21) claimed, “The first, basic, and most important stage of research into communication amongst Mongols entails, I believe, revealing the key to the correct interpretation of speech and the culturally specific rules of its use in the context of nomadic culture.” However, it is not always possible to provide a full context for the word used in each publication. Doing research in the Tyvan language and writing about it in English calls into question the power dynamics between an

Indigenous language and an academic lingua franca. I put my efforts to address the inevitable gap between my main research languages—Tyvan and English—by following a protocol developed during years of research. It includes:

- explaining the Indigenous concepts rather than attempting to “translate” them,
- preserving the interlocutors’ dialect in transcriptions and quotations,
- keeping original audio tracks in films and giving their English translation in subtitles,
- discussing a draft of a paper (or a draft version of a film) with the interlocutors,
- proofreading the Tyvan language as carefully as I would English,
- providing interlocutors with published versions of the papers and films and translating their content into Tyvan.

These measures helped observe “a principle of reciprocity” (Smith 1999) in work with communities and to resist a situation where, in the words of American writer Toni Morrison, “definitions belong to the definers, not the defined” (Morrison 1987: 225). In addition, I wrote and published short articles about my research in the Tyvan language in the local media in Tyva (e.g., Peemot 2016).

In this introductory section, I have brought the Tyvan guesting practice of *aaldaar* into academic conversation as a theoretical concept that allows the understanding of the customary regulations of land-based more-than-human kinship (*cher törel*). I investigated how relationships between humans and sentient nonhumans consider the potential engagement of a third agent—the sentient superordinate homeland, which is often, but not always, personified as a non-human nonanimal master of homeland (*cher eezi*). My theoretical elaboration of two Indigenous concepts—land-based kinship, *cher törel*, and guesting, *aaldaar*—makes it possible to acknowledge the sociality, mutual obligations, and regulations involving the relationships among more-than-human kin. A Tyvan way of sharing knowledge through storying with homelands and horses further supports land-based more-than-human kinship. It prompts us to recognize knowledge sharing as a part of existing relational networks and the fulfillment of obligations between a community and a researcher/kin. The next section sheds light on how my gender impacts fieldwork circumstances and on my approach to working with communities in the Saian and Altai region.

THE WAYS OF (UN)BELONGING

A map of my fieldwork routes resembles an almost complete prolonged oval with an opening at the eastern end. If followed on the map in the east-to-west

direction, the route starts in the Lake Tere-Khöl area and crosses several provinces in Tyva. Further, it goes briefly through the southernmost part of the Altai Republic in Russia and turns south to Mongolia. There the route heads in the reverse direction—from west-to-east to the summer pastures of the Mongolian-speaking Ikh Khotogoid group by the Tes River in the Zavkhan province. All this time the route goes along the Mongolian-Russian border. In my research, I approached this transboundary region as a whole because of the shared continuity of mobile pastoralism, significance of nonhumans (horses and sentient landscapes), and the comparable complexity of political and social changes in the recent past. The region used to form a single political and multicultural unity before the Russian and succeeding Soviet colonization, which reshaped the lives of mobile pastoralists and nonhuman animals (both domesticated and wild) as part of the planned socialist economy. During Perestroika and after the demise of the Soviet Union, the area has been increasingly impacted by the global market economy under different forms of political rule—democracy in Mongolia and limited self-governance in Tyva as a titular ethnic republic inside the Russian Federation.

Several mountain ranges define the natural borders of this transboundary region: the Western and Eastern Saians, Altai, Tan̄dy-Uula, and Khaan Kögeï (in Mongolia, the range's name is Khan Khokhii; I refer to its Tyvan name as Khaan Kögeï). The whole area is often referred as the circa-Altai or the Altai and Saian region. Its diverse ecology includes mountainous boreal forests, mountain tundra, mountain steppes, and semi-deserts (L. Arakchaa 2015: 7–22; Sarbaa 2015: 9–18). My main field sites in Tyva and Mongolia were situated mostly in the Uvs Lake Basin between the Tan̄dy-Uula and Khaan Kögeï Mountains. The basin is characterized by extreme contrasts in temperature, long winters and hot summers, and little precipitation—from 100 to 200 mm/year (L. Arakchaa 2015: 9–11). Depending on the ecological zone, pastoralists engage in the husbandry of domesticated animals: horses, cattle, sheep, goats, reindeer, camels, and yaks (T. Arakchaa 2018; Charlier 2015; Darzha 2003; Donahoe 2003; Kristensen 2015; Küçüküstel 2021; Oehler 2020a; Stépanoff 2017; Vainshtein 1961, 1980). Although I have conducted research among various communities in the transboundary region, I focus on my patrilineal Soyan clan's relationships with horses and homelands in this book. Further, I introduce the Soyans' homeland in southern Tyva and discuss the specifics of conducting research among my kin.

THE AGAR STEPPE AND LAKE SHARA-NUUR

My Soyan kinship group's territories are in southern Tyva. It is Kyzyl-Chyraa municipality (*sumu*) in Tes-Khem kozhuun. I prefer to use here the Tyva term

sumu because it allows for including not only the territory of a village but also seasonal pastures. The *sumu* is also known for the name of its administrative center—Ak-Erik village, which has a school, medical center, and House of Culture. Approximately 900 people live in the *sumu*. A military base and a border crossing point called Shara-Sur are situated within the *sumu*'s territory.

The local herders stay for winters on the northern slopes of Agar Mountain, where they arrive at the end of November when there is enough snow to substitute for water for livestock. Ice blocks from the Tes River are brought and melted for human consumption. At the end of winter, melted ice water is also given to malnourished and pregnant animals. Compared to the forested areas, winters on the steppe are harsh: the temperature drops below fifty degrees below zero Celsius. Though local interlocutors have noticed that winters in the recent decades have been warmer than earlier, this in no way compensates for the harshness of the winter temperatures. Roman Aldyn-Kherel connected construction of the Saiano-Shushenskaia Dam in the 1980s with warm winters and increased unpredictability of weather in Tyva. He talked about the “sea” (*da-lai*) when referring to the reservoir for the Saiano-Shushenskaia Dam. When making the reservoir, pasturelands, archaeological heritage sites, and villages in central Tyva were flooded. Uncle Roman mentioned the town Shagaan-Aryg, which was flooded, and its population was relocated to a newly built town in a different location. He observed:

The nature has changed since 1984, after the sea was made in Shagaan-Aryg. When the great sea was made, the cold disappeared, and there is less snow. Before that, it was dry and cutting-sharp cold in our place. At the time, I used to herd camels. The cold reached minus 60 degrees. A cow's horn froze and broke off. The willow trees in Dugai had their trunks cracked because of the cold. There is no such cold anymore. It used to be cold enough to drive the D75 caterpillar tractor on snowdrifts in March. A snowplow went on the snowdrift without penetrating it. Where is such snow now? Where is such cold now? . . . It was the real cold. If you released your horse into the herd, sweating after rounding up the livestock, you would find him frozen to death the next morning. There is no such cold now. You can ride a horse hard and release it. In the morning, there is not even a hoarfrost on the horse. In old times, all the horse's hair on the belly and legs used to be covered in ice.

Other herders too shared their observations on how changing climate and unpredictable weather impacted their lives and livestock husbandry practices. Consider, for instance, my phone conversation with relatives in Tyva in the end of November 2020. During the conversation, my relatives complained that autumn rains, which are unusual in Tyva, had damaged their supplies of dry livestock dung, *körzen* and *ödek*. The former is used for fuel and the latter is an insulation material for livestock barns (Peemot 2022). Mild temperatures



Figure 0.4. Horses wait for their riders while they swim, Lake Eshtir Khölchük, Iamaalyk Mountain is in the background, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, 18 June 2015. © Victoria Soyan Peemot

in November also delayed the slaughter of livestock for winter meat supplies. Usually, the temperature drops below twenty-five degrees below zero Celsius in November, allowing them to store meat outdoors.

In summer, the Ak-Erik herders stay in different locations. I stayed with the Nogaan-ool and Ailanmaa Soyan's family at their summer site, Khaialyg-Semis-Teï, in the Tandy-Uula Mountains in 2015 to 2018. In summer 2018, they shared the encampment with another family—Shoraan and Aiana Dizhitmaa. Only a few Ak-Erik families move to this part of the taiga in the summer; in addition to Khaialyg-Semis-Teï, other nearby encampments include Chaa-Ovaa and Shivi-Kuduruu. Compared with the steppe, the taiga is rainy and cold, and night frost covers the grass already in mid-August. Some families move to the Tes River in summer. My cousin Aisula's family, for instance, lived there in the summer of 2015. However, the next year they moved to Lake Shara-Nuur and occupied our grandparents' encampment Khöl Adaa.

The area around Lake Shara-Nuur is the main spring-to-autumn site of the Soyans. Three routes lead across Agar Mountain: Üstüü Ush, Kara-Saiyr, and Aldyy Ush. A fourth route goes via the steep Kalchan-Oruk Pass; however, it is not used anymore. From mid-April to late November, local herders move between seasonal encampments around Lake Shara-Nuur, spending the summer months along its southern shore and moving in the autumn to the foothills of



Figure 0.5. A territory (*kodan*) of winter encampment of Orlanmaï and Aialga Kaldan, the Agar steppe, Tyva, 24 March 2017. © Victoria Soyan Peemot

Agar Mountain, north of the lake. There are several water sources for animals—freshwater lakes known under the group name Khölchükter, springs (*bulaktar*) at the eastern end of Lake Shara-Nuur, and the stream Khorlaash (lit. “little waterfall”), which flows into Lake Shara-Nuur. A deep ground well provides water that is suitable for people to drink. In addition, some families dig shallow wells for watering their animals; water from these wells has a detectable salty taste.

When driving down Agar Mountain to the lake’s shore, the change in soil composition and vegetation is especially noticeable: the stony ground gives a way to large-grained sand with specks of seashells; close to the lake, the sandy areas become traps for cars; salt patches (*kuzhur*) and a bit of greenery can be seen along the lake’s southern shore. In the semi-desert area surrounding Lake Shara-Nuur, the grass grows sporadically, some areas are covered with low-growing caragana bushes. Lilia Arakchaa, who studied Tyva ethnoecology with a focus on southern Tyva, defined these caragana and grass “islets” as local nodes of “life intensity” (2015: 55). Arakchaa (2015: 55) observed that these nodes support the stability of the steppe and semi-desert ecosystems in the Uvs Lake Basin. Local livestock is well adapted to grazing in these conditions, and the Shara-Nuur families use affordances of the Naryn River valley when cutting

hay. The hay-cutting locations are the areas along the Naryn River, and a place named Sukpak on the northwestern shore of Lake Shara-Nuur. The hay is then transported to the winter sites. The taiga and steppe summer sites differ in temporality (the period of living in the taiga is shorter than on the steppe), everyday tasks (e.g., related to water and firewood supplies), and livestock handling practices (time of milking, frequency of changing the locations of the corrals, herding modes).

KINSHIP TERMINOLOGY

Before discussing the Soyán clan, I need to clarify the terminology that is used extensively in this study.⁹ My Tyvan-speaking interlocutors use the terms “people” (*chon*) and *törel-aimak* (related group) to refer to “a kinship group” or “clan.” The former term, *chon*, is more general and is used to define the ethnic group—the Tyva people—and a clan in a broader understanding as a group connected through patrilineages, such as the Soyán clan. The latter term, *törel-aimak*, implies kinship. This complexity of definitions reflects the diverse origin of the groups that contributed to present-day Tyva ethnicity. More on kinship groups in Tyva and various (Turkic and Mongolic) origin of the Tyva clans can be found in, for example, studies by Mongush Maḡnaï-ool (2004), Ekaterina Prokofieva (2011), Svetlana Orus-ool (2015), and Sevyan Vainshtein (1957). When speaking with me, interlocutors defined the Soyáns’ group belonging as “the Soyán people” (*Soyán chon*) and “our people” (*bistiḡ ulus*). *Törel-aimak* was used when referring to a group of the Soyáns who share kinship ties.

Previous ethnographies contain lengthy discussions on the character of kinship ties and terminologies among the Tyva people. Soviet ethnographer Sevyan Vainshtein wrote about “common origin and kinship on the male side, *söök törel*, or ‘kinship of bone’” (1980: 238). Vainshtein distinguished between tribes (*aimak*) and clans (*söök*). In addition, he mentioned the (patrilineal) blood related *khan törel* groups (Vainshtein 1980: 238). Currently, the term *söök* corresponds with an ethnic affiliation (Stépanoff 2009). I have noticed that, while among the Tyva people who live in Tyva, *söök* indicates an ethnicity, the Tyva people in western Mongolia used it to mean “a kinship group.” My Tyvan-speaking interlocutors in Mongolia often introduced themselves using the term *söök* as did the elder horseman Chimed Dondog. He said, “My *söök* is Adai-Irgit of the Irgit.”

Decades of Soviet national politics (1944–1991) could not dissolve the clan identities among the Tyva people. During the period of forced socialist modernization and sedentarization, members of local clans joined the newly established collectives or inhabited the newly built villages in the same area where their clans have lived for generations. The central Kyzyl and Tanḡy prov-

inces were the exception because their population consisted of a mix of different clans as a result of migration from other parts of Tyva. These central provinces were considered attractive due to their proximity to the capital city of Kyzyl. In most cases, a clan identity is still inherent to knowledge of one's life geography. The Tyva linguist Mira Bavuu-Surun has discussed how the Tyva people define themselves in relation to geography. She suggested that the Tyva have a strong sense of belonging with their own clan and homelands. Bavuu-Surun (2018: 274) wrote:

Interesting are the names given to each other by the Indigenous Tyva people on a geographic principle. The Tozhu-Tyva self-identify as the Tozhu, or the Tyva of Tozhu, while they define the rest [of the Tyva people] as the Khemchik, inhabitants of the Khemchik area. People from central Tyva, which is adjacent to the Enisei River, are distinguished from the Erzin-Tes people, the Tozhu, the Khemchik (inhabitants of the Khemchik River drainage basin), while they define themselves as the people of Ulug-Khem. Within the larger territories, the clan grounds are distinguished as well. This reveals the Tyva people's acute sense of belonging with a particular clan and with a particular territory.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable increase in various rituals that support belonging within an extended family or clan and the family or clan's (re-)bonding with homelands in Tyva. I suggest that an increase in the number of bonding rituals compensates for a weakening of the intra-clan and clan-homeland relationships during socialism. For instance, three to four generations of people who share common ancestors make a joint consecration of a particular landscape that is related to their ancestors. In the summer of 2018, I was invited to the gathering of the Kezek-Soyan clan (subgroup of the Soyans), known also as Choldak-Soyan or Kezek-Choldak, to whom I am related through my maternal grandmother who was named İomchur (1926–2002) and had a mixed heritage belonging to the Tyvan-speaking Sartyyl and Kezek-Soyan kinship groups and Mongolian-speaking Dörvöd tribe. More research is required on the ongoing processes of Tyva kinship groups' re-bonding with their homelands.

THE SOYAN KINSHIP GROUP: THE ETHNONYM AND ORIGIN STORIES

The Soyans are considered one of the ancient tribes of Inner Asia. The possible Turkic and Samoyedic origins of the clan and its ethnonym have long been debated in scholarship (e.g., Aiyzhy 2010: 33–36; Prokofieva 2011: 89–96; Tatarintsev 1984). Tyva ethnographer Marina Mongush included the Soyans among other groups of Turkic origin—alongside the Tülüş, Dolaan, Teleg,

and Kuular—whose clan unity was established in approximately the sixth century (2010: 28). Vainshtein discussed the ancient origin of the Soyans, relying on a legend about the Soyans’ descent from a bear, which, he suggested, testified about the clan’s long history. Vainshtein (1957: 197) quoted an excerpt from the legend as follows:

The Soyans originate from a woman and a bear (the latter reveals totemic beliefs and that the legend is ancient). In the beginning, their children lived in the cave Soksai by the River Murgun in Mongolia. Little by little, the Soyans became numerous and started to move. They went to the Altai-Khöl Valley on the River Tes, then to the Shagry Valley, and from there to the place Khok. The Soyans became so numerous that here they separated into different clans. Some inhabited the steppe; others went to live in the forest. The forest Soyans domesticated reindeer.

In Vainshtein’s opinion, this legend points to the early appearance of the Soyans, to their non-Samoyedic origin, and to the fact that initially they were steppe people and only later some of them began to practice reindeer herding. Linguist Boris Tatarintsev also argued against the Samoyedic origin of the Soyans and their ethnonym. In doing so, he considered that, first, the ethnonym Soyans is a self-identification term. Second, he pointed out that Turkic language materials must be considered a primary source material and that materials in Mongolian must be considered a secondary source material, and only because of their proximity to and contacts with the Turkic peoples. He drew comparisons with the stem *soy-* (it has more ancient version *sog-*) in the Turkic languages, with meanings close to “the people,” “the real people,” “noble,” “good,” and “pure” (Tatarintsev [2000] 2015: 350–352). The contemporary Turkish language contains the word *soy*, which conveys a range of meanings: noble, high-born, an ancestor, family, generation, origin. The ending *-an* is a relict plural affix (*ibid.*).

Some researchers have drawn similarities between the ethnonyms Soyans and So. The So people lived in the Altai Mountains in the pre-Turkic period, before the fourth century. Currently, there is a “bone” (*söök*) So among the Kumandin people, who are one of the Altai ethnic groups (Potapov 1969: 59). Vladimir Orus-ool, author of the book *Tyvalar* (2015: 21–27, 57–58), connected the Soyans with the So people who lived in the Altai Mountains.

WE, THE SOYANS, LOVE HORSES!

It is common in Tyva to ask a new acquaintance where he or she is from. I often answer with one word, “Akaa.” It says that I am a Soyans from Ak-Erik, Tes-Khem. The Ak-Erik Soyans address their elder men as *akaa*; in other parts of Tyva, the

term *akyi* is common. *Akaa* is dialect for “elder brother.” This word is present only in the dialect of the Soyans who live in one place—Kyzyl-Chyrya sumu, known for its village’s name Ak-Erik, in Tes-Khem, south Tyva. The term *akaa* is used when other kinship terms, for instance that of a maternal uncle (*daai*), an older brother-in-law (*chestei*), a younger brother-in-law (*küdee*) or a kin-by-marriage (*kuda*, non-gendered) cannot be applied. Consider the suggestion by the Soyans man Viacheslav Arina (video recording, Shara-Nuur, June 2019) that the word *akaa* encompasses close relationships between kin. He told me:

Our *akaa* people are the Soyans people. The word *akaa* comes from the word *akyi* and it is a more tender way to say it. That is why we address a person who is slightly older, even only one year older, as *akaa*. This way of speaking is well suited to the tenderness in a relationship between an older brother and younger sibling.

As the result of metonymical transfer, *akaa* became a vernacular term of (self-) identification among the Soyans who live south of the Tes River. Mira Bavuu-Surun has noted that the word *akaa* acquires a specific meaning with an inherent localization as “men (Indigenous population) of Ak-Erik” among the Soyans who live in Tes-Khem kozhuun (2018: 211–212). The Ak-Erik Soyans define themselves using this word as *akaa*, or, in plural, as *akaalar* and “the *akaa* people” (*akaa chon*). The *akaa* people pride themselves on being gifted horsemen with good horses that graze on the steppes, which are rich in nutritious “hot grass” (*izig-o’t*) and suitable for horse racing. When we discuss horse-related topics, my horsemen-kin often say, “We, the Soyans people, have passion for horses in our blood!” or “We, the *akaa* people, are interested in horses!”

The present-day *akaa* Soyans consist mainly of the Kyzyl-Soyan subclan (majority) and Kezek-Soyans. Distinctions between the two subclans are blurred, though, and the Ak-Erik Soyans consider themselves a single clan group. However, knowledge about subclan affiliation has persisted. Several interlocutors identified themselves as Kyzyl-Soyan in our conversations during fieldwork, including my paternal relatives—grandmother Irisinjmaa Kadyp-ool and uncles Khorlai Lajaa and Sergeï Kaldan. I suggest that the Kyzyl-Soyans and Kezek-Soyans, who lived in neighboring territories and who practiced intermarriage, intermingled after the Kyzyl-Soyans’ displacement from their clan grounds in the Khaan Kögeï Mountains during the 1930s and 1940s. The Kezek-Soyans previously lived between the Tes River and Lake Dus-Khöl and the Imaalyk Mountain.

Imaalyk Mountain and the adjacent Agar Mountain and Lake Shara-Nuur used to constitute the northern edges of the Kögeï Soyans’ seasonal grounds. Previously known as the Kögeï Soyans, the Kyzyl-Soyan clan was forced to abandon part of its territory and to resettle in present-day Tes-Khem and Erzin provinces of Tyva.

DID YOU COME TO STEAL OUR HORSES? DOING RESEARCH AS A TYVA IN THE BORDER AREA

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999: 137) has noted, “[T]here are multiple ways of both being an insider and an outsider in Indigenous contexts. The critical issue with insider research is the constant need for reflexivity.” When discussing self-reflexivity during fieldwork, I acknowledge that different perspectives—being the Soyan, the Tyva, and the woman—have shaped my research with pastoralists in the transboundary region of Mongolia, Tyva, and the Altai Republic. I noticed that I began introducing myself by explaining where I am from. Moreover, I had to negotiate my identity in every case in response to the geographical setting and land-based identities of my interlocutors. I identified myself in several different ways. In my home Tes-Khem province and the neighboring Erzin province in southern Tyva, I was a Soyan from Ak-Erik; my local interlocutors were aware of my paternal and maternal kinship ties, some of interlocutors were my kin. “People from the border area” is another way of an expanded regional identification. During our conversations, herders from Tere-Khöl, Erzin, Tes-Khem, and Övür provinces—all of them are situated along the border with Mongolia—relied on our “borderland identity” to emphasize, for instance, a shared past and commonalities in our dialects and horsemanship practices. Consider, for instance, how horseman Oleg Sambuu in southwestern Övür kozhuun brought up geography as a unifying point when talking to me. Discussing the neatness of horse tack in March 2017, he noticed, “We, the southern people who live by the border, know how to properly make and use equine tack.” In other parts of Tyva, my interlocutors saw me as the Soyan from Ak-Erik; they often used the term *akaa* to talk about my clan belonging.

Among the Tyvan-speaking people in western Mongolia, I had to be more specific with my clan belonging and “the Soyan” was never enough. Here I always clarified that I belong with the Kyzyl-Soyan branch of the Soyan kinship group. My local acquaintances mentioned, as a rule, their subclans when introducing themselves. For instance, the elder Chimed Dondog introduced himself as Adai-Irgit. His wife, Dugurzhap Torlo, was Mool-Irgit. Chimed Dondog explained that the Irgit group, who live in the Altai Mountains, consists of multiple branches, including: Ak-Irgit, Choodu-Irgit, Shunjuur-Irgit, Ulug-Irgit, Kalchan-Irgit, Mool-Irgit, and Adai-Irgit (fieldnotes, Bayan Ölgii, Mongolia, July 2016). The elder explained that the Irgits are the Kök-Monchak people. In other conversations, he used a definition “the Tyva of Altai Mountains” when talking about his Tyvan-speaking people living in the Altai Mountains of Mongolia.

In other parts of western Mongolia, my south Tyva origin was important. In Zavkhan and Uvs provinces, Mongol herders live across the border from Erzin and Tes-Khem provinces of Tyva. This proximity allows for cross-border inter-

generational relationships. As an example, I refer to an encounter during one fieldwork trip. In June 2016, I visited the horseman Delgerekh Bazarragchaa (b. 1942) from the Ikh-Khotogoid ethnic group at his summer site in the Tes River region, Zavkhan province of Mongolia. He was a well-known racehorse trainer awarded with titles “The distinguished *uiach* of Zavkhan province”¹⁰ in 2001 and “The distinguished *uiach* of Mongolia” in 2006. When he learned that I was from south Tyva, he assumed that I must know son of his friend Bady-Khöö, horseman Sergeï Ynaalaï, who lives in Erzin kozhuun, Tyva. Delgerekh Bazarragchaa wanted to send greetings to Sergeï Ynaalaï and praised his Tyva friend’s beautiful horses and horsemanship skills. I was happy to confirm that I am acquitted with Sergeï Ynaalaï who is arguably the best-known horseman in Tyva. He is famous for his skills in breeding and training award-winning racehorses. His horses are distinguished by their dominant chestnut coat and fine conformation.

However, geographical proximity is not always about friendship. It has a potential for conflicts as well. Tyva–Mongolian relationships have been damaged by an increase in livestock raiding in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since the conflicts were most intense in the transboundary region, and especially because I wanted to discuss livestock theft, I felt obligated to talk openly about my south Tyva origin with herders in Mongolia. My interlocutors on two sides of the border responded differently when I talked about livestock theft. Tyva herders willingly answered my questions; sometimes they initiated the discussion. However, Mongol herders did not bring up the issue of cross-border livestock theft in our conversations. They avoided the topic when answering my vague questions, “What are the current issues with herding?” and “Are there border problems?” After several days in western Mongolia, I realized that the unproblematic picture of herding life in the transboundary region was not entirely correct. My interlocutors only responded when I asked them directly, “Have you lost your livestock to thieves from the other side of the border?” The horseman Buianzhargal Bolubaatar (b. 1976) shared the following story: “My eyes tear up every time when I remember my race-winning stallion, which was stolen in 2001. It was taken across the border, and I could not bring him back.” Another horseman, Iadam Khökhöo (b. 1967), literally teared up when talking about his horse, which was stolen by thieves “from across the border” in the first decade of the twenty-first century. While listening to them, I noticed that my interlocutors/hosts carefully chose words that avoided emphasizing the ethnicity of the thieves; instead, they talked about “thieves from across the border.” I suggest that my interlocutors were reluctant to discuss the conflict topic due to an understanding of host–guest relationships and hospitality norms in Mongolia. Customary law ensured my guest rights for help. In addition, it protected me from any possible offense. Thus, customary understanding of hospitality interfered with my research, and I had to develop a method with straightforward questions.

Unlike Mongolia, my Tyva identity and the shared Tyva-Altai history of livestock theft conflicts caused a problem in the Altai Republic, Russia. While driving in Ulagan province, which borders Tyva's Bai-Taïga kozhuun, I met the owners of the tourist encampment, an Altai man and his adult son, and asked them for rooms. I introduced myself as a researcher from Tyva. Their greeting sounded hostile, "You came to learn where our horses are, so later your countrymen can steal them!" I responded with a joke, "Yes, I hope you will tell me where the summer pastures of your horsemen are located. I want to get myself a star-spotted Altai horse!" The hosts laughed, and the tone of conversation warmed up. There were no vacant cottages, so they offered us lodging in the cafeteria building for a modest fee. The next morning, I chatted with two Altai women who were cooking breakfast—deep-fried pastries and freshly caught graylings. They spoke in their mother Altai tongue. I spoke mostly Tyvan, slightly adjusting it to the Altai phonetics or using a few Altai words I knew. The Altaian and Tyvan languages are closely related, so our conversation was fun, and we understood each other most of the time.

Land-based kinship can be understood narrowly as one's clan grounds or more broadly as belonging with the transboundary region between the Saian and Altai Mountains. This flexibility makes it possible to interact with various communities across the area. As a researcher who studied with communities in my home region, I was exposed to multiple interpretations of my land-based identities and their implications, which revealed the shared past and traumatic experiences of the cross-border relationships.

THE RESEARCHER'S GENDER

Though women conduct tasks on horseback and own horses, the family's herd belongs to the man of the family. Horse training and racing—status-defining activities—are associated with men only. This explains why I work with mostly men in the field and why men appear in the book more frequently than women.

Due to the masculine nature of Tyva horsemanship and my gender, I constantly shifted back and forth between insider and outsider positions while conducting fieldwork with horsemen. Being a Tyva and having experience with the herding life and horse riding has informed my insider position. I was able to discuss various horse-related topics with horsemen, though sometimes they began answering by saying to me, "You know it well. Explain to your companions how it is" (e.g., fieldwork interview with Khorlai Lajaa, Tyva, June 2015). However, I discovered that my horsemen-relatives avoided discussing some topics. One of such themes was celibacy, when horsemen avoid close relationships with their wives during a horse-training period. In my home region in Tyva, only one horseman subtly hinted at it, "When I am training racehorses, I stay

with my horses and away from the yurt.” In contrast, two horsemen in western Mongolia mentioned that sexual activities between horsemen and their wives are restricted during a racehorse training period.

In the following paragraphs, I analyze how gender distinctions occurred during fieldwork. In March 2017, I received a call from my cousin Otchugash Soyán. He suggested, “Older sister *ugbaï*, we are going to brand and castrate two-year old horses. Would you like to come with us?” Without my researcher position, Otchugash would not invite me because only men conduct these horse-related seasonal tasks. Four of my maternal cousins kept their horses in one herd. We arrived at the spring encampment between Ulug Saïgyn Mountain and the River Tes, where our cousin, Eres Dÿpshÿn, who was the herder, had just moved. There we met more men—mostly relatives led by our uncle, Melesteï Oiun, who oversaw the process because of his experience and having “a light hand” for this work. The yurt of my bachelor cousin Eres was in an after-moving condition with unorganized furniture and unpacked kitchen utensils. The men started preparations by corralling the herd. In the beginning, they made a strong *chipaar* tea and sat in a circle while chatting and enjoying the energizing drink. I resorted to performing tasks that were expected of me as female kin: cleaning dishes, making a fire, and cooking horse meat and blood sausages. When the horsemen started to work, I found myself in an observer’s position. The men chatted between themselves. I joined the conversations only by asking about a process. I received a brief answer before the men concentrated again on their work. First, they caught a young horse with a lasso (*sydym*), put him down, and restrained him. Then, my uncle Melesteï Boraevich castrated the horse using a knife. After that, Otchugash and others branded the horse. During this day, when my horsemen-kin were engaged in horse-related tasks, I constantly shifted between insider (as a Tyva and kin) and outsider (a woman) positions.

Members of my clan, who have a certain weight among horsemen due to their expertise, have taken me into their social networks through the hosting–greeting relationship. Among them, two persons have been especially supportive in my research. My paternal uncle Roman Soyánovich Aldyn-Kherel hosted me numerous times. He is a knowledgeable horseman and eloquent storyteller. I followed him to the horse races, drove around our seasonal pastures with him, and listened to his stories about our homeland, people, and horses. Roman *akaa*’s stories have prompted me to think about landscapes and horses as storytellers who keep and share knowledge and memories about people. When I had just started doing research in 2015, Roman *akaa* said, “It is good that you are documenting our life today. In the future, the children of our children will learn from your work.”

Vladimir Soyánovich Orus-ool from my Soyán clan has supported my research by sharing his expertise in horse husbandry, by telling stories about our

clan, hosting me and my colleagues during our fieldwork, and introducing me to his relational networks beyond our clan grounds in southern Tyva. Vladimir Orus-ool has contributed to the popularization of horsemanship in Tyva in multiple ways: establishing the horse breeding enterprise in the 1990s, supporting a commemoration festival for the racehorse Ezir Kara (est. in 1993), and aiding documentary film crews and music producers in filming horses in Tyva. His example was inspiring for me in learning and sharing knowledge about horses as a way to care about our kin.

NOTES

1. Though the groom's name, according to his official documents, is Temir, his family and community call him Samba, I refer to him as Samba throughout the book. I refer to my interlocutors by their names, without anonymizing them, as a way to acknowledge their knowledge in this book. Some interlocutors expressed to me that they are interested in my research and proud to share knowledge about their people and homeland. In addition, they gave their informed consent for participating in this study and for publicizing their names in research outcomes. In situations that could endanger participants, I avoid giving names unless I have explicit permission for that.
2. The dish of honor, *uzba*, is the tail or rump cut from the Tyva fat-tail breed of sheep together with several vertebra. An alcoholic drink, two ribs, and a tibia bone with meat accompany *uzba*. The receiver must cut small pieces of *uzba* and share them with neighbors at the table. The rest is taken home. Customary law regulates which kin receive *uzba* and when (during a wedding or else before it, when the groom's relatives ask for the girl's hand). In recent years, there has been an unspoken competition in the number and sizes of *uzba* exchanged between the groom's and bride's kin (more on understandings of mutton among the Tyvan-speaking peoples see, e.g., Kristensen [2019], Lamazhaa, Kuzhuget, and Mongush [2022]).
3. Transcription from the video recording filmed by the author, 4 July 2013.
4. The group of "hot grasses" (literal translation of the phrase *izig o't*) includes plants of several genera: *Kochia*, *Artemisia*, *Ephedra*, and *Parmelia* (L. Arakchaa 2015: 79, 105–10).
5. In Tyvan, there is no word that translates as "wilderness" in its English understanding. In some contexts, *cher* encompasses the meaning "a place beyond a territory of seasonal encampments."
6. Examples from Mongolia are relevant to this discussion of Tyva pastoralism for a number of reasons. In addition to being geographical neighbors, the Tyva and Mongol peoples share a common past as part of various states, they both practice Buddhism and shamanism, and currently rural communities in Tyva and Mongolia rely on mobile pastoralism as an income source. For more on the history of Inner Asia, see Sneath (2007); for an example of cross-border research in the area, see Humphrey and Sneath (1999).
7. The syncretism of Buddhism and shamanism among the Tyva people (O. Khomushku 2010; M. Mongush 1992, 2001) allows for non-conflicting hierarchies where the superordinate being is understood as either Buddha (*Burgan bashky*) or Master of Tandy (*Tandy eezi*). I observed this phenomenon in everyday situations among pastoralists in Tyva. For instance, a herder who defines himself as a Buddhist, visits Buddhist temple-khüree in Tyva and Mon-

- golia, and invites a lama to conduct rituals, while he also venerates (masters of) his homelands, including the mountains Agar and Khaan Kögöi.
8. In the summer of 2019, we conducted fieldwork among the Kyrgys with Professor Juha Janhunen and linguist Ekaterina Gruzdeva from the University of Helsinki. Unlike me, Professor Janhunen speaks Mongolian fluently and encountered no obstacles in communicating with the Kachyk Kyrgys people. A local interlocutor asked me, “What kind of Tyva are you who does not speak Mongolian?!” (fieldnotes, Tyva, summer 2019).
 9. In this book, I do not engage in the ongoing debates on kinship society in a historical perspective. Anthropologist David Sneath, in his book *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (2007), discusses approaches to kinship and follows the etymology of the terms “clan” and “tribe.”
 10. *Uiach* is the title for an acclaimed horse trainer; *uiach* means “the one who tethers [horses]” and originates from the Mongolian verb “to tie” or “to tether” (*uiakb*).