BEING BETWEEN BEINGS:
SOIOT HERDER-HUNTERS IN A SACRED LANDSCAPE

A thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK

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Abstract
This study is an ethnography of Oka-Soiot human-animal relations in the Eastern Saian Mountains of westernmost Buriatia in South Central Siberia. It follows ten herder-hunter households from their winter residences to their summer camps, describing their year-round relations with dogs, reindeer, horses, and wolves. Although known in Russian literature as descendants of the people who first harnessed and saddled reindeer, contemporary Soiot herder-hunters have shifted their skills to other species. Yet they continue to share with their Tozhu, Tofa, and Dukha neighbours a heritage of hunting, aided by transport reindeer. Historically, all four groups engaged other species alongside reindeer to varying degree. This diversity of animals is particularly magnified in Soiot households as a result of their proximity to Buriat settler pastoralists since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Buddhist ritual practice became widespread among these settlers, affecting also Soiot cosmology. Exploring Soiot relations with ‘wild’ and ‘domestic’ animals, this thesis positions domestication as 'ongoing perspectival expansion,' experienced at the intersection of shamanist and Buddhist approaches to sentient beings.

The first part of the thesis focuses on how people and animals move between perspectives associated with forest and pasture, as a strategy for life in a shared landscape. It presents the Soiot household as a mirror image of the spirit-mastered household, while contrasting it to the Eurocentric model of the domus. It then shows how interspecies collaboration within the household can lead to perspectival expansion among its members, arguing that such a perspective furthers the recognition of affordances in the landscape. This is followed by a study of shamanist and Buddhist approaches to spirit masters, presenting parallel but non-identical views of the landscape. As the perspective of animals becomes expanded in the human household, so householders' perspectives of the landscape are expanded in their encounter with the ritual domain of Buddhism. While Buddhist ritual practice attempts to domesticate spirit masters, it remains vital to Soiot hunters that the domestication of spirit
masters remain incomplete, and that reciprocal relations with spirit households are maintained.

Part two focuses on proximity between species, introducing dog-human and reindeer-human collaborations. It examines the autonomy of dogs as hunters in their own right, and looks at evolving reindeer herd dynamics and species flux in Soiot households. Part three focuses on the material aspect of human-animal relations, focusing on implements and structures of the household as communicative devices rather than tools of domination. Horses and humans are seen to signal their intentions through roping techniques, while wolves and humans 'read each other' through trap design, den placement, and empathy. Being the first ethnography of Soiot human-animal relations, this thesis offers new knowledge to anthropology by filling a void in south Siberian ethnography, while calling renewed attention to a multi species perspective in Siberia. It contributes to classical debates on the human role in animal domestication, and challenges the division between hunting and pastoralist economies in its presentation of households that engage in both, and for whom the two remain inseparable.
Declaration Statement

I, Alexander Christian Oehler, have composed this thesis. It has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree. It is based upon original research I undertook myself. All quotations are distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.

(A. Oehler) 

Date: 3. October 2016
To Beth, Lars, and Bergen
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Chapter One: Introduction

Introduction: From the Sentience of Fish

16 October 2013. Crusty snow banks of a little creek running near Uncle Burzhon's hunting cabin were sparkling vividly on this autumn afternoon. We had just returned from our morning fishing at a broad pool on upper Sorok river, when Regbi knelt on the frozen creek to clean several of our fish for a quick meal. It had been a beautiful morning, but we had returned hungry and with hardly a catch. After we had eaten our meager rations, I asked Uncle Borzhon why there had been so few fish at the pool. As usual, he thought for a moment. Then he said the fish had probably known that it would be a warm day, and so they had traveled downstream. On a cold day the river is frozen further downstream. On a warm day it can stay ice-free for a longer time, attracting fish. Further upstream where we were now, the river never completely froze thanks to the hot springs that fed into it. People could fish here year round. But the fish preferred to go downstream, lack of ice permitting. In the evening, after we had returned from an equally meager afternoon of fishing, Borzhon boiled four more of our fish in butter water. We ate with our hands, sucking the hot flesh from the bones, and leaving behind four meagre skeletons. With our bread gone, it was fish every day now. To brighten the moment, Burzhon asked if I had noticed that 'fish have no brain.'

Trying to see whether he was teasing me or not, I slipped my half-eaten fish back into the buttered water and argued: 'Very well do fish have brains!' In fact, I could recall diagrams from biology papers I had read on the topic, which described neurological response mechanisms in fish. There were diagrams of fish brains in these articles – so even if they were to be ever so small, fish had brains all right! Not affected by my 'scientific' convictions, Borzhon went on to challenge me to crack open the head of the half eaten fish in my soup: “Find its brain!” All three of us had to laugh. What if I couldn't find its brain? What if, indeed, there wasn't one to be found by me? What good was it to “know” that it had a brain, if I couldn't find it with my own finger
tips? To delay my immanent embarrassment, I reminded Burzhon that he had told me in the morning how the fish knew it would be a warm day. How could they have “known” such things if they had no brains? Just when I thought I had won this comic duel, Regbi finally spoke. Looking at me, as one would at a prideful little child, he said with conviction: 'No brain is needed to know that the water is warmer downstream. A fish can feel with its skin and thus it knows.'

Both men had set the record straight: Firstly, to know about a thing or a process without having experienced it was not useful at all in their context, in fact, such disembodied knowledge was so partial that it could be dangerous - if worthy of being called knowledge at all. And secondly, to separate the mind from its environment (its body and everything beyond that body) was a preposterous project. The brain – if it did physically exist - could not function on its own. It was not necessary, therefore, to search for a small organ tucked away somewhere between cartilage and bone, floating in buttered water. The fish had withdrawn from us that day – as much as the essence of the fish in my bowl had been withdrawn from its body. Together the fish had intended to be somewhere else, and we had not attuned ourselves to their movement. Pinpointing the seat of their intentionality, whether to the neurons in their brain, or to the nerve endings in their skin, or somewhere else altogether, was a superfluous task in a world where intention was not understood to rise from bounded form. Intentions were seeping through the skin of these fish, coming from a much broader semiosphere. In short, it was naive to reason about animals in isolation from their spirit master.
My encounter with Borzhon and Regby, as described above, embodies some of the core themes of this thesis in its concern with the shared history of humans and animals in a sacred landscape. As a guest and student of a group of herder-hunter households, I was allowed to join in herding and hunting activities, granting me insight into what it means to be Soiot today. As a result of this experience I will argue that the essence of being Soiot was expressed in the ability to draw on potential ways of being and of seeing self and others in a shared landscape. At the heart of this way of being and of seeing lay a householder's propensity to maintain an open mind to old and new affiliations with sentient beings, never assuming to fully understand the extent of such encounters, nor wishing to take full control of the diverse intentions that may be found at play within them. This insight has become pivotal to my understanding of the relationships enacted between people, animals, and spirits, which have become the subject of this thesis. However, before delving into the history and contemporary identity of Soiots, which is the subject of chapter two, I will here stake out the topic of my research, my motivations for carrying it out, and the methods that were used to obtain the data presented in this thesis. This is followed by
my research questions and main argument. Finally, I will contextualize these questions within relevant literatures, before closing the chapter with a brief outline of the structure for this thesis.

**Research Topic and Motivation**

My initial interest in South Siberia came with a curiosity about non-western perceptions of animal sentience, and with an interest in the ways animal domestication was understood by those indigenous to what is an intersection of Mongolian steppe lands with the forested hills of southern Russia. Tim Ingold's (1980) *Hunters, Pastoralists, and Ranchers*, a book that explores the domestication of reindeer in the circumpolar north, had sparked in me an interest in this region, a place known to this day as one of the southernmost and earliest sites of reindeer domestication in the world. As I was preparing for my fieldwork in late 2012 I had noticed in the literature for south Siberia a preoccupation with origins. Russian archaeologists and linguists had attempted to establish an origin point for contemporary ethnicities¹, while both 'western' and Soviet scholarship had looked to the area as a cultural and linguistic contact zone that would have given birth to a proto-language possibly underlying contemporary Turkic languages². Similar to the interest in linguistic origins, a kind of proto-shamanism had been debated on the basis of a number of difficult to date petroglyphs (Rozwadowski 2012, 2008; Bahn 2010; Devlet, E. 2001; Devlet, M. A. 2001; Devlet, E. and M. Devlet 2002). The search for the origins of reindeer domestication in south central Siberia, which also had been sparked by rock art (Vainshtein 1980; Devlet 1965; Kyzlasov 1960, 1952; Griaznov 1933) was thus in good company. It is no surprise that the Saian-Altai region³ had become known as *Urheimat*, or ‘original homeland’ for many things.

After an exploratory visit to Soiots of the Eastern Saian Mountains of western Buriatia in 2013, and following close readings of local ethnography, I began to question whether a

³In Russian literature commonly referred to as the “Saian-Altai historical-ethnographic region” [Rus. *Saiano-Altaiskaya istoriko-etnograficheskaya oblast*].
narrow focus on reindeer and their domestication was indeed helpful in understanding indigenous livelihoods in the Eastern Saians. Reindeer still played a part in the lives of several people, and shamanist activities were of wide importance. But particularly for Soiots there seemed to exist a much richer and more complicated history of human-animal relations; a story that had come to stand in relation to the “five types of animals” (Bur. *taban khushuu mal*) known among Oka-Buriats (Rassadin 1996:46) as people transitioned from being primarily hunter-herders to becoming herder-hunters. This story had not been framed purely by shamanism—at least not for the past 300 years. In Tofalariia shamanism had encountered Orthodox Christianity, following Russian settlement in the 16th century, and after the arrival of Buriat settlers in the 17th century, Oka-Soiot ritual activities had encountered Tibetan and Mongolian itinerant Buddhist lamas. Neither of these influences on human-animal relations were addressed in the literature. Finally, the people of my field site did not seem much concerned with the origins of languages, ritual activities, species, or even ethnicity. Life seemed to be much more a matter of navigating what was there and finding ways to prosper in a sociality consisting of humans, animals, and spirits. Returning from my exploratory visit, I recognized the need for an ethnography that would address Soiot relations with multiple species alongside reindeer, and in light of divergent ritual histories.

**Field Site and Methods**

After exploratory visits to the Republics of Tyva and Buriatia in 2013, I decided to place my fieldwork in *Okinskii raion* (henceforth Oka District, or simply Oka), the westernmost administrative district of the Republic of Buriatia. Due to visa restrictions for foreigners conducting research in the Russian Federation, my fieldwork took place over the course of ten months, divided into consecutive periods of three months each, followed by another month spent with Tofa hunters and reindeer herders in Irkutskaya oblast’. From the beginning I had

4These are traditionally horses (*morin*), cows (*ukheer*), yak (*harlag*), sheep (*khonin*), and goats (*iamaan*), and for Oka-Soiots a sixth category: reindeer (*sagaan mal*).
intended to balance my attention between ethnographic and archival research in order to produce an ethnohistory of human-animal relations in the Eastern Saians. But given time constraints, I limited my archival research to the cold winter months (January-March) a time during which my interlocutors did not engage in vital hunting and herding activities. Thus the second period of my fieldwork was spent in archives and libraries of Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Kyren, and Orlik, with occasional visits to my ethnographic site at Uro. Although I was able to collect a large amount of data during this time, little of it spoke to Soiot human-animal relations prior to Soviet collectivization. Consequently I decided to focus this thesis around an ethnographic outlook, emphasizing contemporary human-animal relations and leaving a study of humans and animals in the kolkhoz era for a future endeavour.

The Saian Mountains form the southernmost tip of Siberia, their forest-alpine and forest-tundra ecotones being subject to climate and vegetation akin to subarctic regions. Recent climatological history shows average temperatures as having averaged around +12°C in summer and -22°C in winter (GHCN 1981-1990). Bordering with Mongolia and the Tunka district to the south, Oka flanks the Republic of Tyva in the west, and faces Irkutsk Oblast’ to its north and northeast. With an average elevation of 1,000-2,000 meters above sea level, the region is underlain almost entirely by permafrost (Ransom et al. 2012:325), and jotted with steep peaks, the tallest of which is Munku-Sardyk with an altitude of 3,492m. At the centre of this mountainous district lies the Soiot Somon, an administrative subdistrict known to Oka-Buriats as the centre of indigenous Soiot culture and identity. Here, on the lower banks of Sorok river, several kilometers south of Mt. Rinchin Khumba (2,831m), is located the village of Sorok. Almost entirely of Soiot descent, the village serves as administrative centre for the Somon, which is home to numerous stock-herding families who migrate with their animals between summer and winter pastures in the mountainous backcountry.
Although contemporary Soiots speak Buriat\(^5\) (a Mongolian language variant), they are historically related to three Turkic groups indigenous to the Eastern Saians with whom they

\(^5\)As a fluent speaker of Russian I was initially apprehensive about my inability to speak Buriat, the republic's second official language after Russian, and Oka's primary language of communication. Although Buriat was spoken by all Oka residents, everyone spoke Russian fluently given it had been (and continues to be) sole instructional medium in the state school system. Moreover, several elderly Soiots took pride in speaking Russian, associating the language less with colonialism and more with the hiatus of their careers in the kolkhoz system. In total I required a translator on two occasions.
shared a related language as well as the Saian style of reindeer herding (e.g. Mongush 2012; Vainshtein 1980). These neighbours are the Tozhu of Todzhinskii raion in eastern Tyva, the Dukha (Tsaatan) of Khovsgol Province in northern Mongolia, and the Tofa (also known as Tofalars or Karagass) of Irkutskaiia oblast’. Dukha, Tozhu, and to lesser degree Tofa, have received recent attention from several western anthropologists, social geographers, and historians (e.g., Rasiulis 2016; Endres 2013; Küçüküстel 2013; Stepanoff 2012; Donahoe 2003; Wheeler 2000). Yet, Soiots, who are considered to be the most assimilated among the four, have largely escaped this resurgence in ethnographic interest. With the exception of Larissa Pavlinskaia (2002), a Russian anthropologist who conducted ethnographic and ethnohistorical fieldwork with Soiots in the 1990s resulting in her monograph *Kochevniki Golubikh Gor* (2002) [“Nomads of the Blue Mountains”], little anthropological work has been undertaken here since B. E. Petri’s 1926 (1927) expedition to Oka. Perhaps it was in part for this reason that the local administration and several herders and hunters of the hill country were so very inviting to this young foreigner. Soiot elder and representative for indigenous minorities, Badma Khorluevich Dondokov, together with the Soiot administration of Sorok, suggested contacting his youngest brother Baianbata, a married Soiot herder with three children to consider becoming my host.

Badma Khorluevich not only held an important post with the local administration at Orlik, he was also respected among fellow Soiots as a knowledgeable elder on all Soiot cultural matters. In addition he was well known throughout the hill country as an experienced veterinary specialist (Rus. *zootekhnik*) who had traveled from herd to herd for many years. In May of 2013 he invited me to visit Baianbata at his wooden cabin on Sorok river in the valley of Uro. Badma, Baianbata, and Borzhon—three brothers with their families—had lived here side by side in past years. Following government employment Badma had left the valley, and more recently Baianbata and his wife Beligt'e had built a house in the village so their children could attend school. With Beligt'e running the local post office and maintaining a household in the village, Baianbata was left alone at Uro. He could not bear to part with their yak herd in the hill country,
forcing the family to maintain a foot in both ways of life. Badma had introduced me as 'a young scholar seeking to write a book about Soiot life,' and Baianbata had happily agreed to share his cabin with me, making it my home base for the first two periods of fieldwork (September 2013 to March 2014). From here I was able to build relations with all households at Uro, while Beligt'e was happy to host me in their home in Sorok, allowing me to contact key people in the village. During my third field period (April to July 2014) I brought with me my own family, and together we stayed in a small cabin belonging to Tsydyp and Dagzama's household at Uro. In June our families jointly migrated to the their summer pastures, sharing their summer shelters on the confluence of Tustuk and Iakhashop rivers.

Throughout my fieldwork I relied on participant observation as my primary data gathering method, while using extensive unstructured interviews with a number of ritual specialists. At Uro I spent most days visiting households, offering assistance with chores ranging from cleaning stables and collecting yak droppings in pastures to water hauling and house construction. To ensure maximal time spent with householders, I followed a visitation schedule for part of the time. On occasion I was invited to join hunting parties or other tasks that would take a group of men into the taiga. Because of the gendered division of labour in Buriat and Soiot households, I naturally spent the majority of time in the company of men, which is doubtlessly reflected in my depiction of Soiot life. During break times, I would join in collective tea drinking around the kitchen table, again largely among men. For the most part, men and women conversed sparingly—even amongst themselves—one exception being

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6Throughout my fieldwork in Oka, I was able to draw on generous funding from the Arctic Domus project to pay for previously agreed upon monthly rent in the homes of my two host families. Although I was never asked to do so by my hosts, the extra money in their households helped cover expenses incurred by my presence.

7Especially during hunting trips where firearms might appear in photographs, it was sensible to abstain from taking pictures, as no one desired to be identified holding a rifle or fishnet for which they might not hold a license. Although several individuals allowed the recording of our conversations, a number of in-depth interviews had to be recorded in penciled jottings, which I reconstructed on my laptop immediately after each encounter. At the start of fieldwork, and prior to interviews, I reviewed participant consent forms with interlocutors, ensuring they understood the nature of this project and their participation in it. Pseudonyms are used for most interlocutors, unless they were well-known public figures or wished to be named. All given names are replaced with Buriat names beginning with the same letter, taken from the 2009 booklet, “Buriatskie imena” [Burian names], published by “Budissaia traditsionnaia Sankha Rossii” [Rus. for Buddhist traditional Association of Russia], Ivolginsk: Izdat. Budiskogo Universiteta.
smoking breaks taken by men on the wooden front steps of their homes. Here I would clarify my recordings, ensuring I had not misunderstood what I had observed earlier. Following ethnographic convention (cf. Emerson et al. 2011; Madden 2010) I carried with me at all times a slim notepad into which I jotted observed facts, keywords triggering memory of specific conversations, and reminders of things to look or ask for, as well as names, relations, and occasional illustrations. I then made it a habit to set aside one to two hours every evening to transform these jottings into detailed field notes on a laptop computer.

**Research Questions and Main Argument**

The historical transition of Soiot households from an economy characterized primarily by hunting, and assisted by the use of domestic reindeer for transportation, to a livelihood emphasizing herding activities, and substituted by hunting, provides a unique environment for a study of relationships between humans and other animals and how it can evolve over time. Rather than suggestive of a progressive unidirectional development, what I encountered in Oka seemed to speak to a recursiveness in which old practices could find new applications, and where older ideational configurations were not thrown out but enriched people's doings and knowings. In this way material practices relating to one species could be transferred and adapted to another, as was evident in shared saddle construction for horses and reindeer. In the same way, more recent cosmological ideas about animals were engaged alongside predating ones, as seen in the multiplicity of notions about animal souls. In short, there existed a degree of openness among the households of this study; a potential to move back and forth between ritual domains and between animal species as need and opportunity arose. The shift in emphasis from hunter-herding to herder-hunting therefore had to be seen not as an irreversible development, but rather as a broadening in the potential ways in which people engaged the land. The core aim of this thesis is therefore to frame domestication in terms of perspectival change.

Physical and temporal distances between humans and animals are often regarded as defining factors in terms of a species' “domesticity” or “tameness.” However, in Oka there
existed marked fluctuation in the physical proximity between households and their animals. This distance was nuanced in that animals commonly known as “wild” could be found closer to the household than several of the “domestic” species belonging to it. Thus horses and yak could be found ranging at great distance from their owners' residences, while wolves were interacting with watch dogs leaving their tracks around domestic compounds. Proximity could also be understood in terms of collaborative and communicative intensity between humans and other animals, which in many cases was fluctuating seasonally, as much as it had historically. On the one hand there were relations in which intentions were willfully aligned, as was the case between humans and dogs. On the other hand there were scenarios in which the intentions of each party remained purposefully concealed and opposed, as could be seen in human-wolf encounters. Where both came together, an intricate negotiation of hierarchies came to fore, as was displayed in human-dog-wolf encounters. Meanwhile, the seasonal intensity of all human-animal relations fluctuated, and had to be understood in terms of a negotiation of intentions, whether or not such were framed by a wild-tame dichotomy.

This flexibility in proximity and communicative intensity between species, as well as the historical flux in the importance of particular species vis-a-vis the household, generated a number of interesting questions in relation to domesticity, and more specifically about how such a concept had to be approached in the context of the Soiot household. If humans moved back and forth between social, economic, and ritual domains, then animals who were affected by these movements and who shared in this history with humans would also move between distinct domains. How would such flexibility affect the process of domestication in a species? Clearly such an approach had to redefine the criteria on which a species could be considered “domestic.” In this context, non-linguistic communication between humans and animals featured as an especially important qualifier in interspecies relations. Thus it mattered little whether one referred to an animal as wild or as domestic in Buriat or in Russian – what really counted was how an animal was known to relate and how one could relate to it in response.
These and other considerations arose from the materials of my fieldwork, and they are best summed up in the main research question for this thesis:

*How are the relations of Soiot herder-hunters with “wild” and “domestic” animals best understood in light of a past defined by reindeer domestication, and framed by competing sacred narratives about ‘taming’?*

To answer this main question in as practical a manner as possible, I have arranged the material of this thesis in response to three thematically related subquestions:

1. *How does collaboration between humans, animals, and spirits increase affordances in a sacred landscape?*
2. *How do space and time affect collaborative intensity between humans and animals, both in terms of seasonal and historical fluctuations?*
3. *How are material implements and structures of the household used as communicative devices between humans and other animals?*

The first question suggests that interspecies encounters can result in the broadening of one's ways of knowing the landscape. It proposes that such an expansion leads to a proliferation of the ways in which a being comes to benefit from the world. The second question recognizes that effective interspecies collaboration is subject to multiple external factors, and that humans and other animals adjust to these by optimizing their encounters with each other based on times and locations. The final question focuses on materiality as a means for non-linguistic communication, providing a venue for mutual reading, and thus for learning from and about each other.

**Theoretical Context and Contributions**

While in the field, and during the writeup of this thesis, three interrelated concepts emerged from my observations. They have since guided my understanding of life shared with other species in the Siberian mountainous taiga. These concepts are *perspective, proximity,* and *materiality*. In what follows I will briefly clarify what I mean by these terms, before
summarizing some of the theoretical literature within which I frame these. I will then go over some of the contributions of this thesis to the literature, specifically to recent debates in ethology and biosemiotics, as well as the transition from hunting to pastoralism in North Asia, and shamanist and Buddhist studies in south Siberia and the Himalayas. At first sight these four fields of inquiry may strike the reader as disparate. In my fieldwork, however, they were deeply interwoven, which is reflected in this thesis. Animal-human bonds could not be studied in isolation from their emplacement within the environment, and this emplacement was specifically couched in cosmological terms. Furthermore, the parallels between the manner in which humans moved between ritual domains, and how their animals moved between forest and pasture had to be acknowledged and addressed.

Perspective can be described as a way of seeing, as awareness, or as perception, and as I shall describe below, even as umwelt. In either case, what one sees and how one sees it is here understood as a result of one's social engagements with bearers of other perspectives. In the chapters that follow, I attempt to describe how conspecific and interspecies socialities affect perspective. Thus, Soiot yak herders have attuned themselves to seeing their landscape in terms of yak-specific needs. Attaining a yak’s perspective, for instance, grants the herder the ability to recognize affordances in the landscape – ranging from forage to altitude, and from shade to water access – suitable and desirable to yak. Upon reintroducing reindeer to the Soiot household, herders had to relearn an ancestral perspective. By way of encounter with settlers, such perspectival expansion can be extended also to ritual interpretations of the land, where interlocutors deliberately integrate colonial ritual practices into their ancestral activities, thereby taking advantage of multiple possible interpretations of land features.

Proximity, in the context of domestication, can be understood in temporal as well as physical terms. Temporal proximity may refer to the time that has passed between specific ways of relating to animals, or to the generations of selective breeding that have occurred, marking emergence of divergent physical and behavioral attributes in a species. Physical proximity, in
this thesis, refers to the spacial and relational distance between species, including the degree of relational intensity between humans and other animals. This ethnography emphasizes physical proximity by showing how distance and relational intensity affect household composition and interspecies communication. At the same time, the temporal quality of proximity is not marginalized as physical proximity perpetually fluctuates, both seasonally and historically. Seasonally speaking, for instance, human-horse communication is more nuanced in the summer when horses are physically close to the household. Historically speaking, reindeer have become physically and relationally more distant from the Soiot household as their importance has been eclipsed by yak.

Materiality in the context of this thesis is understood not as a physical object upon which are inscribed metaphysical intentions, but rather as a co-constituent in the making of all meaning. Thus the grain of a wood block communicates with the chisel of the carver: What emerges from the block is not the materialization of the carver's preconceived mental image, but it is a relationally construed form, negotiated in the encounter of diverse surfaces. This negotiation is by definition unpredictable and thus open to serendipitous new turns. The wood block's internal qualities co-shape the image in the carver's mind, breaking down the artificial divide between mental and material realities. In this regard I follow Ingold who argues that “[t]he properties of materials ... are not attributes but histories” (2007:15). Lassos or corrals are not objects possessing restrictive or directive properties. Rather they are known to us as objects of restriction because of their particular histories. Yet ongoing interaction between humans, animals, and inanimate materials must be expected to generate new histories. An open approach to material allows us to envision alternative histories which arise from changes in perspective. Here a lasso or a corral – even a trap – may attain alternative meanings. They can become implements with histories that transcend restriction and entrapment.

In recent years there has emerged a growing field that seeks to combine human and animal sciences into what some have called “etho-ethnology” or “ethno-ethology” (e.g. Lestel
Concerned with how meaning, interests, and affects are shared between humans and other animals, some authors have come to realize that humans are “not only profoundly influenced by animals, but that [they are] fully animal, not contingently (by phylogeny) but in an essential way, which is to say existentially,” and suggesting that the human tie to animals transcends the limitations of intellect (Lestel and Taylor 2013:184, emphasis in original). Questions such as, 'what makes us human?' usually result in a listing of 'unique traits' used to justify human exceptionalism. But from the perspective of being an animal among other animals, exceptionalism based on a denial of attributes can be seen only as racism (e.g. Haraway 2008; Taylor 2013) that stands in the way of an enriching exploration of interspecies becoming. One such exploration is Vinciane Despret's (2004) revisitation of “Hans,” a horse that had been thought to provide correct answers to mathematical problems by communicating through movement with its examiners in a 1904 Berlin courtyard. Despret shows that rather than solving puzzles, Hans had been reading bodily movement. In fact, he “could make human bodies be moved and be affected, and move and affect other beings and perform things without their owners’ knowledge” (Despret 2004: 113).

By looking at ways in which Soiots read animal movement in the landscape, and by how they anticipated animals' reading of human movement, this thesis addresses a number of core concerns raised by etho-ethnology.

The efforts of etho-ethnology to deconstruct what is left of the boundaries that separate culture from nature and humans from other animals in Western thought is echoed by the work of posthumanist scholars of many fields, most pertinently here, those concerned with communication between human and other animals and their broader environment (e.g. Descola and Palsson 1996; Descola 2001, 2013; Kohn 2007, 2013; Hornborg 2001). Several of these scholars have attempted to bring together the bios (Greek for “life”) of biology with the semeion (Greek for “sign”) of semiotics, to create the subfield of biosemiotics. In working against the Cartesian divide, Eduardo Kohn (2013) has attempted to utilize the biosemiotic perspective
without anthropomorphizing non human beings. For him the goal is to find out, “how the recognition that certain kinds of nonhumans think can help us harness properties in the world we might not otherwise notice” (Kohn 2014:280). One critique that has been made of Kohn's (2013) book, *How forests think*, an ethnography of Runa of Amazonia, has been that by singling out as uniquely human the symbolic capacity on which our language thrives, he is in danger of reinstating the nature/culture divide, when his very project has been to overcome it. In defense, Kohn reiterates that the symbolic is “nested” within broader forms of reference (Kohn 2014:278), many of which we share with other constituents of the biosphere. As such, Kohn recognizes the symbolic to have become a “kind” among “degrees” (cf. Peirce's continuums, Deacon 2012) of being. For Kohn the symbolic remains “open” by way of its interdependence with the broader semiosphere (Kohn 2014:279). My own work is inspired by this vision of emerging interconnected *kinds*, and while I am not entering the ontological jungle that is biosemiotics, this thesis speaks to the facilitation and enabling of openness, both in terms of communication and in terms of the perspectival expansion that can result from it.

The tension that exists between ideas of life on a continuum versus the emergence of identifiable *kinds* of beings is reflected in discussions surrounding the transition of hunting to pastoralism in North Asia (e.g. Ingold 1980, 1986; 2000), particularly where reference has been made to the potential implications of cosmology (Knight 2012; Willerslev 2012, 2013; Willerslev et al. 2015). When Tim Ingold (1980:223) initially contrasted pastoralists with hunters, he stressed that herders have individual access to resources, set production targets, are not subject to generalized reciprocity, and can grow their herds in size. Inspired by this contrasting of herders with hunters, Willerslev et al. (2015:4) provocingly suggest that no drastic shift occurs in the way people relate to animals as the result of a transition from hunting to herding. In fact, they argue, a hunter's attitude to prey may live on in his relationship with domestic animals as can be seen in a comparison of ritualized killings of wild animals with the sacrifices of domesticated reindeer. My research supports Willerslev's et al. thesis, not by
focusing on ritual sacrifice but, by identifying the importance of autonomous space as an additional aspect that has been carried over from hunting to herding. Furthermore, access to cattle and hay production sites among Soiots was indeed limited to the owning household, as Ingold had suggested for pastoralists. However, none of his other contrasting criteria seemed to hold fast: productive targeting under kolkhoz management had led to a breach of carrying capacity in the landscape, and at the time of my fieldwork targeting population size in yak herds was hardly possible due to an uncontrollable presence of wolves.

A cosmological framing of domestication comes to fore also in the literature of Buddhist and shamanist studies of the Himalayas, Mongolia, and southern Siberia. Much has been written about pre-Buddhist mountain cults and shamanist activities in Tibet, the Himalayas, and Mongolia and their later incorporation (or domestication) into Buddhism (e.g. Mumford 1989, 2004; Diemberger 1996; Steinmann 1996; Heller 1996). Southern Siberia represents an interesting if outlying example in this regard, because indigenous peoples of the southern taiga came in contact with the mountain cult of Buriat settlers who later accepted Buddhism (Gomboev 2002; Pavlinskaia 2002; Belyaeva 2009). This thesis therefore contributes to our understanding of how the shamanist descendants of indigenous populations credited with initial domestication of reindeer in the Saians have lived in close association with a pre-Buddhist mountain cult (e.g. Mel'nikova 1994) and its subsequent “scriptualization” (Blondeau 1996:iv) at the hands of Buddhist clergy. Speaking of the Himalayas, Blondeau argues that, “Buddhist lamas like to emphasize that with Buddhicization of a region local animal sacrifices are no longer carried out, when in actuality we have many examples of this practice being carried out even in the present” (Blondeau 1996:xi). The same could be said of southern Siberia, where the introduction of Buddhism occurred long after the dispersal of reindeer domestication to Northeast Russia. Yet the presence of Buddhism raises a number of interesting questions in

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8I do address ritual sacrifice in this thesis, however not as a practice unique to one or the other domain, but as a political tool for the proclamation of an indigenous identity vis-a-vis settlers, and as a practice that incorporates both hunting and herding domains.
regard to introduced notions of landscape domestication and how these may have affected contemporary human-animal relations among herder-hunters of the Saians. Although many of the shamanist activities of modern day Soiots remain similar to those practiced by more northerly reindeer pastoralists, the role of Buddhism explains some of the differences between the cosmology of present day pastoralists of the far north and those who remained at the source of the Enisei river.

My observations of Soiot relations with horses and reindeer, wolves, and dogs seek to contribute to ongoing conversations in etho-ethnology in that they speak of a kind of *mutual reading*, an aspect I will discuss particularly in wolf-human context. This becomes especially evident at the wolf-human interface which was characterized by purposeful withholding of information from the other. Wolves watched humans watching wolves, as humans watched wolves watching humans. Knowledge derived from such mutual reading of each other's movement in the landscape, was known to be reflected in the design of wolf dens. The building endeavours of wolves were mirrored by human trap designs. The concealed intent of traps and of dens was subject to being 'found out' by the other, and 'finding the other out' was a matter of learning. My interlocutors incorporated wolves and their proverbial intelligence into daily language by routinely comparing human capacity to learn quickly with its equivalent observed in wolves. Furthermore, there existed an open ended competition between humans and wolves in their efforts to influence the allegiance of dogs to humans and consequently the dogs' effectiveness in protecting livestock. These and other ethnographic examples of different species from my fieldwork contribute to our understanding of how humans and other animals communicate with each other in nonlinguistic terms, affecting each other's bodies to be moved in particular ways, sometimes by employing the services of a third animal, the built environment, landscape features, or material implements. All of these observations speak against human exceptionalism—even within the household—while pointing to varying degrees of human-animal interdependency within and beyond the home.
The material presented speaks to debates entered by Kohn and others in that it aims to tease out the ways in which the coming together of diverse species creates unique points of view within the landscape, perspectives of self and of others that result in the recognition of new affordances. It is a way of turning around Kohn's question of “how the recognition that certain kinds of nonhumans think can help us harness properties in the world we might not otherwise notice,” by asking how nonhumans recognize that human thinking can be harnessed to make available affordances otherwise left inaccessible to them. The material from Oka suggests ways in which expansion of awareness increases affordances in animals and humans, emphasizing that humans are facilitators as much as they are the facilitated. Furthermore, my material speaks to animal domestication as Kohn and others do to semiotics. While Kohn recognizes human symbolic capacity as a distinct feature arising from a continuum of various semiotic degrees shared with other species, so this thesis identifies 'domesticated' species as fleeting kinds that remain intricately interwoven with a gradient (or continuum) of being. Although a reindeer may be identified as 'domestic', both externally (i.e. coat color) and in terms of how it relates to humans (i.e. tameness), autonomy of movement positions its 'domesticity' as a visible, if fleeting, kind that remains deeply interwoven with other ways of being reindeer, regardless of its proximity to the household. In this regard the 'domestic' reindeer of this study are a mirror image of the symbolic on the gradient of a broader semiosphere.

While Willerslev et al. (2014:1) have identified the sacrifices of reindeer pastoralists as a form of 'ideal hunting' in which 'control' is taken over “accidental variables” that emerge with hunting, my fieldwork suggests a different purpose for contemporary sacrifices of south Siberian herder-hunters. The urge to 'control,' which has been stressed by Ingold and others, does not have equal weight in my data on Soiot human-environment relations. Rather, in an Eastern Saian context, control remained in the hands of major spirit masters who decided over the life span of human and other animals. Although some coaxing may have been possible with local spirit masters over the release of individual animals, “accidental variables” were not seen
as something that had to be explained or controlled. Ambiguity and unpredictability were adjusted to, primarily by one's attunement to the intentions of the spirit master and the needs of his animals. My argument is that the minimization of differences between the cosmology of hunters and herders in a mountainous taiga environment increased people's flexibility in moving back and forth between animal *kinds* of the forest and of the household, and between associations with settler and indigenous ways of relating to the environment. Domestication (of reindeer and less ancient species) in the, Saians, then was not so much an escape route from “accidental variables” in the hunt to more predictable ones in the pasture, precisely because both domains remained intricately connected: Wolves, who belonged to the spirit master's household reminded herders of their reciprocal responsibilities to the spirit in the hunt. This reminding was accomplished through predation on domestic stock. Hunting demeanor was thus reflected in herding success, ensuring that pastoral activities of herder-hunters remained inseparable from hunting activities.

Finally, having worked with shamans and lamas of Oka, who saw themselves as in service to herder-hunters, my observations contribute to the literature of Buddhist and shamanist studies of south Siberia and Inner Asia in that they speak to the ways in which indigenous herder-hunters navigated between ancestral and settler-introduced ritual domains of power in the landscape. In this thesis I try to show how both ritual models were maintained in a shared environment, so long as spirit masters were not irrevocably 'domesticated' by Buddhist efforts. I draw a parallel, therefore, between the openness maintained in human relations with animals of the forest and of the human household, directly resembling Kohn's interdependence of symbols with the broader sphere of a semiotic gradient. Where a cut was made to halt the communicative ties between animals or spirits and the remainder of the semiosphere, these spirit entities and the landscape and animals they represented become unavailable to human herders and hunters. Consequently, the perpetuation of shamanist sacrifice amidst Buddhist offering represented the Soiot effort to keep open reciprocal relations between humans, animals, and
landscape, thus striking a balance between ritual domains and their interpretative powers in a sacred landscape.

**Thesis Structure**

While this chapter introduced the study's overall aim, its main questions and argument, as well as its contributions, chapter two, “On Being Soiot,” introduces the reader to the people who invited me into their lives and into their homes. Here the goal is to provide a view on what it means to be Soiot, as expressed in the ability to draw on potential ways of being and of seeing self and others in a shared landscape. This observation serves as foundation for the three parts into which I have structured the remainder of this thesis. “Part I Perspectives: Back and forth between ways of seeing” consists of two chapters, the first being “Awareness.” Here I am concerned specifically with interspecies encounters and the ways in which these can expand an animal's perspective of self and the world, and how such a becoming may affect a being's recognition of affordances in the environment. This is followed by chapter four, “Spirit Masters,” which guides the reader into the ritual perspectives that have become part of the landscape of Oka. It is concerned with the role of ritual practices in human-animal relations, particularly where divergent histories have led to opposed ideas regarding the usefulness of ‘wildness’ and ‘tameness’. These chapters are then followed by “Part II Proximity: Collaborative fluctuations in time and space,” which is divided into chapters five and six. In chapter five, “Dogs,” I focus on the seasonal rhythms that underlie the collaborative intensity between humans and animals by looking at communicative flux through the activities of hunters and their dogs. Chapter six, “Reindeer,” continues with variations in collaborative intensity, this time by examining how changes in landscape use reflect alterations in species emphasis within households, and by looking at some of the challenges of reintegrating reindeer after having been replaced by yak over a period of about 30 years. The final section of the thesis is “Part III Materiality: Implements and structures as communicative devices,” which contains chapters seven and eight. In chapter seven, “Horses,” I look at material restraints, such as hobbles, reigns, and lassos and
how they are utilized as communicative devices between horses and humans. I am also interested here in how people reason about horse volition in the context of these objects. Chapter eight, “Wolves,” provides a different view on materiality, this time by looking at how structures built by humans, and structures built by wolves, are infused with their builder's anticipation of the movements of others in the landscape. Unlike the preceding chapters, which emphasized human-animal collaboration, chapter eight focuses on counter-collaboration by way of concealment. It frames wolves as keen learners who compete with humans in their ability to anticipate the other's next move. The thesis is then closed by a conclusion.
Chapter Two: On Being Soiot

Introduction: Selective Representations

27 September 2013. After the door to Orlik's museum is unlocked, Badma Khorluevich and I enter into a central octagon that hasn’t been dusted for a while. We are greeted by a wood-carved shrine of the buddha in dark and light natural wood. The tourist season is over, and the type of visitors and dignitaries for whom this collection of Oka curiosities is maintained will not reappear until next year. Above us a raised ceiling opens to a broad turret. Windows in the upper walls shed light on seven water color posters glued to the inside walls of the turret. Each poster depicts a symbol of Oka: The rare snow leopard in his silver coat; several domestic reindeer resting among conical tents with families gathered at the entrances; the winding gravel road connecting Orlik with Mondy on the Mongolian border; the Oka river gently running through its valley; a group of horses freely galloping in the hills; Lake Sagan-Nur in all its glory; and yaks peaceably grazing in an alpine pasture. All of these paintings depict Oka as we find it now – with the exception of one. Interestingly, the reindeer are shown in a historical setting of bygone days. Clearly the scene refers to a Soiot past of reindeer herding, since no one alive today has resided in a conical tent. Several days ago, when I showed my Soiot hosts pictures of Tsataan reindeer herders living in conical tents on the other side of the border, they responded in astonishment: “Oni zhivut kak drevnye liudi!” (“They live like the ancients!”).

At the centre of the octagonal entry hall, perched among four old wooden boxes of different shape, rests a model of an octagonal Buriat log yurt. Its shape and position reflect elements of the building we are standing in, and given its central location beneath the paintings in the turret, it serves as an eighth symbol for Oka. While the conical larch bark and hide chum-ursa (conical tent) of Soiot ancestry seem to have been relegated to the past, Buriat log yurt

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9According to a display at the Soiot museum at Sorok, one of the last Soiots known to have lived in a chum-ursa year-round was elder Ulekshonov Sandak Gomboevich, who had herded reindeer near the sacred spring of “Shumak.”
designs like this one are being revived. The guesthouse where I stay during my visits to Orik has recently constructed one of these yurts to house visitors from afar. It’s light spruce walls and comfortable interior have become an object of pride to the family. On the right side of the model a wooden Soiot mobile baby cradle (Rus. Liul’ka Soiotskaia Pokhodnaia – Soi. Ulgy) hangs suspended from a nail in a structural support for the museum ceiling. Nearby a reconstructed Soiot stringed instrument (Soi. Morin Khuur) awaits its musician. Like a small guitar with a square body that narrows slightly on the side of the handle, it has two strings running over a circular hole cut into very thin, near transparent wood. Next to it a variety of containers are on display; a silver samovar, an Asian-looking brass carafe, cast iron pots, a copper bucket, wooden pails and barrels, and a birch bark container of the sort grandfather Dorzho likes to make at his home in Uro.

In the right wing of the museum an entire wall is dedicated to framed black and white photographs of people working at the kolkhoz. Women are sitting behind industrial sewing machines, a man is operating a radio, and several young people are examining new products at a store. Nearby, a wall painted in the hills of Lake Sagan-Nur—devoid of human trace—serves as a backdrop for a short white taxidermy reindeer, its glassy eyes gazing across the room to a console covered in curious prehistoric items: a mammoth-like tooth, a carved stone our guide cannot explain, and several items of geological interest. A carved snow leopard prowls behind hand-sized figurines of various animals: a black horse, a brown reindeer, a cow, a sheep, a goat, a white horse, and again a white reindeer. The exhibit closes with a glass vitrine of Buddhist ritual items. Bells, cymbals, a candlestick, a seashell trumpet, a small wooden Buddha statue, a lama’s metal plaque, woven cloth, an incense holder, and several fragments of Tibetan text leave the visitor with a strong impression of the historical prominence of Buddhism in Oka. After going through the veterans hall commemorating fallen residents of the Great Patriotic War (1941-1945), I leave the museum wondering where the shamanic ritual items have gone, and why there is no reference to contemporary Soiot reindeer herding.
One must bear in mind that Orlik is the centre of a region in which Buriat settlers have made up the majority of residents for over a century. The museum, which was located less than a block away from the regional administration, clearly reflected this reality. A Soiot perspective could be gleaned at the school museum in Sorok, where the material culture of a bygone way of life was better contextualized and more amply displayed. However, my reasons for describing the Soiot 'presence in absence' at the Orlik museum will become evident in this chapter, which has at least two aims. Firstly, it provides a brief overview of some of the prehistoric and historic demographic movements that have taken place in the Saian Mountains, based on the limited archaeological and historical sources we have available to date. This provides us with a backdrop against which contemporary Soiot settlement can be plotted, and it helps the reader appreciate the nuanced, interrelated, and fragmented nature of contemporary Soiot identity. Secondly, this chapter lays out what I have referred to previously as the 'essence of being Soiot,’ which I have found to be expressed in the ability to draw on various ways of
being and of seeing self and others in a shared landscape. Not only was this a landscape shared with other animals, but also one shared with other human settlers practicing different livelihoods and utilizing the landscape in different ways. What follows, then, is an attempt to delineate the parallels that exist between Soiot movements back and forth between cultural affiliations and practices with animal movements back and forth between spirit and human households.

**From Early Explorers to the First Anthropologist**

The archaeological record for Oka is sparse, and the beginnings of Soiot presence in these mountains is limited to fragmented oral memory and scholarly speculation. Given Soiot and Buriat resistance to human disturbance of the ground, it is understandable that the efforts of archaeologists have thus far been limited to surface surveys. Fear of stealing from the earth is reflected in a common utterance I overheard many times from Buriats and Soiots alike: 'What is in the ground belongs to *burkhan* [the local mountain deity], and nothing good comes from moving it.'

In spite of this belief, Oka-Soiots have a long history of encounters with geological exploration. I have heard stories about Soiot ancestors who, 'a hundred years ago,' worked for a foreigner by the name of M. J.-P. Alibert - a French prospector who had discovered high quality graphite on Mt. Krestovaia in 1847 (*cf.* Radde 1865:51-61), and who, having set up camp above Batagol river, hired Soiot men and their reindeer from Khonchen river as porters. Later, and up until the 1960s, Soiot herders and their kolkhoz bred reindeer were hired to transport countless geological expeditions deep into the Saian Mountains. Although a sore in the eyes of many Soiot elders, today's corporate gold mines employ younger Soiot men, moving tons of soil while poisoning the fish in several of Oka's streams.

Long known for its rich mineral deposits, Oka had been much less at the centre of early ethnographic focus. In fact, few explorers of the Tsarist period ever ventured directly into the

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10 Throughout this thesis I distinguish between verbatim quotations (usually based on digital sound recording) and interpretative quotations (recalled or based on field jottings) by indicating the prior with double quotation marks ("...") and the latter with single quotation marks ('...').
territory, which explains the lack of pre-revolutionary depictions of Soiot life. Although commissioned to explore the Saian Mountains in 1772, German naturalist Peter Simon Pallas found them to be inaccessible, soon returning to Krasnoiarsk (Henze in Pallas 1771-1776 [1967]:XI-XII). A survey of 19th and early 20th century explorers' maps and itineraries for south central Siberia reveals how travel routes repeatedly bypassed Oka-Soiot territory on all sides, running instead through eastern Tyva (e.g. Adrianov 1888; Radlov 1893; Kon 1899 [1934]; Carruthers and Miller 1914; Olsen 1915; Grumm and Gzhimailo 1926), northern and northwestern Mongolia (e.g. Potanin 1881a, 1881b), Karagassia in the Irkutsk Governorate (e.g. Castren 1856; Katanov 1891), and even Tunka Valley of Buriatia (Castren 1856). Among the few explorers who did travel into Oka were German naturalist Gustav Radde (1863, 1865), and young geographer (and later famed Russian anarchist) Piotr Kropotkin (1867). Radde, who had stayed with Alibert at the mine to study birds, described Soiots as “nomadic savages” whose lives to him starkly contrasted the cultured ways of the Frenchman's mine (Radde 1865:58). By the time Kropotkin rode through Tustuk Valley (where I conducted my summer fieldwork), Alibert had already abandoned his mine, and not venturing toward Khonchon, Kropotkin encountered only a single Soiot man in a yurt at Batagol (Kropotkin 1867:n.p.). Continuing up Oka river, the explorer mentions Tofa (Karagass) frequenting the ridges above Buriat camps, and that in the past Soiots would have done likewise (Kropotkin 1867:n.p.). Yet Kropotkin's actual encounters with local residents seemed to be limited to Buriat settlers.

Two decades earlier, in 1848, Finnish scholar Alexander Castren (1813-1853) had returned from visiting Tofa hunter-herders of the Verkhneudinsk District (Karagassia), who had

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11 According to Nefedev and Gergesov (1929:n.p.), who were writing about Soiots of the late 1920s, “there are households [at Khonchon] which still reside in Ursa,” the larch bark and fur covered conical tents that can be seen in historical photographs and drawing for Tozhu (e.g. Olsen 1915) and Tofa, and which predate Soiot transition to yurts, and later log- and boarded cabins.

12 Kropotkin bases his Soiot hypothesis on documents he describes in a footnote: “In the papers of the eighties of the past century [1780s] a permission surfaces, granted by the Tunka remote border office [Rus. Tunkinskaja pogranichnaja distantsionnaja kantsilara], granting Soiots to migrate within the vicinity of the border guard [Rus. karaul], so long as the border itself is not crossed.” Evidently, these “Soiots” are eastern Tyvinian Tozhu and likely unconnected to the “Mountain-Soiots” described by Castren in 1848 (Castren 1856).
told him about distant Soiots relatives that had settled in the Tunka Valley. That same year, he traveled to Tunka to meet these Soiots. Castren writes (1856:396-397):

“These [Soiots], according to legend, once lived in the Verkhneudinsk District on the Sikir river, but later migrated to Tunka where they split into two branches, of which the one resides in the mountains on rivers Oka, Gargan, Halbi, and Hoshun, while the other [branch] stays in the flatlands of the Buriat Uluss of Bukha-Gorkhon. [...] The Steppe Soiots [of Tunka valley] are now-a-days pure Buriats, while the Mountain-Soiots remain in part faithful to the practices of their ancestors... [...] Not long ago Mountain-Soiots are said to have spoken the same Turkic dialect as the Karagass... [...] [b]ut in regard to Samoyed ancestry of Soiots, all memory has disappeared...”

As one of the few scholar-explorers who encountered Soiots outside of Uriankhai [Tyva], he nevertheless failed to venture up the rivers he describes as the homeland of Mountain-Soiots. Thus, Castren himself never encountered the men and women who are most likely the ancestors of present day Oka-Soiots.

The only anthropologist who conducted work specifically with Oka-Soiots, albeit just after the revolution, was Swiss-Russian scholar Bernhard Eduardovich Petri (1884-1937). Based at the university of Irkutsk, Petri had amassed both archaeological and ethnographic data for several indigenous peoples of southern Siberia, including Tofa, before finally venturing into Oka in 1926. Together with his colleagues, and in service to the Northern Committee (Rus. komitet severa), he had visited all known Oka-Soiot settlements, conducting a systematic demographic medical survey (Petri 1927a:12-20). But with the exception of a preliminary report (Petri 1927), all detailed results of this expedition are believed lost (e.g. Sirina 2003; Pavlinskaia 2002:26). Nonetheless, his preliminary report gives us a glimpse into the locations of Soiots household, their composition, and their stock ratios in the mid to late 1920, prior to

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13B.E. Petri was executed on grounds of accusations of treason at this politically most turbulent time for anthropologists taking interest in the rights of ethnic minorities (see Sirina 2003).
complete collectivization by the new Soviet state. Given the lack of pre-revolutionary data on Soiots, historians, anthropologists, and archaeologists have relied on materials from neighboring regions14 in their efforts to reconstruct earlier Soiots life ways. In what follows I will rely on the work of anthropologist and historian Larissa Pavlinskaia (2002:27-34) who brings together in her work several of the sources speaking to the complicated developments in the demographic composition of the Saian Region.

Samoyed Hunter-Herders and Pastoralists

Dating to between 3000 and 2000 B.C. (Dashibalov 2001:4-6), the Zhombolok river site near the settlement of Orlik may have belonged to “Protosamoyed tribes of the Finno-Ugrian-Samoyed branch of the Uralic family” (Pavlinskaia 2002:27, based on Chernitsos 1973:12-13 and Vainshtein 1980:69). This site is one of the few found in Oka, but it corresponds to a view of the Saian Mountains as the easternmost settlement of ancient Samoyed speakers (Vainshtein 1980:87). Most other archaeological sites that speak to the prehistory of the region are located outside Oka. Along the central and upper Enisey river, finds of Samoyed material culture infused with Tungusic features suggest that a blend of early Tungusic peoples with Samoyed in-migrants had been here by the Neolithic (Prytkova 1970:54; Vainshtein 1980:87). In the Bronze Age (2000 to 1000 B.C.), signs of semi-settlement and pastoralism, including cattle, sheep, and horses for meat production appear (Pavlinskaia 2002:28), and with the arrival of the early Iron Age (1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D.) a new wave of Samoyedic peoples appears in the Saian Region, this time well familiar with pastoralism (Kosarev 1991:22-23).

As the Hun Empire expanded, Ket-speaking people are thought to have arrived in the Saians, which is suggested by a series of toponyms found in both eastern Tyva and Tofalariia (Alekseenko 1980:129). It would seem that although Samoyeds may have had a stronger

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14The Tozhu district of eastern Tyva, the Tofalar (Nizhneudinsk) district of Irkutsk Oblast’, and Pre-Khubsugul in northern Mongolia are among somewhat better understood neighbouring regions that have been utilized to reconstruct historical and prehistorical population movements in the Eastern Saians (e.g. Dioszegi 1968; Mel’nikova 1994; Mongush 2010; 2012; Pavlinskaia 2002:26; Rassadin, I.V. 2012; Rassadin, V.I. 1971, 1978, 1982, 2000).
presence, Ket and ancient indigenous Tungus populations were present at the same time. Levin and Vasilevich (1951:63-87), as well as Vainshtein (1970:3-15), suggest that these later populations introduced the domestication of reindeer to the Tozhu region of eastern Tyva, as well as to Tofalaria and Oka, enabling local Samoyed and Tungusic peoples to migrate further into the northern taiga. At the same time, these diverse peoples seem to have come together to form what Rassadin (1971:93-94) termed a common “southern Samoyedic” language, which would have incorporated both Ket and Evenk (Tungus) elements, and would have served as a foundation for contemporary Tofa and Tozhu languages. Other scholars believe that the resulting language group may have reached well into the Minusin Basin (present Tyva), as well as into the Lake Khubsugul (Mongolia) area (Kyzlasov 1969:88; Vasilev 1979:31-32), all suggesting close ties within the larger Saian region.

Although pastoralism is likely to have come to the Saians only around 500 B.C., it may well have been introduced to western Tyva as early as 1000 B.C., along with the arrival of early Indo-Iranian mobile populations (Pavlinskaia 2002:30). To the Saians pastoralism would have come with Turkic peoples of Central Asia, to whom are attributed the ancient rock engravings found along the Oka river (e.g. Sensen-Gol and Zhombolok river sites) (Pavlinskaia 2002:30), and whose language would have started to influence local speech by the second half of the first millennium (Rassadin 1971:96). Pavlinskaia examines seventh century Chinese Tan-Shu texts, which refer to ‘Duba’ tribes located in Duba, Milige, and Echzhi aimags [districts] that would likely have contained what are now Tozhu, Tofa, and Oka territories, and which would have been part of the Turkic Khanate (2002:31-32). These Tan-Shu sources speak of Duba as having no calendar, cattle, or agriculture, while living in tree bark shelters, and possessing large numbers of good horses (Pavlinskaia 2002:31). These references may well be the earliest textual evidence for a division into reindeer hunter-herders and horse breeding pastoralists among Samoyeds of the Saians (ca. 500 B.C.) - a division that may be further confirmed in Rashid-al-Din’s 13th century reference to “Forest Uriankhai” (Pavlinskaia 2002:32).
Oka-Soiot and Oka-Buriat Settlement

By the 8th century, the Uighur had taken over the Turkic Khanate from the Altai to Manchuria, and after 750 central and western Tyva, as well as the Khakass, fell to them (Bichurin 1950:355). Residents of the Saians are not mentioned during this time, but their furs seem to appear in Chinese registers via taxes collected by Uighur rulers (Pavlinskaia 2002:33). In the 9th century, mobile tribes of the Saians joined the Khakass in their battle against the Uighur, suggesting that the Saians had also come under Uighur taxation (Kyzlasov 1969:93). A powerful government emerged under the Khakass, and backed by imperial China, gifts of Eastern Saian sable and chipmunk are known to have been made by its envoys to the emperor (Bichurin 1950:352). By the 13th century, the Khakas government weakened and a new Mongolian power came to rise under Ghengis Khan, which was soon to include the Saians, the inhabitants of which were now referred to as 'forest peoples,' along with all other southern Siberians under Mongol rule (Pavlinskaia 2002:33). Several crushed uprisings mark this period, during which local populations repeatedly withdrew into Mongolia (Kyzlasov 1969:135-137). According to Pavlinskaia (2002:33), this demographic mobility may help explain why several clan names are shared between Mongolia and the Saians, and why medieval traces of Mongolian can be found in the ancestral languages of Tofas and Soiots.

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, when the Mongol empire grew weak, the Saians once again fell under the power of the Khakas. The historical record is silent on the Saians for these two centuries, and Pavlinskaia speculates that the ethnicities encountered by Russians in the Saians of the 17th century were formed precisely during this time (2002:34). By the 17th century the Turkic influence of the preceding centuries had culminated in a language shift for Samoyeds, with Tofalars and Soiots joining the Uighur group of Turkic languages (Rassadin 1971). Meanwhile, the Saians became subject to two new powers: The Russians and the Manchurians. The new border, following the Treaty of Kiakhta (1727), ran through the southern flanks of the Saian Mountains, and was lined with border sentries (Rus. karauly), two of which
were located in Oka. One was positioned on the mouth of Zhombolok river, the other at Narin-Kholoiskii in Gargan (Sharastepanov 2008:9). The Mongolian speaking Buriat settlers who came to staff the sentries quickly established themselves among indigenous Soiot Turkic speakers and eventually pushed for a second language shift in the local population - this time from Turkic-Soiot to Mongolian-Buriat. As Pavlinskaia (2002:34) points out, it is likely that this shift of the 18th and 19th centuries proceeded so rapidly because of the pre-existing linguistic and cultural similarities Soiots had shared with Mongolia since the 13th century.

Local historian, D. Ts.-B. Sharastepanov (2008:6-8), describes Oka-Buriats as having descended from 15 clans and sub-clans, most of whom had come from Tunka and Alar’ regions. Their ancestors, who had been sent to staff the new border sentries, had encountered Soiots belonging to Khaasut, Irkit, and Onkhot clans—three genetically unrelated clans—who were living in the mountainous taiga of the upper Oka river at the time (Dugarov 1983:97). The Khaasut clan is said to have settled in Oka first. According to late Sorok elder Dezhida Dambaevich Sonopov, the clan descended from a man by the name of Khuruldai, who had relocated from eastern Tyva some 11 generations (ca. 360 yrs.) 15 ago, together with his “Uriankhai” wife, to settle near Lake Il’chir after a disagreement with his relatives in Tyva (Dugarov 1983:97-98). The Irkit clan had emigrated more recently from the village of Zhemchug in Tunka, also settling in the area around Lake Il’chir. But, based on the genealogy of Darma Khontoevich Khusaev (b. 1888) of Engorboi in Tunka, they had originally come from the shores of Lake Khubsugul, 16 some 13 generations (ca. 430 yrs.) ago (Dugarov 1983:98). Finally, the Onkhot clan is said to have originated from among the Bulagats of Prebaikalia at a later time yet (Sharastepanov 2008:7). It is this kaleidoscopic vision of Oka-Soiot origins, in conjunction with the intermarriages that followed Soiot encounters with Buriat settlers, that we...
must keep in mind as we delve into a discussion of contemporary Oka-Soiot identity.

**Bringing Out the Soiot Self**

Unlike Tsarist governance, which had paid relatively little attention to remote Soiot herders and hunters of the Saians (cf. Dameshek 1983), the new Soviet regime attempted to corral within its bureaucratic auspices every person capable of work and every animal of potential economic value. This massive effort was accompanied by an attempt to classify local populations on the basis of ethnicity, and to simplify ethnic diversity where possible. Having been lumped with Buriats under Soviet governance, all mention of the remains of the Soiot language and of their cultural history were repressed for the next 60 years, although a *Rodovoi Soiotskii Soviet* was formed, but only “to bring Soiots into cultural and economic compliance more quickly” (Nefedev and Gergesov 1929:43). Following the collapse of the USSR in 1991, a cultural revitalization movement eventually surfaced among Soiot descendants in Oka. By 1993 Soiot activists had formed a cultural association, which a year later resulted in the village of Sorok being made the official centre of the *Soiotskii Nationalnyi Somon* (Soiot national administrative district) within the larger district of Oka (Pavlinskaia 2002:65, 98). The following year, census data showed that 1,973 locals had chosen to identify as Soiots. Then, in 2000, Soiots received official status as one of Russia's Indigenous small-numbered peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East.

Interlocutors from Sorok explained to me how the federal ratification of indigenous Soiot status had been anticipated by many to come with substantial economic benefits. It had seemed that, after such a long time, being Soiot was once more a good thing. Even prior to the October Revolution, Soiots had weighed their economic advantages against the assertion of a strong collective ethnic identity. Uncle Misha (b. ca. 1965) made this clear to me during one of my visits to his winter pasture on the trail that follows Tustuk river—the same trail Piotr Kropotkin rode in 1867. Misha spent the winter here with his ailing mother, one of the last “true Soiot elders” alive. Here on the Tustuk, Misha told me of old Soiot Munko of Khonchon. It was
the story of a self-suppressed Soiot revival that had occurred 'over a hundred years ago':

22 October, 2013. Munko, who was living on Khonchon river [near the source of Tustuk river], had started a school in his own yurt, where he was teaching children the Soiot language and traditions. His Soiot neighbors soon told him to stop these efforts, because strengthening Soiot identity was known to be dangerous. Previously, when Soiots had been strong, they had raided all their [Buriat] neighbors. Thus, there was fear that Soiots might gain new strength, and that such activities would be taken up, calling for great conflict with their Buriat neighbors once more. In fact, as more and more Buriats had come to live in the Saians, they began to outnumber Soiots, and soon forbade the Soiot language.

According to Misha, 'Soviet attempts to kill the Soiot language were merely the final blow following a long history of language repression [by Buriats].' But Misha's main point seemed to be that Soiots had always known when to make explicit their identity and when to refrain from emphasizing it.

Although Misha was 'officially' Buriat, he knew himself to be Soiot also, and he seemed genuinely proud of both. His Soiot identity, no matter how invisible, could always resurface given the right time and social context. With the relatively poor economic pay-off that had followed recognition of Soiots as an indigenous minority, Munko's figurative yurt had not seen too many eager students in recent years. Nonetheless, the boarding school at Sorok continued its programming for Soiot language and tradition, even while facing a chronic shortage in willing or able instructors. Misha's present lack of Soiot political zeal was not in the least a disdain for the cultural heritage of his mother's ancestry. Like many other men of his age, he seemed to have a sense of belonging with the animals and landscape that surrounded him. Even if he and the children of his household had grown up speaking Buriat and Russian instead of Soiot, his social ties to the land and to those living on it made Misha the man he knew to be, and this sense of being and belonging seemed little affected by what outsiders might require of
him to accept him as a true 'Soiot.' Sorok's village administration had already taken care of outsider's expectations with their installation of a year-round open air exhibition of 'traditional Soiot life.' Here visitors could satisfy their curiosity for this mysterious - and long thought to have assimilated - indigenous minority.

Illustration 4: The Soiot museum complex at Sorok, displaying stationary log yurts, mobile yurts, and a larch bark chum-ursa. © 2014, Author

Negotiating Identities
To my initial surprise, however, many Soiot friends and neighbours went so far as never to challenge the rhetoric of “buriatification” [Rus. *oburiatilis*], of which they had ironically been accused since long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Several Soiot friends even agreed that few material distinctions were now left to set them apart from their Buriat neighbours: they no longer hunted with reindeer, had long intermarried with Buriat settlers, relied on hunting only in part, had lost their language, built Buriat style homes, and herded cattle much like the descendants of Buriat settlers. Indeed, how were Soiots distinct from their Buriat neighbours? Although some individuals may have felt regret over the loss of their ancestors’ specific ways
of life, I also witnessed hearty laughter among friends over the Soiot 'ethnic rebirth' narrative of the late 1990s. On occasion, in intimate settings where outsiders were not present, I would hear: 'No one really knows who is Soiot' - 'We're all Buriats!' Statements like these had the sound of an inside joke. It was as if the world had been tricked into believing a kind of Soiot political invention. But didn't such statements merely fuel accusations of Buriats who already frowned upon the Soiot struggle for independence? Was I living with a people who themselves no longer believed they were who they officially had asserted to be?

It took me a while before I realized that common determinants of identity – such as blood tie, material culture, oral history, subsistence strategy, or land claim - would not suffice in an attempt to establish what it meant to be Soiot. But when my friend and teacher Uncle Borzhon went to see his yak herd in the hills east of Uro one night, something began to dawn on me: Borzhon had described his yak as “domesticated” (Rus. *odomashnennyie*) – an adjective I had herd him use before (and to which I will return in the next chapter). In spite of using this Russian term, which is synonymous with domestication (Rus. *domestikatsia*) in both Russian and English, Borzhon had insisted that his herd did not actually rely on human care. Were his yak to be deprived of human oversight, they still would flourish in the mountains. How could his animals be so independent and yet be considered domestic? It was then that I realized that asking Borzhon whether he was Buriat or Soiot, was much like asking him whether his yak were wild or domestic. Borzhon's ancestors' partial integration with Buriat society had not been merely a matter of demographic coercion, nor of utter economic dependence. They had not become Buriats to the exclusion of other ways of being, nor had they surrendered their ability to reemerge as Soiots one day. It seemed that Soiot identity in the Saian's was less a matter of one's origins, or of perpetual battle for independence. Rather, Soiot history and identity had to be understood in terms of its back and forth movements, its perpetual fluctuation in proximity to neighbouring communities. Being Soiot was a matter of carefully negotiated relationships.
Between Two Homes

Uro was one of many winter pastures (Bur. öbelzöönzh; Rus. zimniki), strategically positioned among a series of connected valleys and mountain ridges, forming part of a larger transhumant landscape, similar to those found in the European Alps with dairy cattle (e.g. Gorlier et al. 2012; Davis 1941) or the South Asian Himalaya with its yak herds (e.g. Barsila, et al. 2015; Tucker 1986). As such, Uro was a seasonal home to several extended families who herded their stock here from late August until early May. Between June and August the valley would be deserted, with all its households migrating with their stock to summer pastures (Rus. letnik) at higher altitude. In August, before the families would return with their animals, the men came to harvest hay patches surrounding their winter homes, as well as in a number of inherited spots scattered through the valley and on other rivers. The hay was then dried, stacked, and fenced near stables to feed cattle and sheep in winter. The men would then return to their summer pastures, to help gather and return all their animals to the winter pasture. At this time most of their household belongings were hauled back to Uro. Because the greater number of months each year were spent at Uro, and because warmer summer months required fewer comforts, the winter pasture served as a kind of primary residence for most families. This was evident in slightly more substantial homes, coupled with greater storage capacity for seasonal items.

17The term uro is derived from the names of two creeks feeding into Sorok river: the Urda-Uro (or Urda-Ure) on the central eastern side of the valley, and the Khoito-Uro (or Khoito-Ure). According to Rassadin’s Soiot (2003) and Tofa (2005) dictionaries, the root ur- in Turkic Tofa and Soiot stands for “pour,” “pour into,” or “pour out.” Tofa also possesses a word similar to khoito-, which is hoi (hoït), referring to “foot of the mountain” or to “sheep,” while in Soiot it can refer to “spook[ing]” animals. In Buriat, khoito (xoiïro) refers to “northern,” and the variation khoituul (xoiïryyi) to “subsequent,” “following,” or “behind” (Babushkin 2009), all of which make geographic sense at Uro, since the Khoito-Uro stream lies behind or north of the Urda-Uro stream as one follows the flow of the Sorok. Both Soiot and Tofa language variants have terms resembling the word urda (урда), meaning “long ago,” or “of old.” In Soiot there also exists the word urdy (урды), which means “minor load tied on top of a ready pack” (e.g. on a horse or reindeer). More likely, urda-, like khoito-, is a Buriat introduction, meaning “south” or “southern.” It is likely then that at Uro, Buriat toponyms were attached to Turkic root words.

18Uro’s winter pasture is located ca. 1,550 m above sea level, while corresponding summer pastures on Tustuk river are located barely higher at 1,700 m. The difference in elevation helps reduce insects pestering stock, and it allows yak to wander to greater elevation (2000-2500 m) in less time than required from winter pastures.

19Up until the recent past, most households migrated between four seasonal camps, instead of two: Winter, spring, summer, and autumn pastures were maintained, and stock were rotated between these on a seasonal basis to ensure sufficient forage and to prevent overgrazing. At present former spring and autumn pastures are used for hay harvest.
Although neither summer nor winter locations had any municipal services, Uro was connected to the village of Sorok with a power line, allowing more or less reliable electricity to power television sets, light bulbs, mobile phone chargers, milk separators, and a small number of other electrical devices.

While staying in Baianbata's (b. 1970) home at Uro, he was often gone for a week at a time to be with his family in Sorok. Although he enjoyed very close ties with his elder brother Borzhon (b. 1966) (H01), it was difficult to be away from his nuclear family while looking after his yak near Uro. Whenever I saw Baianbata and B'eligt'e together, they were affectionate.
toward each other, if reserved in my presence. On one visit to their home in Sorok, while Baianbata was away, B'eligt'e told me about the hardship of not having her husband by her side for long periods of time. Yet she also expressed deep pride for her husband - a man who maintained such a strong herd of yak all by himself. It was not difficult to see her deep affection for him, and although she clearly recognized him as the khoziai (Rus. master) of her household, I never saw Baianbata asserting his authority over B'eligt'e. On the contrary, both seemed to adhere closely to the gender roles understood as normative within their community, be it in the raising of their children, or the slaughtering of bulls.

At the end of each day in Sorok, Baianbata would help his elder daughter (15 years) with her homework, while his youngest (5 years) would sit on his lap, or lay beside him watching TV. His teenage daughter would milk the family's two dairy cows, and she would follow her mother's household tasks from making fire and baking bread to cooking supper and cleaning house. Her younger brother (10 years) would be allowed to play with his friends after school, but before long, he too would be called in to follow up on his chores, which included hauling water, chopping wood, and sometimes kitchen assistance, such as peeling potatoes. At Uro, and also at the summer pasture, children learned by watching and participating in their parents' tasks. Boys would learn how to drive yak, round up and saddle horses, cut hay, butcher stock, and hunt for game with dogs. In their free time, boys would fish in the local streams and share their catch with the family. Daughters would join their mothers and elder sisters in milking cows, shearing sheep, knitting in sheep and yak wool, cooking, processing dairy products, and cleaning and preparing intestines after the slaughter.

The pastures at the centre of the valley at Uro were divided between two intermarried clans\textsuperscript{20}. One of the two clans was headed by Badma Khorluevich, and at Uro it was represented by his younger brother Borzhon (b. 1966), together with his wife Ranzhur (b.

\textsuperscript{20}Not to be confused with Soiot clans (Rus. rody) as described on page 32. Here I use the term merely to refer to a group of families or households.
1963). The couple shared a house with their son Buinto (b. 1990), daughter Balma (b. c. 1989), and Balma's two-year-old daughter. Borzhon's adoptive son Regbi (b. 1984), his wife Norzhima (eldest daughter of Burg'ed's, H03), and their six-year-old son and three-year-old daughter resided in a newly completed cabin next door. Borzhon's younger brother, Baianbata (b. 1970) (my host) lived in a house just past his elder brother's winter stable. To the south, across the Urda-Uro stream, and in the middle of the valley, resided their youngest brother, Vandan (b. 1974) with his wife Otshigma (b. 1980) and their four sons and one daughter, ages 2-16. The brothers and their wives frequently visited each other and collaborated on various household tasks.

The other of the two clans was headed by Aunty Vera (c. 1965), whose husband had passed away, but whose son Tseden (b. 1986) was handling most of his late father's responsibilities. Vera was the sister of Ranzhur, Borzhon Dondakov's wife (thus both clans were related), and she lived in one house with her unmarried sons Dagba (b. 1984, †2014) and Tseden, as well as their disabled sister Masha. Across the pasture from their house lived Vera's second eldest son, Iumzhap (b. 1974) with his wife Tserigma (b. 1983) and their three boys, ages 5-9. A stone's throw to the west lived Vera's youngest married son, Tsydyp (b. 1977), with his wife Dagzama (b. 1981) and their two boys, ages 5 and 10. Although members of both clan households would pay each other visits quite regularly, the majority of inter-household collaboration occurred within rather than between clans. Larger tasks, such as construction projects, stock inoculations, and log preparation were usually accomplished with the help of members from within one's own clan.

This collaborative relationship within the clan was also reflected in the herds each household held. Any given horse group, or yak or sheep herd, was likely to comprise animals belonging to other members of the clan. Some of their owners held jobs in the village, lived in Orlik, or had moved to the capital Ulan-Ude. If one inherited a herd, it did not mean that one became sole owner of all its head. More likely one became a steward of many animals, some of
which belonged to members of the wider clan. Clan members living in the city could come to pick up their riding horses at Uro to go hunting in autumn, and often all the sheep and horses of one clan were held together during the summer. Because of the free-roaming nature of yak herds and horse groups, much of the conversation during visits between households was concerned about the location of animals within the landscape.

At Uro, households were centred around a main residence, usually a log cabin or wooden house with a brick-built cooking and heating stove at the centre. Thin boarded walls or curtains divided the living space into quarters for parents, children, and other kin, each sharing a section of the rear hearth wall for warmth. The cooking side of the hearth would open up to a kitchen space where all meals were prepared and bread baked. A lean-to, or separate front room, served as storage space for hunting and herding equipment and as a meat cellar in winter, and a dugout outhouse and a wash house were located 20 to 30 meters from each residence. Wash houses had a steel stove on which to heat water for the family's weekly bath and laundry session for which water would be hauled from the river in buckets suspended by a wooden yoke. Fire wood was brought from neat stacks of up to 20 cubic metres of ready chopped larch, prepared by the family in April, harvested from government allotted sections in the forest. Wooden corrals were built adjacent or immediately onto log-style stables with grass roofs, housing sheep and cattle during the coldest months of the year. Many corrals consisted of two or more rectangular or round forcing pens for the sorting of horses and cattle, usually with an attached milking pen. A straight single file chute connected corrals for biannual stock inoculations. Movable sheep pens were positioned in view of residence windows to protect against wolves, and to prevent foot rot, and the harvestable pasture surrounding the compound sometimes had a wooden fence around it. Most summer compounds were similar in design, although families usually shared a single room without dividers, and their stoves were not as sophisticated.

When Uro's residents left for the summer, they did so in staggered fashion to prevent livestock from mingling, as each household set out in direction of their respective summer
pastures. Combined, ten of Uro’s households owned roughly 465 cattle and yak, 173 horses, 155 sheep, 15 goats, 23 dogs, and 32 chickens, at the time of my fieldwork (Illustration 6).

When all returned in August, many of the school children would be with their families, causing the valley's population to swell for a short time. As well, relatives would come from Sorok or Orlik to help during peak labour times, while others would leave to conduct business in the city. In 2013-14 the valley experienced a low of approximately 33 residents, and a high of approximately 69 across 12 households. Because summer migration would take each household in a different direction, people became part of different communities at different times of the year, a fact everyone seemed to look forward to. While the winter valley was more densely populated (see Illustration 5), some of the summer pastures rendered households rather isolated one from another. Yet, mutual visiting continued to play an important part in the summer, with

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Illustration 6: Approximate stock count for Uro Valley, autumn 2013


22It was difficult to extract these figures, as it is considered improper to speak about the number of one's stock, particularly about yak and hybrids. On the one hand, this may have been a superstition that by numbering one's stock it would be exposed to greater danger in what were already volatile conditions, thanks to predation and sickness. On the other hand, this silence was rather successful in its prevention of neighbours comparing each other in terms of property. However, perhaps the real reason behind this silence was that most herders kept disclosed and undisclosed counts. This allowed them to minimize fees arising from mandatory inoculations without which it was illegal to sell meat. A certain number of yaks could thus be hidden in the mountains during a zoo technician’s visit. With all disclosed stock inoculated, undisclosed animals could be rejoined to the herd once veterinary workers had left.
some preferring the sociality of their summer residence to Uro's, associating the prior with a better atmosphere, greater joy, and, perhaps, less strained relations.

**Conclusion**
This chapter set out with an outline of the history and prehistory of Soiot and other migrations in the Eastern Saians, sketching a background for more recent developments in Soiot settlement and household formation. In so doing it showed both continuity and rift between prehistoric hunter-herders and more recent herder-hunter activities, all of which have drawn on in-migrations from various neighbouring regions. The chapter then concerned itself with the ways in which several present day Soiot interlocutors approached the question of 'being Soiot' by drawing on oral history and the memory of deceased elders. One of the key aspects that emerged from these observations with Soiot interlocutors was their openness to autonomy in animals. Because historically this openness has included collaborations with species beyond reindeer, this chapter indirectly addressed the single species focus characteristic of an image that has existed in the literature for the Saians. Furthermore, it discussed how visible elements of being Soiot could be expressed or repressed in relation to how people interpreted the benefits of being recognized. The 'presence in absence' of Soiots at the Orlik museum may therefore be condoned by many Soiots. In this regard, being Soiot is perhaps best understood as an ability to withhold that which is already known. More importantly, the chapter presented being Soiot as a way of seeing and of being that paralleled local understandings of animals who had to be understood not as wild or domestic, but as able to move back and forth between household and taiga. In similar fashion, being Soiot was the ability to move between Buriat and Soiot communities and perspectives, which raises the question of how domestication must be approached in Soiot context. The next chapter attempts to answer this question by drawing on the key role of perspectival expansion in humans and other animals.
PART I – PERSPECTIVES
Chapter Three: Perspectival Expansion

Introduction: Descending With Yak

16 May 2014. It is cool outside, and there is a fine blue-gray mist forming over the grassy hillsides on both sides of my cabin. It is 10:30pm and the sun has long set behind the hills. I begin to wonder whether Uncle Borzhon is still going to show up as he said he would. After ten more minutes the door opens, and into the light from above my table steps Borzhon with his usual quiet smile. I quickly slip into my black rubber boots and follow him into the dusk. He has come on his horse. We cross Urda-Uro creek, the stream from where I gather my water, and head into the hills. I walk, he rides. Before too long we make out movement on a dark side of a tall hill ahead of us. Furry bodies of a large herd are calmly moving in the deep grass, their shaggy white tails gently swaying. We approach the grazing herd from behind, without startling them, and maintaining a calmness similar to their own. Having anticipated a longer search in the darkened hills, I am surprised to find that Burzhon’s 55 yak did not move far from the valley today. Slowly descending in occasional switchbacks behind the heavy herd, I glance over to Borzhon. He is riding out to collect the stragglers. Several of the recently born baby yak come up close to inspect me. They leap back and run to join the herd. There are 13 new offspring so far, and a fourteenth was lost to the wolves a couple of days ago.

Whenever I approach a grazing yak, it immediately jolts out ahead of me, galloping in a straight line to join its herd, all of which are now headed in the direction of Borzhon's corral at the bottom of the valley. Although Borzhon says his herd prefers to stay in the hills overnight - in whatever place they find good feed that day - it is not difficult to move them in another direction familiar to them. Moving more swiftly now, I notice two dams feeding their young further downhill. Neither of the two move as our stampede passes by them. Following from behind, Borzhon swiftly gallops by, as if not noticing them. Soon they are left behind on the hill side. Borzhon and I proceed to move the rest of the animals downhill. Only later I find out that one of the two dams belongs to my neighbour, Tseden. The other one belongs to Borzhon, but
he knows not to disturb their feeding. Tseden, or his elder brother Dagba, will drive them home later in the night. I do hope so – there have been fresh wolf tracks in the late spring snow by my cabin and on both sides of the stream. “Is it ever difficult to drive yak back to summer or winter camp?” I ask Borzhon over tea and soup, once we have made it to his house. He responds: 'It's not difficult, unless a dam is having a calf. After birth, a dam fiercely defends her young. She won't allow anyone or anything near it. You can't move her then.'

Borzhon tells me, in winter his yak roam as far as the former winter reindeer camp on the upper reaches of Urda-Uro stream. They will roam no further on their own, unless they are startled by bears. In that case the herd will run, and they will cross the mountains into Iakhoshop valley. Here it can take Borzhon and his sons, Regbi and Buinto, several days to locate and return them. In summer, when Borzhon moves his household and all their stock to pasture at higher altitude, his yak will wander as far as the northernmost summer camp on the upper reaches of Sorok river. From here Borzhon and his sons will ride out to the herd every night and drive them back to the corral at their camp. According to Borzhon, 'yak never return home on their own at night, unless one were to keep their young at camp. But not these days. No one currently milks them.' I ask Borzhon why milking is no longer practiced. He looks at me with a funny expression and says, 'Haven't you seen their small teats? With Mongolian dairy cows around, it makes no sense to milk yak.' Indeed, yak, like reindeer, are cumbersome to milk. They resist the process and produce little more than is required for the growth of their own offspring (cf. Wiener, Jianlin, and Ruijun 2003:136).

With the herd in the corral for the night, I ask Borzhon whether he considers his yak

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238 June, 2014. In the evening Grandfather Ardan (b. 1958) came to visit our summer cabin. He told me that during the Soviet years ten female milkers (Rus. doiarki) and their families had lived at the confluence of the Tustuk and Iakhoshop rivers. Each of them had had a little cabin, all of which have since been removed. A doiarka would milk 25 yaks (this area kept yaks, not cows), amounting to approx. 250 yaks in the area. According to Ardan, their husbands would have held various jobs, but most of them are likely to have been horse herdsmen (Rus. tabunchiki). These tabunchiki maintained several camps, one of them on upper Iakhoshop river. In summer the tabunchiki would drive their horses down to the confluence, where their homes were located. In those days, yaks were milked regularly – just like cows – and the milk, which is very high in fat, was churned into butter. This butter was then transported to Sorok on horseback every morning. The ladies would ride to Sorok before sunrise to beat the heat of day. According to Ardan, reindeer had never been held at this location.
domestic or wild. Somewhat confused, he seeks to clarify whether I am referring to the origin of yak in general, or to his particular herd. I point to his herd, and he replies: 'Domestic, of course.' In fact, once we are back inside, he tells me: 'I feed them supplementary hay every morning all through the winter.' Not all householders do this, not even his younger brother supplement-feeds his herd. Some people will resort to hay only when the snow gets too deep or too crusty for yak to penetrate with their sharp hooves. For most of the winter Borzhon drives his herd into the large corral at night, and by 10:30 in the morning, just before releasing them to wander off for the day, he feeds them. In spite of the feeding, Borzhon insists: 'These animals are entirely independent from humans.' 'Were they to be left to fend for themselves,' he continues, 'they would do just fine.' His observations remind me of how people relate to reindeer. Neither seem to depend on human care or protection for their survival. What is it then that makes them domestic to us? My thoughts are interrupted by Borzhon, who is pouring me yet another cup of tea. It is late, and time for me to go.
This chapter argues that an animal's perspective of the landscape and its usability expands through encounter with another, and new ways of seeing are opened up enabling the animal to move back and forth between affordances of the forest and the household. This distinction of domains is reflected in (but not always subject to) human presence in a landscape. The latter can make available resources to other animals as much as it can withhold them (cf. Nyyssönen & Salmi 2013). Affordances in this context refer to anything the environment can provide for an animal – both good and bad, known or as yet unrecognized, sought after or undesired (Gibson 2015[1979]:119). Although broadly applied across disciplines, there has been considerable debate over what does and does not constitute an affordance (cf. Michaels 2003). Some (e.g. Norman 1988) have narrowed this definition to include only possibilities of which an animal is aware. There have been attempts to construct ontologies of affordances, such as founding them in propertied realism (e.g. Turvey 1992), which has led, in turn, to varied critiques. Scholars like Kadar and Efken (1994), for instance, disagree with a realist ontology, replacing it with a Heideggerian conception of intentionality.

I follow Michaels (2003:137) who asserts, “affordances do not arise as a consequence of mental operations. They are action-referential properties of the environment that may or may not be perceived.” However, I disagree with her when she suggests that “[affordance] is not perceiving what actions others engage in” (Michaels 2003:146). My point is that affordances become perceptive to animals through their encounters with other animals who perceive the same or other materials in different ways. The resulting expansion or change of perspective, I argue, grants humans and other animals a degree of flexibility in the landscape. This flexibility also adds to the unpredictability of human and animal behavior, which notably marks interspecies relations, but which seems to be underemphasized in the literature on affordances. In a taiga context, each party must reckon that the other possesses the potential to act in ways
contrary to their own. It is as if each party had an exit door, an alternative source of potential sustenance. Rather than control this door, the skilful herder-hunter positions himself to benefit from the animal's flexibility to move between affordances. The animal's autonomy is thus seen not as detrimental to the relationship with the herding household, but as an asset in helping ensure its sustainability. Their bond is defined not by dependency as much as by the benefits of association, and a herder's management finds expression in the deliberate habituation of such associations.

Rather than reasoning that reindeer (or yak) are willfully incorporating themselves in human-animal relations (e.g. Stepanoff 2012:290), I will argue that the loose binding of animals into such relations is primarily to be explained as a result of habit formation. Habits may seem to be forced upon animals at first, but as they take root, animals begin to act according to new patterns. Initial coaxing employed to establish new habits in others is not, of course, a one-sided affair. To employ pressure, as well as to resist it forcefully or cunningly, is a modality available to all species. It may be better, therefore, to speak of a negotiation of intentions, which in the landscape of the Saians is ever held in balance. Domestication in this context is not a matter of achieving perfect control over members of the household, but it is a matter of establishing manageable working relations with sentient beings who are sometimes closer to the household, and sometimes further away, but who can be recruited into collaborations time and again as memory of previous encounters accumulates.

**Proximity and Negotiation**

The vignette of Burzhon's yak herd points to at least two defining factors in most, if not all, Soiot human-animal relations. Firstly, relations are defined by fluctuation in proximity between humans and animals, and, secondly, they are characterized by ongoing interspecies negotiation of intentions. These two characteristics are indicative of the nuanced approach taken to animals in Oka, an approach that is not explained by using a wild-tame dichotomy, although this dichotomy was well known to my interlocutors. The view that proximity and negotiation co-
produce open and context-related human-animal relations in the Saians pushes at the boundaries imposed by language, especially by Russian and Buriat, focusing instead on how these often silent herders and hunters interact with animals in parallel to (or in spite of) the terminology that has come to describe their actions and relations linguistically. As we have seen in chapter one, Russian and Buriat are well established languages in the Saians. It is no surprise then, that in observing the lives of humans and animals a certain discrepancy can arise between what things are called, and what they are known to be in a more experiential sense. This experiential sense is perhaps best explored in how herders and hunters make use of spacial proximity and intentional negotiation.

Proximity between humans and animals is crucial in that it perpetually fluctuates as the result of unforeseen immediate circumstances, predictable seasonal variation, and historical change. Predator attacks, for instance, will disperse a yak herd beyond their usual rhythmical movements along well trod routes in the hill country. Although wolf or bear sightings may suggest to a herder increased likelihood of upcoming herd displacement, such events are generally unforeseen and immediate. They not only affect the nature and distance of a herder's routine movements toward his animals, but they can affect also their behavior upon return. More predictable are seasonal changes in distance and interactive intensity between animals and householders. In early spring pregnant yak will hide in the hills to give birth in seclusion, and horses are released for the winter in autumn. Conversely, for dogs, reindeer, various game, and wolves, autumn marks a period of increased interaction with members of the household. These fluctuations of proximity are part of predictable seasonal changes. Interruptions to these routines occur when the relative importance of a species to the household shifts. As we have seen, introduction of the Mongolian cow and its hybrid offspring with yak has led to milk yields that have made yak milking redundant, which in turn has affected the amount of physical contact between humans and yaks. Similarly, low prices for sable and squirrel furs have affected human-dog relations.
Perpetual negotiation of intentions encountered in other sentient beings is foundational to all interspecies relations, regardless of how intense they may be at any given time of year. As I will explore below, domination by brute force is not a common way in Oka to relate to animals, whether they are located far or near the household. Borzhon did not as much drive his yak, as he solicited their willingness to move in the direction he intended them to go. Such solicitation can amount to outright co-commitment in humans and animals as they jointly engage in tasks that are perceived rewarding to both parties (cf. Stepanoff 2012). These forms of collaboration are generally negotiated rather than forced, and they grow in intensity and efficacy with practice. In either case, communication of intentions always relies on movement, maneuvering, and utilization of various material implements, including environmental and architectural features. At the same time, this negotiation is never a one-sided endeavour; both humans and animals make use of these modalities in their own communicative styles. Borzhon’s yak, much like other species, such as wolves or horses, read and interpret his maneuvers, responding with their own. The outcome of such negotiations is never entirely predictable, which suggests a degree of openness to all human-animal relations I have observed in Oka.

**Perspectives on the Domus**

According to Walter W. Skeat's Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, the adj. *domestic* derives from the Latin *domesticus*, i.e. “belonging to a household,” which in turn comes from the old Greek *domus* (δόμος) “a house” (Skeat 1993:123). In the Latin sense, the *domus* included animals and slaves among other property (Cooper 2007:4; Finley 1973:58). Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913) defines *domestication* as “accustoming to home.” Thus, making someone accept the “home” as normal, must precede their “belonging” (Skeat 1993:123) to it. In the Oxford Dictionary, the term “household” refers to “[a] house and its occupants,” both of which are “regarded as a unit,” a connection that existed also in its original Roman context (cf. Saller 1984). Here, the social collective inhabiting the house is by definition inseparable from the materiality of its shelter, or home. In Oka this inseparability between the
two is not as rigid, as we have seen in animals who may belong to, but do not always reside within or near, the household. The Russian equivalent for *domestication*, which Borzhon had used to describe his yak, is *odomashnenie* (Ushakov, 2014), although a more common Russian equivalent is *priruchenie*, a term that stands closer to habituation in English. Although still based on the Latin *domus*, *odomashnenie* is somewhat more descriptive than the English, in that the Slavik prefix “o-” stands for *vokrug*, or *krugom*, both of which translate as *around* or *about*. *Odomashnenie* then is suggestive not only of “belonging to,” of “accustoming to,” or of being “inseparable from” the residential structure of “home,” but instead is concerned with proximity - the bringing of an entity into an area *around* or *about* the house.

This 'ushering into proximity' has traditionally occurred under the auspices of a household head. Interestingly, in Russian, the words for master (*khozian*) and household (*khoziaistvo*) are the same, the suffix “-stvo” turning “master” into a collective noun (i.e. masterhood). In Buriat *ezhen*, master, owner, possessor, or *ezhen* (Bur.), master, owner, must be connected with *ger* (Bur.), house, to form *gerei ezen* (Bur.), house owner. In Roman context, the *domus* had belonged to a master known as the *dominus* or proprietor who assigned members of the household a place within an asymmetrical power structure (e.g. Cooper 2007; Valpy 1852:41; Smith 1875:426). Scholars disagree whether the power asymmetry of the *domus* was defined by domination (e.g. Dumont 1970) or by a more nuanced and achieved recognition of authority (Cooper 2007:7, Gregory 1997:7-8). Domination, in this context has been defined as “the power of the master (*dominus*) over things (dominium, “property rights”), and even more, the power of the master over the slave (*potestas dominica*)” (Cassin, et al. 2004:227). But more recent views on on the Roman domus, hold that,

“Although a hierarchical relationship was asymmetrical where power was concerned, the ideal of reciprocity required that recognition of both authority and accountability be symmetrical. If symmetrical recognition was withheld by the inferior partner, the superior partner’s standing was accordingly undermined” (Cooper 2007:7).
This is a rather nuanced understanding of power within the *domus*, and although perhaps not identical to the Soiot domus, it does strike a chord with the notion of mastery in Oka.

The Soiot understanding of a 'household head' or *ezhen* (Bur.) is modeled on the concept of local master spirits and their balanced relations with the physical landscape and all living beings residing within it. The master spirit resides over a specific territory and can be encountered in the form of any of its household members roaming within that territory. Similarly, freely roaming yak can be traced back to their human owners, based on their general disposition or personality – that is to say, the temperament of the head of the human household to which the animals belong is known to be reflected in the animals' countenance. The social relations between human and other residents, both in the households of master spirits and human masters, are characterized by a recognition of sentience in others, very similar to Cooper's “recognition of authority and accountability” (2007:7). Rather than ruling its members by domination, the Soiot *domus*, as residential structure, as economic unit, and as landscape, is held together by perpetual balancing of reciprocal exchanges. These exchanges take place within the household, as well as between households. The local master spirit provides for the members of his or her own household (i.e animals of the forest), but he or she also responds to the needs of human masters and their dependents by sending animal gifts to human hunters. While both human and spirit masters operate in the same landscape, each posses their own physical and independent loci from which they observe the movements of animals.

**Spirit and Human Mastered Households**

A local spirit master is seen as a prominent land feature, such as a mountain or a spring, while the residential structure of a household serves for the human master a similar purpose. Neither are bound to these loci, as they move about the landscape in their dealings with animal property. Although the points from which these masters fan in and out are strategic and significant, this is not reflected in how their herds are categorized linguistically. Thus, herds are not identified.

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24 Interview with Irina S. and Aleksei M., Khurga Valley, 1 October, 2013.
as “wild” or “domestic,” that is, either in terms of residence or lack thereof. Neither are they held apart by the ways in which they are handled by their masters. Both masters approach their herds in similar ways: In Buriat (not specifically Oka-Buriat) *agaha(n)* refers to animals, particularly 'domestic' animals, such as cattle. The related term *adagalkha* (Bur.) means 'to put on fetters,' and *adaglakha* (Bur.) is 'to watch over,' 'track,' 'follow,' or 'look after.' Both spirit and human masters 'look after' the members of their households. Nonetheless, a differentiation is made between the holdings of spirit and human masters, particularly where the same species is held by either household.

In Oka this dividing line between human and spirit-owned animals is perhaps best understood in terms of an animal's relation to the forest. Spirit and human owned animals may both roam the forest, but both are not 'of the forest.' Although wild yak (*Bos mutus*) are known to roam and have interbred with domestic yak (*Bos grunniens*) in the trans-Himalaya region (e.g. Wilson and Reeder, eds. 2005:690-691), there are currently no known non-domestic yak in Oka. Similarly, there are no horses known to roam entirely free of human claim. Consequently, no common linguistic differentiation is made, in the Oka variant of Buriat, between domestic and wild yak or horses. However, for species which do have counterparts in both human and spirit-mastered households such a distinction is made. Goats and reindeer form one example (Rassadin 1996:53-55): Wild goats (Siberian ibex, Rus. *sibir'skii kozerog*) and domestic goats are referred to as *iamaan* (Bur.). To differentiate between the two, the term *oin iaman* (Bur.) is used for the wild variant. Furthermore, a wild buck is knowns as *tekhe* (Bur), while a domestic buck is referred to as *babana* (Bur.). A wild doe is called *oin eme iamaan* (Bur.), and a domestic doe is known simply as *'em'e iamann* (Bur.). Similarly, wild reindeer are known as *oin sagaan* (Bur.) or *gurööhen sagaan* (Bur.), while domestic reindeer are referred to as *mal sagaan* (Bur.). The term *oin* (Bur.) translates as “of the forest,” and the term *mal* (Bur.)\(^{25}\) means “cattle.”

\(^{25}\)Although *mal* is not directly connected to “house,” or “household” (i.e. *domus*), in Buriat it is often used in association with *ger* (house), as in *ger malaa h'erg'e'ekh'e*, which means “to establish one's household.”
The classical question of domestication is: When and how did animals of the forest cross into the fold of the household? In Oka animals cross the line between human and spirit households regularly, however not alive. Their bodies are conferred by the master spirit to a hunter in the form of gifted game, or sometimes as a sacrifice to the spirit master from the herder-hunter. The spirit master may also claim stock from a human master with the aid of predators. Somewhat less often, living animals cross the line. When they do, it is usually in the form of domestic reindeer, lured away to mate with wild reindeer, thus enlarging the spirit master's herd. Least common are accounts of forest animals joining the herd of a human master. Yet, it is this transaction that we have in mind, conventionally, when we speak of “domestication.” Arguably, the transition of animals between forest and human herds is somewhat less complicated in places where the proximity between spirit and human households is minimized. Kertselli (1925) has claimed that wild reindeer of the so-called Karagass breed (native to the eastern Saians) lend themselves better to domestication because they already possess a domestic heritage. So far we have not been able to identify a genetic marker for domesticity in reindeer (Roed et al. 2008; 2011). But it would seem that a general predisposition to domestication is inheritable, suggesting that an animal retains its potential to become what members of its species have already been.

Crossing between Households

It is this recursiveness that lies at the heart of my argument: Domestication should not be seen as a binary choice between forest and domestic. Instead, it is a process that involves the spirit world and human herds. The Buriat distinction between “animals of the forest” and “cattle” does not seem to have existed in ancestral Soiot or Tofalar. As linguist V. I. Rassadin (2005, 2003) points out in his Soiot and Tofa dictionaries, wild reindeer were known as *ak-an*. Ak had two meanings, one being “white” (cf. Bur. *sagaan*), while *an* is translated as “wild” (Rus. *dikii*). Here there seems to exist no association with the forest. The word “wild” is also known in Tofa as *cherlik*, although a “wild” horse was referred to as *emdi*, and a “wild” reindeer also known as *dopshun* (Tof.). Domestic reindeer, in contrast, were *ibi* (Tof.) or *hoilyga* (Tof.), the latter being a generic term for “domestic animal” (Rus. *domashnee zhivotnoe*). To obtain a better understanding of the logic underlying the linguistic division between *ak-an* and *ibi*, a closer study of the etymology of these terms is necessary.
merely as a matter of a gradual unidirectional genetic change. Rather, it should take into account the relational potential of a species, which is called upon when over an extended period of time an animal's proximity to another species is reduced, and which recedes once their proximity to each other increases again. Crossing the line between spirit and human master households may thus be described as a going back and forth between potential ways of being. Such a vision emphasizes relational fluctuation between species, rather than evolutionary stages producing what might resemble final artifacts (cf. Ingold 2002:43 on artifacts as arising from actions). In this view, each animal “artifact” is the product not only of descent but also of its living relations as activities. Instead of focusing on the particular shape of something in order to trace its formation back to a point of origin, it would seem useful to look at the ways in which a being relates to another, and to attempt to understand how the nature of their relations conditions each. Such an approach deemphasizes origin, and instead focuses our attention on the formative role of animal intentions in webs of interspecies exchange.

Western science has understood plant and animal domestication as processes that revolutionized human social development and enabled the formation of civilizations. We thus speak of a Neolithic Revolution; a term coined by archaeologist Gordon Childe (1892-1957). In his view, "Neolithic societies began deliberately co-operating with nature to increase the productivity of edible plants and to protect and foster the multiplication of animals that yield food as meat, blood, or milk" (Childe 1958:34). Although his idea of ‘co-operating with nature’ does provide some space for the notion of mutuality, or non-singular intentionality, Childe’s emphasis lies largely on human intention. This emphasis has stood at the heart of most official definitions of domestication ever since. The United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity reads: “‘Domesticated or cultivated species' means species in which the evolutionary process has been influenced by humans to meet their needs” (1992:3). This official definition reflects a conventional Western stance toward the role of humans in the world at large. While it is inherently anthropocentric, it does not sum up all of the ways in which human-animal relations
and domestication have been understood, even in the West.

Although Childe chose the term ‘revolution’ to describe a very lengthy and less than well-understood process, he never intended to describe it as having been abrupt, neither was he certain at what point one might speak of its zenith (Childe 1958:39). Childe’s cumulative perspective of domestication thus leaves room for a degree of nonlinearity. However, we are reminded by Cassidy, emphasis in traditional definitions of domestication has been on “distinguishing between discrete states characterized by fixed properties” (2007:11). In other words, historically it has been assumed that a progressive course could be plotted for the morphological transformation in a species from the wild to the domestic stage. But such linearity does not allow for much recursion in which the proximity between species fluctuates prior to any visible traces occurring in their morphology. Perhaps one of the earliest manifestations of this linear thinking is found in the three-stage theory of such ancient thinkers as Marcus T. Varro (116-27 BC) and Porphyry (234-305 AD), who proposed that hunting and gathering were replaced by pastoralism, which in turn would give way to agriculture, while maintaining elements of both previous models (Kramer 1967:73). German ethnologist, Eduard Hahn (1896; 1897; 1905), was one of the first outspoken critics of this approach, showing how various ‘stages’ could occur at the same time, as well as out of sequence, not making them stages at all (Isaac 1970:6). The seeds for rethinking domestication have thus been with us for a while.

**Beyond Linearity and Anthropocentrism in Domestication**

Historically, in anthropology there have existed rather divergent approaches to domestication. Some have framed domestication as an economic and biological event, triggered by human intention, and as a relationship in which the non-human animal becomes subject to exploitation through human commodification and ownership (Clutton-Brock 1990:7). Others (e.g. Cassidy 2007) have taken a rather more contrary view in which domestication is characterized by commonalities, by frailty, and as the result of coincidence. Such qualities speak against a linear
gradient from wild to domestic, constituting a process that defies clear hierarchies of power, as suggested by Clutton-Brock. In this ever more prevailing view, domestication is non-linear and recursive, as much as it is a balancing act between the roles of benefactor and beneficiary. It is a relationship requiring negotiation and perpetual mutual adjustment. This need for consensus between sentient beings is indicative of a sociality of exchange in which human participation is not guaranteed to end up on top. Hahn had blazed this less anthropocentric trail when he suggested that people represented merely one among many species affecting behavioral and even physiological adaptations in other animals.

In his seminal work, *Die Haustiere und Ihre Beziehung zur Wirtschaft des Menschen* [Domesticates and their Relationship to the Economy of People], Hahn writes, “From the beginning I assumed that any definition [of domestication] had to take for granted conditions evident in the animals, and that any viewpoint that puts man into the foreground had to be abandoned entirely” (1896:1). Numerous scholars have followed Hahn in this line of thought (e.g., Zeuner 1963; Rindos 1984; O’Connor 1997). For Hahn, the human impact of captivity and care on non-human animals was evident of course, but he did not want to dwell on the specificity of the human role in this process. Instead, he saw the biological changes that occurred in domesticated species as natural adaptations to fluctuating circumstances, which in principle did not differ from conditions that could be found in circumstances where humans were absent. This may be another way of saying that the changes that occur in an animal, and which archaeologists generally identify as characteristic of domestication, are the consequences of changes in webs of relations with the environment and its human and other-than-human actors. But even in an archaeology focusing on animal domestication at the hands of humans, the relationship between human hunting and herding modes has been understood as flexible.

Higgs and Jarman (1969) have argued that while archaeological evidence of morphologically unchanged bone concentrations, belonging to one or two species, may be indicative of a close human-animal relationship, there is no saying from such a find whether we
are dealing with hunter-gatherers or with early forms of domestication. In fact, they went so far as provocatively to conclude that there may never have been an age of hunting and gathering as such, but rather that there may have existed symbiotic relationships between humans and other animals dating back as far as the early Pleistocene (Higgs and Jarman 1969:39). "The choice of which form of exploitation was to be pursued [hunting and gathering or early domestication], may have been determined by which form of economy was the more successful in particular environments" (Higgs and Jarman 1969:39). Archaeological observations like these are among the precursors to current anthropological thinking about the fluctuating distance between species, including humans, which affect biological and behavioral changes characteristic of domesticates. In this process it is not excluded, depending on climatological changes and other environmental factors, that a semi-domesticated species may go feral several times prior to showing any significant morphological changes associated with the domestication state in which they are familiar to us today. The process of domestication may thus involve multiple crossings back and forth across the line described above, which is further suggested by observable fluctuation of intentions in the species involved.

A Dialogue of Human and Other Intentions
The old idea that intention alone, and especially that of humans, is to be credited as the driving factor for the morphological manipulation of animals that we now identify as domestic (e.g. Harris 1990; Higgs and Jarman 1969; Zeuner 1963) has been challenged more recently by scholars like Helen Leach (2007), who argues that our 10,000-year history with domestication may well be divided into at least four stages. The first two stages are marked by “unconscious” human selection and the use of generic breeding techniques to retain preferred varieties, while the last two stages of deliberate cross breeding, inbreeding, and finally intentional genetic manipulation, fall only within the last 300 years (Leach 2007:73). In other words, human intention has driven domestication only in the past three centuries, while the preceding millennia of domestic pre-history are the product of human-animal coexistence and its largely
unintentional outcomes. Leach’s argument echoes Hahn’s observations from over a hundred years ago in that it qualifies and limits the significance of human intention in the process of domestication.

Some authors will go even further in arguing against the anthropocentric tendency that has been at the heart of the domestication debate. Science writer, Stephen Budiansky (1992), describes animal domestication as a co-evolutionary process in which benefit is derived not only by humans, but also by the animals involved. He notes, “A close look at other evolutionary odd couples in nature [besides rats and mice]—species that have gained an advantage in the struggle for survival by flocking with another species in defiance of the norms of defensive behavior—reveals biological motives that are apparent in all domesticated relationships” (Budiansky 1992:46). Drawing on Zeuner’s (1963) examples of the role and function of human urine, Budiansky points to coevolution that seems to have occurred between Sami and reindeer, arguing for a “more equal symbiosis” in which reindeer profess a kind of “free will” by which they engage in this partnership (1992:52). The author’s numerous examples of unsuspected human-other animal relations, in which non-human animals sometimes seem to take the lead, take place somewhere within the fuzzy area between the wild and the domesticated. They are examples of webs of interaction in which humans are not superior players. This unpredictable approach to animal domestication speaks against the Western anthropocentric tradition in which humans are seen to be in control, and in which there exists a firm division between nature and culture, domestic and wild.

The culturally relative foundation on which this wild-tame dichotomy is built, and the extent to which colonial ontologies have affected indigenous ways of knowing, are especially well addressed by authors writing from a wildlife management perspective (e.g. Davidson-Hunt and Berkes 2003; Etkin 2002; Suchet 2002; Orlove and Brush 1996). According to social geographer Sandra Suchet-Pearson (2002:146), “linear notions of social evolution, progress and development underlie Eurocentric ways of knowing wildlife.” But this social evolutionary
perspective is not shared by most traditional indigenous ontologies. Consequently, she argues, “the undeveloped existence of hunting and gathering is defined as the absence of civilization, characterized as untamed, uncontrolled, savage and wild” (Suchet 2002:146). While Western wildlife management takes the Cartesian separation between culture and nature for granted, and therefore further divides the world into human and non-human animals, and into wild and domestic spheres, there exist alternative ontologies, some of which reverse this order. To illustrate this, Suchet draws on Deborah Rose’s work, who “turns upside-down the Eurocentric notion of Australia as progressing from a prior, uncontrolled wild towards a present and future domesticated civilization” (2002:147). For Rose, landscape that has been tamed is representative of an isolating space in which inhabitants lack relations to land, and which for that reason has become wild (Rose 1996 in Suchet 2002:147). Wilderness is thus a state of uninhabitability, and the recognition of such a state is culturally relative.

**Autonomy, Economy, and Communicative Materiality**

The question then is perhaps not so much whether a being belongs to one or the other category, but how it relates qualitatively to constituents within its environment, and what degree of autonomy it may posses in moving between them. Contemporary scholars interested in these relations stress mutuality, co-dependence, and collaboration between species, including humans (e.g. Tsing 2011; Pollan 2002). This emphasis on open relations is inspired by a close reading of how contact between humans and animals is established over time in the archaeological and ethnographic record. With such a reading emerges a picture of social relations that are often highly ambiguous in terms of how power is distributed between individuals and populations, and which can be host to mutualism that is invisible to participants, resulting in unforeseen consequences for all affected parties (e.g., Cassidy 2007; Zeder 2006; Star 1991). Although Melinda Zeder, a specialist in the archaeology of animal and plant domestication, attributes a power advantage to human intentionality based on our highly developed ability to transmit cultural knowledge, she also recognizes that, “threshold criteria that require total genetic
isolation and emergent speciation or complete dependence on humans for survival set a very high bar that many, if not most, widely accepted domesticates would fail to clear” (2006:107). Porous isolation and imperfect dependence thus maintain a space for animals from which to resist or manipulate human intention.

Domesticity is not a product only of one party's ability to keep in check another, but it is a relationship in which both parties are able to identify and act upon what they identify as value in the other. Thus domesticity can be described as, “highly contingent on a wide range of factors, including the ability of the plant or animal to take advantage of the relationship,” but also, and especially of, “the strategies and accompanying technologies humans develop to manage the resource, and its changing value vis-a-vis available alternative resources” (Zeder 2006:107). It is this “changing value” perceived in the body and related affordances of the other that can lead to intentional entry into, or exit from, mutualistic interspecies relations. Many theorists seek to decide whether animal domestication is best understood in terms of human domination, interspecies symbiosis, or commensality, with cost-benefit calculations as foundation, thus leading to arguments either in support of power symmetry or asymmetry (Clark 2007:55). But rather than argue for one or the other, I hope to show in this thesis how humans and animals move back and forth between symmetric and asymmetric power, and how they fluctuate between commensal and mutualist ways of being with each other.

As Zeder has shown, materiality plays a pivotal role in the negotiation of power. However, this is not limited to the economic utilization of human technology, it is also true in terms of the communicative potential of objects: Were a reindeer and a herder connected to each other with a lasso, there would exist between them a number of possible ways in which pressure could travel through the lasso. Depending on their individual intentions, as well as on possible joint commitment, the direction of the pressure traveling through the lasso would be affected. Is the herder tugging on the deer, or is the deer tugging on the herder? Is the herder communicating with the deer through the lasso? Has the herder set out by tugging, encountering
initial resistance from the deer, while at a later point the deer decided to come along without having to be pulled? The archaeological remains of the lasso itself may, or may not, convey to us a clear record of the quality of the interaction with its multiple possible turns, but we must assume that the range of possible scenarios is broad. Accepting that pressure can flow in more than one direction, and that the tendency of that direction can change repeatedly over time, allows us to study the *domus* and its implements beyond a subjugation-opportunism dichotomy. Hobble and lasso are no longer implements of domination merely, but they become communicative media – means for the negotiation of interspecies intentions, operating in more than one way.

**Domesticity and Expanding Perspectives**

Through prolonged tactile engagement with the other, we are able to develop for ourselves a perspective of our body akin to theirs. Taking this notion of perspectival expansion to interspecies encounters, we are naturally confronted with the issue of body-specific perception of the world, and in its wake with multiple possible (yet mutually exclusive) worlds. In *A Stroll Through the Worlds of Animals and Men*, biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1934) compares ways of perception between humans, flies, molluscs, and many other animals, based on differences in the biology of their receptor organs. He concludes that while they share a common environment, each live in a separate *umwelt*, or *phenomenal self-world* (1934:5). However, these divergent worlds interact with a common environment, and thus are bound to intersect with each other at some point—even if the intersection of their two worlds is validated in radically different ways27.

A related debate has ensued in anthropology as part of the so-called 'ontological' and 'animal turns' (e.g., Weil 2010; Ingold 2013), at the heart of which lies an interest not only in defining *what is* (and for whom), but also in how communication is facilitated between beings

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27Mimicry and interspecific empathy have been written about in recent years (e.g. Willerslev 2007; Brunois 2005), but the focus of such literature generally lies on humans attempting to enter the *umwelt* of other animals rather than the reverse.
of distinct life-worlds. One theoretical approach to the intersection of the perceptive worlds of humans and other beings is Viveiro's DeCastro's (1996, 1998) Amerindian perspectivism. DeCastro's perspective, which is dictated by the shape of a particular body, is similar to von Uexküll's receptor organ perception, which defines the organism's umwelt. Even outside of an Amerindian cosmological context, in which an animal is understood to harbour human likeness at its centre, the biological uniqueness of an animal's physical constitution is still understood to have perspectival or perceptual uniqueness. The question is, whether an animal's perception of the world is affected by interaction with beings of another perception of the world. It would seem that for perspectival expansion to occur no reconstitution of one's biology is necessary, but merely a degree of flexibility in the way it is currently being used. We may then speak of domesticates as animals whose knowledge or use of their own body in the world has been expanded to include ways contrary or supplementary to their species' normative behavior. Such animals have allowed the perspective of an Other - consciously, deliberately, willingly, or otherwise - to affect their own.

**Emerging Affordances and Life Rhythm**

In DeCastro's terms the above circumstances could be described as another's perspective seeping through the porous membrane of an “animal mask” (1998:471). An individual's way of being, and thus of seeing, is profoundly affected by the presence of the other. And in tandem with this expanded perspective, the individual in question begins to draw on hitherto unrealized biological potential. French philosopher Dominique Lestel (2002:56) speaks to the same

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28 Drawing on the ethnography of Amerindian peoples, he postulates a radical relationalism between human and other beings. Hidden behind the external corporeal manifestation of all beings (i.e. their diverse bodies) lies a common (human) nature. While the inner human nature of all beings shares a common cultural perspective, its view of the world is distorted by the specific body in which it finds itself dressed. The inner nature, by way of its body's perspectival distortion (cf. phenomenal self-world), is able to identify others only as animals. Humans thus identify other animals on the basis of their distinct bodies, while animals see themselves as humans, and humans – in turn - as jaguars. To be human means to be able to see one's interior (human) nature, and to be animal means to see a subject from its exterior (animal) nature. DeCastro summarizes this ontological shift by contrasting multinaturalism with multiculturalism. The prior refers to multiple realities (natures, bodies) with a singular underlying culture, the latter refers to multiple cultures (perspectives, awarenesses) of a singular underlying reality.
phenomenon, drawing attention to its affects on rationality when he asks, “What changes does the rationality of one agent undergo when it regularly interacts with another agent possessing skills very different from its own?” One way of approaching this change in rationale is to consider ways in which individuals may begin to recognize and respond to aspects of their environment as affordances new to them. As their bodily abilities (e.g. their digestive capacity) are broadened, so they become aware of new resources they may exploit. What hitherto was outside of their realm of awareness is now gradually being included. Such a change in the reading of the environment amounts to a change in rationality itself, or in the logic used to make connections within one's umwelt. E.N. Shirokogorova (1919), spouse and colleague of Russian anthropologist Sergei M. Shirokogoroff, provides us with a fitting example of such an expansion in affordance recognition from their joint fieldwork with Evenki (Orochens) of north-eastern China:

“These Orochens belong to the third group we have visited; we shall call them the Kamar ski Orochens. Being the largest group of Manchuria's Orochen population, they are primarily hunters, much like Amur Orochens, breeding horses on the side. The horse aids them in their migrations, as well as during the hunt, for which reason the most sought after quality in a horse is its endurance. Because hay making is unthinkable under the circumstances of a hunting life style, horses are first being accustomed (Rus. priuchaiut) to “abstinence” (Rus. vozderzhanie), after which they can go entirely without food for 2-3 days, and then they are being accustomed to eating berries, shrubs, and eventually meat. At first they will feed a horse strongly salted boiled meat, after which they will feed it without the salt, eventually transitioning to raw meat. A marginal portion – served in the morning, once a day - consists of eight pounds of meat per horse. “Non-vegetarian” horses will survive in the taiga for 25 years, highly enduring and strong as they are. The experienced horse will save its energy in the taiga and skillfully adjusts to given circumstances, while an inexperienced horse will last for no longer than
2-3 weeks” (Shirokogorova, 1919).

Shirokogorova uses the term “accustoming,” or literally to “re-teach,” “teach anew,” or “overwrite” (Rus. *pereuchit*) when referring to these hunters who trained their horses to eat in ways similar to their own. Horses are known to fall between ruminant (bacterial digestive action in fore stomachs, enzymatic action in small intestines) and non ruminant (enzymatic action, single stomach) digestive systems (Wright, 1999), which explains why they can potentially break down meat in much the same way as humans, pigs, and dogs (ruminants). Their evident ability to become accustomed to a meat diet is exemplary of the biological potential on which horses are able to draw in response to the environmental shift they may experience as part of their collaboration with humans. But transitions such as these have an affect not only on the daily dietary composition of the horse's feed, but also on the temporal pacing of a horse's normative intake, which constitutes an integral part of its *umwelt*. No longer can the horse rely on its average 12-18 hours of synchronous grazing, a behavior that is thought to correspond to the nature of its digestive tract (cf. Burla et al. 2016; Boyd 1988). It must now move according to the pace set by its human companion. The human companion, in turn, is aware of the adjustment required of the the horse and works with it in a sensitive and gradual manner, until a single stomach filling of meat becomes a new norm. At this point, it may be reasoned, the horse has learned to recognize eight pounds of raw meat as suitable food enabling it to walk through challenging terrain for one or more days*. Its embodied perspective has expanded, and it now recognizes the resources of a companion species as affordance.

**Conclusion**

This chapter approached the boundaries between wild and domestic as a matter of perspective. It argued that interspecies proximity and negotiation of intensions characterized all Soiot human-animal relations within and beyond the household. To gain a better understanding of the

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*Sadly we are not given any detail on the horses' behavior upon return to pasture lands. Will these horses approach meat when grasses or grains are in abundance? How easy is it for these horses to switch back and forth between grasslands and meat feeding taiga? What is the role of humans in this transition?
concept of the household, the chapter examined the etymology of the *domus* in its Roman (Latin) context, comparing it to Soiot notions of social, productive, and residential spaces. Finding the latter to be modeled on the local master spirit's household, it framed human-animal relations in terms of reciprocal inter-household exchanges rather than a wild-domestic dichotomy. With these exchanges, a degree of flexibility for animals to move back and forth between spirit and human domains emerged, a recursiveness hinted at by early theorists of plant and animal domestication. Looking to more recent critiques of linear and anthropocentric approaches to domestication, the chapter pointed to unpredictability as a major feature in the negotiation of intentions between humans and animals. Attention was then given to the role of animal autonomy, perceived economic value, and the communicative modality of material implements.

It may be concluded from these observations that affordances (or an animal’s recognition of such) emerge from inter-species sociality. As species become engaged with each other, their perspectival expansion increasingly allows them to take advantage of affordances previously recognized or utilized only by holders of other perspectives. Expansion of an embodied perspective is possible where potential physical or behavioral qualities can be made visible or invisible, as we have seen in the digestive example of horses in Shirokogorova's account. I will develop further this notion of perspectival expansion in the next chapter, which focuses on the reciprocal relations between spirit and human households. Here Uro’s householders are described as keeping a foot in the door of two ways of knowing their land, namely through shamanist and Buddhist ritual perspectives. While the concept of perspectival expansion served us as an inroad to understanding animal domestication in this chapter, the next chapter's concern with expansion of cosmological perspectives shows how herder-hunters move back and forth between services of divergent ritual specialists, thereby recognizing affordances unique to each practitioners’ perspective of the landscape.
Chapter Four: Spirit Masters

Introduction: His Spirit Soars Above Us

11 May 2014. Before his days as a zootekhnik for the collective farm at Sorok, Badma Khorluevich had lived in a little cabin at the centre of the valley of Uro. His cabin is gone now. It was moved to Sorok, much like yurts used to be moved in the more distant past. Today Badma took me to the location where his hut had once stood. All I could make out, in what is now his brother’s pasture, was the vague indentation left by the foundations of his former home. Nearby a traditional serge, or horse hitching post, was rotting away. Devoid of other material reference to his former life, the landscape itself is still teeming with memories for Badma. Beyond his former cabin, for instance, there had once stood two other cabins. Both are gone now, like Badma’s, including any sign of their serge. One of the two cabins had belonged to a powerful Soiot shaman. He had lived here for many years, together with his wife. One day, when the shaman was ‘rather old’ (over 60), Badma tells me, three eagles had appeared in the sky. They soon landed in the grass near the aging man’s cabin. When the shaman caught sight of the three visitors, he wasted no time. Reaching for his rifle, he stepped outside of his cabin. Pointing the barrel of his rifle under his chin, he pulled the trigger. With the shot echoing in the valley, the eagles took flight. And with them—Badma claims—they took the shaman’s spirit (Rus. dukh).

His body, like the bodies of many other elders, was taken up the west-facing hillside behind the three cabins. I have picked berries here on multiple occasions, and it is not rare to spot an eagle, and sometimes up to twelve, soaring high above in the blue sky. Unlike the present day, when people are increasingly burying their dead in the ground (albeit on

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30Galdanova (2000b) and others have written extensively about the role of the serge among Buriats. For Buriats, Mongols, and Iakuts the presence of a serge indicates that a location has its owner, host, or master (Rus. khozian; But. ezhen, echen). Soiots share in this tradition. The serge is installed on the right side of a yurt’s entrance (the masculine domain), facing south, and it represents the centre of a related household’s range, symbolically resembling its hearth (Rus. ochag) according to Evgenia O. Zaksheeva (2009:48). A common blessing given upon its erection is: “May this hitching post be ever unflinching, and the hearth be inextinguishable” (Zaksheeva 2009:48) If a serge remains in place after the death of a human master, its enduring presence stands testimony to the existence of the host’s offspring. The serge of an heirless man, in contrast, is removed upon his death (ibid.). Badma’s serge, although disintegrating, had remained standing.
hillsides), the shaman's body had been placed on a pyre of dry branches. With additional wood piled on top of the corpse, the shaman's body soon disappeared in the blazing light of fire. Badma had seen off many of his ancestors in this way. As the eldest son, it had been his responsibility to take them up the hillside, just like the old shaman. This was how his people had always sent off their loved ones in the past, he assured me. They had never buried their bodies. Instead, with the corpse resting on a horse-drawn sleigh-like attachment, a rider would drag the dead body over bumps and through the moss into the hill country. Wherever the corpse fell off the sleigh from the unevenness of the forest floor, there it was to be left undisturbed. Although much has changed even since the death of the shaman, the eagles are still soaring above us, and with them – or in them – the man's spirit.

Illustration 8: Baianbata scattering tea to the spirit master. © 2013, Author

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The main aim of this chapter is to outline the relationship between two cosmological perspectives that existed for the householders at Uro. Combining the hunting practices of their
ancestors with the herding tasks of their Buriat neighbours, Soiot men and women deliberately engaged the ritual activities historically associated with either. Rather than keeping these two cosmological domains apart, herder-hunters as well as ritual specialists often blurred the lines between the two, which suited the mixed subsistence activities of each household throughout the year. Tying in with the importance of maintaining ambiguity and autonomy of movement, as discussed in the previous two chapters, this chapter seeks to tease out the differing approaches to domestication encountered in Buddhism and shamanism. While providing the reader with a background on the history of both ritual practices in the Saians, the chapter specifically draws on examples of overlap between the two in Oka. Its main argument is that where buddhist practitioners have domesticated master spirits (in a complete and irreversible sense), the relationship between the two ritual domains has become unproductive. Conversely, where master spirits remain earthly there people gain from an overlap of shamanism with Buddhism. It concludes that hybrid communities like Uro, in which multiple species share social ties within and beyond the domus, and where diverse ritual activities intersect, all relations must be kept open (i.e. incomplete and reversible) if they are to remain sustainable. In this regard, people's best choice is not to renounce the one and to convert to another, but to remain flexibly positioned between two.

Of Practitioners and their Activities
To appreciate the herding and hunting activities of my Soiot friends and teachers, it is paramount to consider how shamanism, Buddhism, and buddhist Tantric practices co-shaped their ideas about the landscape, and about sentience encountered within it. Having explored domestication as an expansion of bodily awareness in the previous chapter, this chapter is concerned with notions of domestication from the diverse angles of ritual practitioners in Oka. It argues that where buddhist taming activities have resulted in the deification of landscape master spirits, there the relationship between the ritual domains of shamans and lamas has become unproductive. Conversely, the chapter finds that where a degree of ambiguity is maintained, and
where master spirits remain earthly beings, there people are able to benefit from an overlap of shamans' and lamas' perspectives of the landscape. This chapter then provides a cosmological perspective on 'moving back and forth' – this time between ritual perspectives.

Approaching shamanism from a political historical angle, Nicholas Thomas and Caroline Humphrey (1996:5) have referred to shamans as “inspirational practitioners,” and to their practices as “inspirational activities,” in a context often characterized by power negotiation between “inspirational and state cults”\(^{31}\). Although it may look like a clear dichotomy of opposed types of activity, Thomas and Humphrey argue, “what may be significant are precisely the overlapping and mutability of various forms of contested ritual agency, rather than the clarification of what makes them distinct” (Thomas and Humphrey 1996:3). In other words, what at times is utilized to stress difference, is at other times presented as something held in common. This approach to shamanism is useful to my thesis, because it acknowledges the ambiguity of boundaries between local and introduced activities, between 'wild' and 'ordered' ways of knowing—especially where Buddhism has incorporated local concepts—while it recognizes the power of inspirational activities to periodically strike out against Buddhist narratives. This flexibility is mirrored in what I have described earlier as the essence of 'Being Soiot' - a definitional indistinctness that I shall use here to speak about ritual practice.

Although Buddhism did not come to Oka as a state cult, it did gradually assume the position of “official” cult, held largely by Buriat settler majority. Yet, even to these settlers Buddhism had come as a foreign import, one that never fully replaced older ways of knowing, such as the Oka-Buriat mountain cult (Gomboev 2002). Given its Tantric subset of practices, the confrontation of Buddhism with shamanism in Oka has not led exclusively to conflict, but

\(^{31}\)According to Brian Morris, “Most scholars suggest that shamanism is not a ‘religion’ in the sense of an organized or institutionalized social phenomenon” (2006:18). Instead, it is often described in terms of beliefs and practices within a religion (Hultkrantz 1988 in Morris 2006:18). Another explanation is that shamanism has been studied ethnographically by anthropologists, who have emphasized its status as a “cultural tradition” (Siikala 2004:175). Lacking universal scriptures, shamanism cannot be regarded a “scriptural religion” (Thomas and Humphrey 2006:2,8), although local forms of shamanism may claim religious scriptures from 'scriptural religions' as their key texts (e.g. Hogarth 2002:109).
also to dialogue and—to use Thomas and Humphrey's term—to “overlap” (1996:3). Thus it was not always clear whether a Soiot hunter performed a ritual to a local spirit master, a Buriat mountain deity, or to burkhan (Bur. for god, deity), commonly used as an inclusive cover term to refer to either. Arguably, this ambiguity allowed herder-hunters to continue with their activities in a place where multiple ideological convictions have projected their ways of seeing on the landscape. But it also allowed herder-hunters to benefit from relations with people representing what may be construed as opposing perspectives.

Like the herder-hunter who moves between pasture and forest, and whose household extends far beyond the cabin and its adjacent hereditary hay harvest plots, so the people of my fieldwork seemed to move rather freely between diverse ritual activities and between the services of various ritual specialists. For Soiot clients calling on ritual services, the activities of diverse specialists seemed to overlap in purpose, if not in detail. When I asked my neighbour, Borzhon, whether calling a shaman to consecrate the household was any different from calling a lama, he responded: “probably not” (Rus. naverno net). “Probably,” because Borzhon did not identify as a ritual specialist, and making a confident statement would have been inappropriate from his point of view. More importantly, “probably” speaks to the very nature of social encounters with sentience in the sacred landscape: Never certain, rigid, or predictable, social encounters had to be experienced, and they could be ascertained only retrospectively (cf. Humphrey 1995:135).

**Divergent Approaches to Spirit Masters**

Less concerned over whether a shaman or a lama was invited, what seemed paramount was the efficacy of a specific practitioner. A more powerful lama was likely more helpful than a less powerful shaman in protecting a household against wolves, or other misfortunes. But it was also understood that certain tasks could be accomplished only by one or the other, depending on their field of expertise, knowledge of specific family history, or relatedness to its clan. Baldorzho had been introduced to me as 'the lama from Bukson,' a small village south of Sorok.
The Dondokovy brothers spoke of him as “the only true Soiot lama.” He had attended school with Badma Khorluevich, the eldest of the three Dondokovy brothers, before leaving Oka to undergo Buddhist training, both in St. Petersburg and in Mongolia. Like several other lamas, Baldorzho was a Tantric practitioner, but what set him apart from other lamas was his knowledge of localized rituals and chants, passed down to him by his forebears, knowledge of which he claimed to be the sole surviving initiate. Baldorzho was known as lama, and not as shaman, yet his perspective of the landscape took serious peoples' relations with local master spirits.

Baldorzho was a man intimately familiar with two distinct perspectives. He never abandoned his role as lama, and yet he was deeply familiar with Soiot shamanist perception of the landscape. Seeking to direct his services to the fears of the households at Uro, his familiarity with the needs of hunters (as opposed to herders), allowed him to mitigate between Buddhist and shamanist perspectives. To the people of Uro he was a kind of spokesperson who could approach a spirit master (Bur. ezen, ezhen) from the perspective of its Buddhist household, the household to which it was said to have converted many years earlier. Quite unlike a shaman who would engage in an exchange with a particular local spirit, Baldorzho would secure a spirits' benevolence by reminding it of the allegiance it had formed to the Buddhist household. What mattered to my neighbours at Uro was that the relationship between them, their stock, and the spirits of the landscape was maintained, something that in their minds amounted to a balance achieved in part through the performance of appropriate ritual.

However, it would be naive to assume that herder-hunters at Uro were unaware of the differences that existed between a shaman's and a lama's approaches to sentience in the landscape. As I will explore below, according to the lamas' narrative, the majority of local master spirits had been persuaded by itinerant lamas of the past to become obedient to the Buddha's teachings. With their successful “domestication” of the most powerful master spirits, several of them had attained divine status in the Buddhist pantheon. From a Buddhist perspective,
their inclusion with other divinities had rendered them not powerless but harmless, predictable, and benevolent to the people. But from the perspective of a shaman, such conversion rendered master spirits unavailable to regular exchanges with human mastered households. Such exchanges had always stood at the centre of maintaining balance in the relationship between humans, animals, and the landscape. The divergence of these two approaches to master spirits is expressed most clearly in a Buddhist layman’s offering and a shaman’s sacrifice, both enduring yet opposed ritual actions I will explore below.

An Underlying Order of Things
In the absence of pre-revolutionary ethnographic materials for Oka, the historical activities of Soiot shamans are perhaps best understood by looking to what is known about Tofa practices. Tofa shamanism is thought to have been influenced by Buddhism over a four hundred year contact period (14th-18th c.) with Tozhu of eastern Tyva (Mel'nikova 1994:135), as well as with Mongolian tribes of the Baikal region (cf. Vainshtein 1968). Beginning in the second half of the 17th century, elements of Russian Orthodox Christianity also began to influence Tofa rituals, which otherwise remained consistent with shamanist activities known from the Altai, western Buriatia, and eastern Tyva (Mel'nikova 1994:135). Although the highest ranking deities for Tofa were burkhan (or kudai) of the upper world, and erlik-khan of the lower world, it was dag-ezi who is described as the mountain ruler overseeing all other spirit entities within the Tofa pantheon.

B. E. Petri describes these entities as a “special clan [or kind] of mountain spirits—deity owners—with a strict hierarchy” (Petri 1928:15),32 which he lays out as follows: “Dag-ezi rules over the owners of separate valleys, to whom in turn spirit owners of individual undrained or marshland mountain valleys (Rus. pad’) are subject, and finally there are the spirit owners of glens” (1928:15). Water bodies themselves, on the other hand, are described as not being subject

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32How strict this hierarchy may have been is open to debate, particularly in light of current attempts in southern Siberia to construct cohesive cosmologies (cf. Halemba 2006:136-137).
to *dag-ezi*, but under the authority of *sun-ezi* the water deity. Not unlike the hierarchical organization under *dag-ezi*, water spirits under *sun-ezi* follow a ranking order from rivers to creeks to streams - with the exception of lakes, whose spirits fall under the direct authority of *sun-ezi* (Petri 1928:16). The local *ezi* of each valley was entreated prior the hunt to ensure success, and similarly fisheries depended on supplications to either *sun-ezi* or smaller local water spirit masters. *Dag-ezi* was thought to protect not only wild reindeer, but also herded reindeer, securing the reproductive success of human managed reindeer and maintaining their feed year round (Petri 1928:15, 16). In this way, *ezi* ensured the fattening of both hunted and herded animals of the same species.

**Balance and Willingness in the Landscape**

Most of my interlocutors spoke of animals as possessing a soul. It was less clear whether this soul could be considered as separate from the spirit master in whose care the animal moved, or whether the spirit master served as single collective soul. In either case, people spoke of animal souls as if each animal had its own. Searching a forest for animals could thus be understood as seeking for their spirit or soul. A hunter would conduct a ritual of entreaty prior to his search, after which he would set out on the trails in a given landscape. His hunt could thus be construed as a soul search that bore resemblance to the solicitation of spirits performed by shamans on journeys undertaken in a state of trance. The hunter could travel through the forest for days before locating an animal willing to render itself. Similarly, a shaman often had to invest great effort in searching for a spirit before such would appear in his presence. Both hunter and shaman depended on the good will (Rus. *blagoraspolozhenie*, cf. Petri 1928:15) of the spirits or souls they sought.

Willingness of animals to come to the hunter has been described in the literature of the Saian-Altai region as dependent upon a hunter's maintenance of balance in all things. In the Altai this has been referred to as *kire*. Anthropologist Ludek Broz writes:

“*Kire*, in one of its meanings is often translated into Russian as *mera* – ‘measure,’ ‘level,’
‘degree’ (Tybykova 2005:109–1). The more appropriate translation for the context in which it was used, however, seems to be ‘norm’, ‘share’, ‘portion’ or ‘balance’. Every hunter has kire – the amount of animals which it is appropriate to shoot within a certain period of time (e.g. hunting expedition) as well as within one’s lifetime” (Broz 2007:298).

One's effectiveness in soliciting souls or spirits in the landscape is thus also a matter of how many animals one has been ascribed, and how many of their souls one has already solicited.

The principles by which a hunter's balancing efforts are tracked extend well beyond his usual hunting range. I was told by Burjat shaman Buda-Khean Stepanovich, that wherever he goes, the landscape spirit master of that locality will recognize him. While traveling in Tyva one day, Stepanovich was met by birds who flew alongside his vehicle. He recognized the birds as a sign of welcome from the local spirit master:

'One spirit master conveys to another information about you. So, if you have a certain number of days left to live, that information will be relayed, “as if from radio tower to radio tower” [Rus. kak by s onoi radio bashni k sleduiushei]. 'The same is true of the number of animals you were given by burkhan (i.e. kire). Say, you were given five, but because you did not need that many, you took only one. Burkhan will not forget your humility (Rus. skromnost) and will request the next spirit master to give you something nice.’ [...] 'Say, I were to give you five kilograms of fish for the road to Ulan-Ude, but you were to take only two or three single fish, saying that you did not need more for the trip, then I would call my friend in Ulan-Ude and ask him to give you something nice—maybe a book—since you had been humble enough to take only as many fish as you actually needed and not as many as I offered.'

Spirit masters were encountered not only in the form of landscape features or fire. Their spirit-souls flowed also through the animals they mastered, such as the birds that flew alongside Stepanovich's vehicle.
**Spirit Masters Manifest in Animals**

Stepanovich recalled incidents in which *burkhan* entered the shape of a wild animal, or in which ancestral spirits entered animals. But he did not have an account of a living shaman or hunter entering the body of a wild animal as we know it from the Russian Far East (e.g. Willerslev 2007). In the 1960s there had been an elder who had hidden from Soviet collectivization a sizable amount of gold and silver rubles. He had been a rich man, and all his savings he had hidden in a cave. On his death bed he told his son about the treasure and its approximate location. He instructed his son that 60 years would have to pass before anyone was to lift the treasure. After 60 years a better time would be at hand (the Communists would be gone), and it would be fine to unearth the fortune then. But the son waited only until the mid-1970s, which was 15 years after his father's death. The son had been hunting with two other men, when they came across the cave in which his father was thought to have deposited the fortune. Together they began digging, when a bear attacked them. According to Stepanovich, this was a very unusual location for a bear encounter—bears had never been seen here. The bear killed two of the three men, tearing off half of the son's face before leaving him behind, barely alive. Only the warmth of his dog's body and the flames of a fire he had been able to make kept the man alive on that cold October day.

For Stepanovich the bear had come to attack the men because the father's coins had since been transferred into the possession of *burkhan*, to whom belong all precious metals hidden in the ground. The shaman was convinced that either *burkhan* himself had entered the bear's shape in order to attack the men, or that it had been the deceased father's spirit who had entered the bear to remind his son that the time had not yet come to unearth the fortune. In either case, the bear incident holds several interesting notions about personhood, property, boundaries, and embodiment. Although the bear is understood as a totemic ancestor by Tofalars, and thus is subject to a series of special hunting rituals that clearly diverge from regular hunting protocols.

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33 According to Stepanovich, 60 years being one Buddhist century.
(Mel’nikova 1994:171), Oka Buriats and Soiots do not share this ancestral association. In Stepanovich’s interpretation of the encounter, the animal’s actions were directed by *burkhan*, or possibly by the intentions of the father’s spirit. In either case, the animal’s behavior could not be considered to correspond to a singular autonomous will (i.e. the animal’s own soul). Rather, in the bear’s volition mingled the intentions of potential others who could utilize the bear’s bodily strength for their purposes. The personhood of the bear thus constituted multiple possible intentions, representing several potential spirit persons.

In our conversation, Stepanovich did not elucidate on whether the father’s spirit had also become the landscape master of this particular locality, nor whether he had chosen the cave for such reasons. To my understanding, the man had not been a shaman. But the father’s fortune, due to its metallic nature, had become enfolded by *burkhan* upon reentering the ground. The bear defended this property, his actions being directed in protection of the landscape and of the level of balance maintained within it. The son had sought to disrupt this balance in his need (or more likely in his greed). A sort of hierarchy had come to fore: The father’s spirit, who remained subordinate to the will of *burkhan*, utilizes the spirit master’s claim over the domain of the ground to protect his fortune for a later time. Here the human (political) realm and the realm of the landscape spirits had become interconnected, and property claims were transferred between the two.

**Speaking to Animal Souls**

Anthropologist Brian Donahoe (2012:106) writes about Tozhu of Tyva:

"It is the *cher eezi* who decides whether or not to give an animal to a hunter; it is the *cher eezi* the hunter fears and respects, petitions for help in the hunt, thanks for success, and with whom he establishes a relationship of trust, as distinct from doing so with the animal directly. Wild animals are the medium that constitutes the social relationship between the hunter and the *cher eezi*."

Accordingly, when I asked Soiot shaman Dondok whether animals possessed their own volition
in relation to offering their bodies to a hunter (since they were understood to possess a soul [Petri 2014(1928):65]), he replied that they did not really have a will of their own. Their spirit master, would decide such things on behalf of them. The spirit was in charge of what happened to the animal. According to Dondok, every living being was given a set number of days to live. 'If your full number of days has not been reached, then nothing can kill you—whether you are in a car accident or in a plane crash.' In the same way an animal’s days were numbered, and *burkhan* would not allow a predator to take its life until its days had expired.

In contrast to Dondok, when I asked Stepanovich whether hunters could communicate with their prey directly (i.e. bypassing the owner spirit), he responded in the affirmative. According to Stepanovich, 'a hunter will speak to the animal itself, and not only to its spirit master. In so doing, he encourages the animal to render its body for the preservation of the lives belonging to the hunter's family.' Such communication could take place in voice, although it usually was done in silence and more intuitively. Yet, my attempt to distinguish between the volition of an individual animal soul and that of its spirit master seemed to most shamans and hunters like splitting hairs. It was clear that animals were offered to hunters. But did the individual animal soul have a say in this process? The question seemed artificial to my friends, much like asking whether it was a fish's brain that directed its travels in the stream. My neighbour and teacher, Borzhon, had told me of the moment in which an animal gave 'itself' to the hunter. Soiot hunters waited for this moment, he said. It was in this instance that the spirit master turned the animal over to the hunter. Which was it then—the animal or the owner? The moment itself was, “a fraction of a second,” and it could easily be missed. The animal might look the hunter in the eye during this moment, but it did not have to. My questions seemed superfluous. If *burkhan* had allotted the animal to the hunter, there was nothing to dissuade the gift, not the animal's individual will, or even the mention of its name. And yet, this

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34 In fact, one morning, I overheard Borzhon and his sons utter the names of animals they were going to search for later that day. Both claimed they had never heard of taboos regarding the utterance of names of prey, although circumlocutory terms are known to have been used in the Saians.
preordination did not seem to affect the fact that some hunters were more skillful than others. Skill, in this context, seemed to have more to do with one's ability to maintain balance than with tracking or aiming well.

Early one October morning, before departing for a day of hunting, Borzhon quietly set out to work at this balance. He scooped off several cups of milky tea from the large pot that was boiling atop the steel stove in his hunting cabin, and poured it into a separate pot, which he sat aside. After the tea had been separated, the other hunters were allowed to drink what was left on the stove. Borzhon then heaped a shovel with glowing coals from the hearth and carried it outdoors, where he carefully set the coals on a special wooden pedestal outside of his cabin. Inside, his older son was applying butter to several large pieces of freshly cut bread, which he placed in a soup dish next to the dedicated tea. Outside they placed juniper twigs on the burning coals as incense, filling the air with thick smoke. Then Borzhon placed the buttered bread pieces on top of the incense, and finally sprinkled some of the tea on the offering. With a ladle, he dispersed the remaining tea in the air, following all four directions of the compass. Walking around the pedestal three times, he completed the ritual. Borzhon had made a hunter's offering to the landscape spirit master, petitioning him to grant the moment he had described to me as "a fraction of a second." He had spoken to the landscape, and with it, to the animals that were roaming it.

**Records in the Trees**

For Stepanovich, a hunter represented the male members of his immediate family; his sons and their dependents. When he entered the forest, he would perform a hunting ritual for the spirit master of that place. Traditionally he would then attach as many rags to a tree branch as there were hunters in his group, or as there were sons in his family, even if the latter were not with him on the same day. If the man had three sons, he would hang four rags on a branch next to the tree's trunk. By so doing he communicated to the spirit master that he was hunting not only on his own behalf, but also for the men who 'stood behind him' (Rus. za nim eshe stoiat). By
displaying his intentions in the trees, the hunter was able to avoid potential discrepancy between his taking of animals and his allotted *kire*, or measure. In fact, he would be hunting not only on his own *kire*, but also on that of his sons. The next hunter who would come this way—by looking at the position of the rags on the branch in relation to the trunk—would know approximately how long ago the first hunter had been here and how much he had intended to take. If enough time had lapsed, the next hunter and his sons would place their rags next to the older set. Thus, over time, the branches of a tree filled up with rags, providing a harvest record to be read by subsequent hunters, helping them decide whether to hunt here or not.

But balance, or right measure, was not only a matter of one's momentary state of *kire*. It was also a matter of delayed reciprocity: Sitting at the kitchen table over yet another cup of tea, uncle Iura explained that, 'as much as you take from the spirit master in terms of animals hunted during the summer, that many animals will he take from your herds in winter by way of wolves.' He added that this was a kind of cycle—a ‘give-and-take’ of sorts. Immediately reminded of Ludek Broz’s (2007) account of perspectival reversal of wild and domestic ‘cattle’ among human owners and landscape spirit masters in Altai, I inquired what would happen if every hunting ritual had been kept prior to each hunt. Would the spirit master still take human owned stock in that case? Iura seemed convinced that a respectful hunter who had ensured proper balance in all his affairs would not suffer wolf attacks in winter. In contrast, Borzhon later told me: 'No matter how carefully a hunter performs his rituals, wolves will always befall his herds in winter.' Did Borzhon believe in the effectiveness of observed rituals or not?

Later I came to realize, it was not that simple a matter. Returning from an unsuccessful hunt in autumn, I asked Borzhon how we had offended the spirit master. But he insisted that we had done nothing wrong, except perhaps for our drinking: “Of course the spirit master did not like [that].” But the number of possible reasons for an empty return was vast. According to

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35Hunting in summer, of course, could be construed as a violation of the proper order. Predation in winter would then follow as a means of reestablishing balance between spirit and human mastered households. The main hunt was to occur in autumn and winter, allowing animals to regenerate over the summer.
shaman Stepanovich, *burkhan* could withhold prey for several reasons at once: It may have been that one of the hunters in the group had already hunted, and in spite of having exhausted his *kire*, he had continued to hunt with the group, thus angering the spirit and affecting their success. Or, the hunters may not have fit together astrologically, causing disharmony. Perhaps one of the hunters (or a relative of his) had been ill. *burkhan* may not have wanted such a person to consume his animals. Alternatively, *burkhan* may have allowed the animal to escape, if it or any of the family members had recently suffered from wolves or other predators. Or, perhaps, *burkhan* knew the offspring of the targeted animal was going to be particularly strong, in which case he may have wanted it to reproduce.

**Blood Sacrifice**

Borzhon and his brothers went to great lengths to secure good relations with *burkhan*. Every three years, they invited Soiot shaman Dondok, their relative, to perform a ritual sacrifice on behalf of the clan. The sacrifice involved the burning of the head of an animal—usually a cow or a sheep—on a rock pedestal at the base of the “shaman's cliff” (*see Illustration 9*). The shaman's cliff was one of several sacred cliff sites in Oka, each known to have a specific purpose (Sharastepanov 2008). Every time we drove by the rock, the driver would stop to make an offering beneath a shaman's tree, which was located some 200 meters away from the rock itself. While visitors recognized the site as a typical sacred site where one would leave a token of respect (i.e. rice, coins, cigarettes, or strips of fabric), for the Dondokovy this location held much deeper significance. From here they connected with *burkhan*, who oversaw not only the taiga and its animals, but also their own households and animals.

I was not able to witness a blood sacrifice in person, as it had already been completed before I arrived in the field, and neither was there going to be another sacrifice well until after I left. Neither was the whole process advertised locally. It remained strictly a family affair. As I found out later, there was good reason for the hushed nature of this ritual action. Taking an animal's life as sacrifice to a local spirit master was considered by local lamas a gross violation
against Buddhist precepts. It was not a surprise then, that the event took place under the auspices of Badma Dondokov, nor that it was conducted by Soiot shaman Dondok. Both men shared a strong sense of Soiot identity—much like Soiot Munko of Khonchen described in the introduction—which both saw as intimately interwoven with shamanist ritual activities. Both men had utilized shamanism as a tool in their stance against Buddhist assertions over Soiot territory. Without seeking open conflict, both men were intent on making a proclamation of allegiance in the landscape, taking a stance in the spirit world as well as in that of local politics. Blood sacrifice at the base of this ancestral cliff had to be the culmination of their stance.

The Arrival of Buddhism in Oka
Buddhism came to Buriats of southern Siberia (predominantly Zabaikalia) via Mongolia, where people had first become acquainted with it at the time of their raids into Khitan, Uighur, Chinese, and Tangut territories under Genghis-Khan's reign (1206-1227) (Tsybenov 2001:39). However, Buddhism was officially endorsed in Mongolia only under Kublai Khan's reign (1260-1294). It would take another 300 years (16th century) before the new religion took root among the general
population. Altan-Khan's 1578 meeting with Sonam Gytaso (3rd Dalai Lama) of the Tibetan Gelug school resulted in a monumental effort to translate Tibetan and Sanskrit sacred texts into Mongolian, as well as the construction of monasteries and the training of a large number of religious specialists (e.g., Elverskog 2003). Only at this time (16th and 17th centuries) did Buddhism make inroads into northern Mongolia where it reached Buriat tribes who had been practicing shamanism much like other central Asian peoples (Tsybenov 2001:39; cf. Vanchikova et al. [Buriat Chronicles] 2011:176-185). Following the growing number of mobile Buriat clans who practiced Buddhism on the northern side of the newly formed border between Qing China and the Russian Empire, Empress of Russia, Elizaveta Petrovna, ratified Buddhism as an official religion in 1741 (e.g. Tsyrempilov 2013:55, 63).

Although the majority of Buddhist adherents in Oka have been of Buria settler origin, Buddhist practice did not replace shamanism for all Burias, nor for Soiots36. Yet it is reasonable to assume that Soiot ritual life was affected by the Buriat mountain cult, and subsequently by the presence of Buddhism, especially through Soiot-Buriat intermarriages. Conversely, it is evident that Oka Buddhist practice has incorporated local ways of knowing37. Yet, even among

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36Although the Russian Orthodox mission played a crucial part in Tofa history, the presence of Christianity in Oka is treated, at best, as a footnote in local discourse, and it is virtually absent in the literature. In Buriatia, Orthodox missionary activity was much more pronounced among Burias and Evenks (e.g., Mitypova 2005:101ff.). According to lama Norbu, “There once was a mission outpost (Rus. missionerskiy stan) […] located in the village of Sainay [also called Sharza]. […] [And] later something of a church… [with a] clergy member (Rus. sluzhitel’), although he died suddenly, leaving behind his family of five children, who subsequently fell into poverty.” Although there is no obvious sign of Russian Orthodoxy in Oka today, a rarely discussed heritage predating the establishment of the first datsan exists in Oka. In an archived newspaper article, Ts. I. Tsybdenov (1990) provides some information on the early work of the Orthodox Mission to Oka. The missionary priest Mikhail Petrov, a graduate of the Irkutsk Ecclesiastic Seminary, is said here to have been the first teacher of the Orthodox school in Oka. Although he had a tolerable command of the Buriat language, all teaching was conducted in Russian. Tsybdenov speaks of only two school terms with an enrollment of eight and five children, respectively. The Oka mission post was closely related to other mission posts in Tunka valley, where the church had established itself in 1871. By 1883 a mission post was added in the village of Mondy. It was officially consecrated in 1885 (Kalinina 2000:434), soon after becoming the ‘Oka-Mondy post’. Its first school was opened at Mondy in 1885, and subsequently a school was opened also in Oka in 1895. Five years later, on 13 July 1900, Holy Trinity Church was officially consecrated at Sainay (Kalinina 2000:434). Most probably it was the priest of this church that lama Norbu had referred to.

37Several of the lamas I interviewed were not keen on offering Buddhist explanations for anything that might be construed as representative of a global religion, or as representative of an ‘official’ view of such a religion. I believe they were not interested in providing sweeping statements, for what Richard S. Cohen (1989:361) has referred to as the role of ‘place’ in Buddhism: “In seeking a universally generalizable Buddhism, scholars have ignored “place.”” He goes on to say, “One aspiring to escape from normative definitions may find, however, that place, locality, provides a powerful category for analytic reconstructions of Buddhism. Place
Buriats, a significant Buddhist following came about only by the late 19th and early 20th centuries, following the establishment of the Zhelgenskii datsan (Sharastepanov 2008:33). Until then Buriats had been fervent adherents to the local mountain cult, venerating three main mountain deities for northern (Nukhen Daban), central (Tailgata), and southern (Orkhoboomo) Oka, as well as their many subordinate master spirits (e.g. Sharastepanov 2008:33; Galdanova 2000a:19). According to Gomboev (2002:69), the mountain cult had existed in Central Asia as an independent manifestation, and together with other elements of shamanism was partially incorporated into a buddhist framework (cf. Zhukovskaia & Derevianko 1988:27).

Illustration 10: Zhelgenskii datsan, constructed in 1906 near Balakta, and consecrated in 1914. It was looted and ceased operations in 1930 (Zhuzhaeva 1996), and was officially closed in 1935. After being moved to Orlik to serve as a club house, it was destroyed in a fire. © Orlik Archives

Unfolding Power in an Enfolding Landscape

Some individuals, such as Badma Khorluevich, still felt quite strongly about shamanism as the only appropriate way for Soiots to relate to the landscape. Being a highly respected Soiot elder, sets the idiosyncratic and the indigenous on par with the trans local and universal, the here and there with the everywhere” (Cohen 1989:361). Perhaps for this reason, the religious specialists I spoke with were much more comfortable relating to their practices and beliefs in terms of specific places – be it the Tunka Valley, or various locations in Oka.

sets the idiosyncratic and the indigenous on par with the trans local and universal, the here and there with the everywhere” (Cohen 1989:361). Perhaps for this reason, the religious specialists I spoke with were much more comfortable relating to their practices and beliefs in terms of specific places – be it the Tunka Valley, or various locations in Oka.
Badma had introduced me to several shamans he trusted\textsuperscript{38}. Returning together from a seance at Soiot shaman Dondok Dorzheevich's\textsuperscript{39} house one day, I asked Badma what distinguished Soiot shamanic practices from those of Buriat shamans. I had expected him to perhaps point out some uniquely Soiot features that contrasted with Buriat practices. Instead he related to me his anger over past Buriat attempts to establish a Buddhist temple (Bur. \textit{datsan}) at Sorok, the centre of Soiot identity. Each time such plans were discussed, Badma had strongly resisted them. To date Buddhist \textit{khuraly} (services) had to be held at the local club house. 'There has never been a \textit{datsan} at Sorok in hundreds of years,' Badma said, and he did not want to see one now. Dondok, in response to the same question, told me of his disapproval of lama Norbu of Puntsognamdolling \textit{datsan} (a Soiot by descent), who in the past had referred to himself as “Soiot lama.” For Badma and Dondok there had never been a 'Soiot lama,' because 'Soiots had never had lamas - only shamans.' Their resistance to the construction of \textit{datsany} on Soiot territory must be understood as a direct continuation of an age-old struggle on the border lands of the Mongolian steppe.

Morten Pedersen (2003) and others (e.g. Heissig 1980; Even 1991) have described this struggle as a Buddhist attempt to “domesticate” shamanist landscapes in northern Mongolia. Very near Badma and Dondok's homeland, where Mongolian highland steppe gives way to mountainous taiga, itinerant Mongolian and Tibetan lamas are said to have struggled with landscape entities, which in the literature are often referred to as demons (cf. Pozdneev 1971[1887]:343-344; Charleux 2002:169). In an attempt to expand the reach of Buddhism, powerful lamas were sent out to locate and subdue these deities and establish \textit{datsany}. In Oka, caves containing Buddhist ritual objects can be found to this day (Dashibalov 2000:5), and local lore explains these shelters as key strongholds, used by the earliest lamas who had come to Oka.

\textsuperscript{38}Elders would often point out the proliferation of 'charlatans' (Rus. \textit{sharlatany}) – usually younger individuals who were self-appointed shamans, and who sought to benefit from local tourism by performing would-be rituals.

\textsuperscript{39}Dondok was a distant relative of the Dondokovy clan, which took great pride in having their 'own' shaman lineage.
to tame local master spirits. Such lore echoes Mongolian and Tibetan legends of famed Guru Rinpoche (or Padmasambhava):

“[T]he majority of pilgrimage sites in the Tibetan world include caves where [Rinpoche] is said to have meditated, occasionally with one of his consorts or dakinis. In each of these places, he subdued local deities, bound them by oath and “opened” up the site. He is reputed to have hidden *gter ma* (“treasure texts”) for subsequent discovery at an appropriate time, and also for making prophesies that led to later temples’ foundations” (Charleux 2002:182).

An example of these and other features associated with Tantric Buddhist cave use are found in a locally revered cave site near the village of Saiany north of Orlik (Fig. 2).

As Marina Sodnompilova (2009) points out, in the traditions of Mongolian peoples, caves have been understood as the womb of the Earth Mother. They are sacred places. This motherly or parental notion also comes to fore in beliefs about caves as the residence of ancestral spirits (ibid.). Spirits of bygone ancestors can turn into local master spirits (cf.
Humprey 1995:151), as is the case in Khukhein Khada, a sacred site on Shumak River, north of the village of Shumak in the Tunka region. Here, according to legend, two Soiot girls were lost, and after their death turned into local master spirits (Sodnompilova 2009:65). Similar accounts exist for Oka, particularly in reference to influential shamans who later became landscape master spirits. But yet another Mongolian view of caves associates them with ritual impurity, understood to be inherent in their femininity. An example of this is “the emergence of the phallic cult in the vicinity of the ‘Erd’eni-dzu monastery [central Mongolia], [a cult, intended] to ‘neutralize’ erotic activities of the earthly goddess - with [a local landscape feature] being externally reminiscent of the bosom of a lying woman” (based on Nekliudov 1984:105 in Sodnompilova 2009:66). Whatever the exact motives may have been for the purification of caves in Oka, it is clear that these physical recesses attest to a history of taming and purification as part of the Buddhist project of domesticating landscapes.

**Subjugation and Transferral of Spirit Masters**

One of the main purposes for ritual dances performed by Tantric and Bon-Po masters of Tibet (and later in exile) has been the “subjugation” of “hostile forces” in the landscape—a process that involves “mental as well as physical actions of subjugation and expulsion,” rendering “purified and protected” spaces for the construction of a temple, stupa, or mandala (Schrempf 1999:198). These dances were widespread in Buriatia, and conducted annually also in Oka at the Zheelgenski Datsan, where people knew them as *tsam* (Sharasteponov 2008:35). According to Mona Schrempf (1999:199) these ritual dances “subjugate the earth” (sa-' dul)—a means of taking control of and transforming space.” Although not all subjugation ritual is dance, it is this kind of confrontation between powers that lies at the heart of Buddhist expansion and territorial maintenance. Perpetual “taming, disciplining or civilizing” of that which is “uncontrolled, including the mind” is, according to Geoffrey Samuel, a core duty of Tibetan lamas (Schrempf

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40Similarly, Russian ethnographer, Andrei V. Anokhin (1924:8), mentions about Altaian shamanism: “Erlik [entity representing diseases] has nine daughters who manifest excessive sexuality,” which is seen in “vaginas as cracks in the ground,” “with breasts like hills,” and “with twisting bare butts and breasts.”
1999:199 based on Samuel 1993). Body and landscape become one when (sometimes masked) dancers represent protection deities, thereby becoming invocational placeholders. “By creating a ritual space and divine powers inside their bodies and minds, the dancers inscribe and recreate their environment in turn with their body, speech and mind…” (Schrempf 1999:199). In so doing, according to Schrempf (1999:199), the perceived duality of body and landscape collapses. Mind and space, comprising and being comprised, become one.

In the Tunka Valley, the heritage of initial power encounters between representatives of Buddhism and local deities is best remembered in the arrival of a Tibetan lama, locally known as Buduun Lharampa (the fat Lharampa)\textsuperscript{41}. The lama is said to have taken up residence in northern Mongolia after a dispute with the 13\textsuperscript{th} Dalai Lama. His Buriat students had invited Buduun Lharampa to the Tunka valley in 1919 (personal communication, Martin Mills, Nikolai Tsyrempilov, 2015), where the datsan at Kyren’ had become a sizable centre with up to 500 lamas serving the valley (cf. Natsov 1998). The officiating lama at Gandan-Darzhalin datsan explained the dignitary's visit as follows:

“The pandit [Buduun Lharampa] was a great scholar, a realized practicing buddhist—a yogin... When he came to Tunka, he could see and converse with the five deities of Tunka, and by means of laying out to them the Dharma, the Buddhist Path, he led them into Buddhism. It began [near] the village of Khoito-Gol, at the site of burkhan Baabai—the deity who, according to legend, descended from the upper world... of 33 celestial residents, headed by Khormus Khan. burkhan Baabai is considered one of Khormus Khan's sons. He descended to earth in order to overwhelm evil, [and] coming to the Tunka Valley, he settled on Sandy Mountain (Rus. peschanaia gora)... [from] where he became the patron of Tunka Valley.”

Buduun Lharampa is credited with setting up a rgyal mtshan (Bur, zhalsan), a wooden post at

\textsuperscript{41}Local media associate another name with the inauguration of the structure: Tibetan lama Darm Luizhin (Merlis, L. 2013). The same name is used in Russian language scholarship on Tunka's sacred landscape, with the date for his visit given as 1916 (e.g., Zandanova 2005; Natsov 1998).
the top of which was placed a cylinder commemorating his arrangement with the local landscape deity burkhan Baabai (or Shargai-Noion). Subsequently, the yogin introduced all five burkhany of Tunka to Buddhist precepts, converting or “transferring” them (Rus. perevel ikh) to Buddhism. The potential ill-will of these landscape master spirits is thus understood to have come under the control of Buddhist order, not so much through force, as through a gradual perspectival change on their behalf. Nonetheless, it is understood, that encounters at this level (i.e. with the most powerful deities of a region) require the efforts of no ordinary lama. And it is also understood that master spirits who have not yet attained liberation remain volatile, a point to which I shall return.

**The Benevolence of Binding**

In the Tunka valley, at the Gandan-Darzhalin datsan, an officiating lama explained to me how 'powerful and enlightened lamas' of the past had “either convinced, or subjected” (Rus. ugovorit' libo pochenit’) the mighty landscape entities, “binding them by oath” (Rus. sviazat' ikh kliatvoi).

For the lama the process of ‘convincing’ or ‘subjecting’ and ‘binding’ was an inherently benevolent act that could be extended to all sentients – be they animals (human or other) or landscape deities:

“[F]rom the perspective of Buddhism, an animal does not have a good intellect (Rus. razum) or conscience [or consciousness] (Rus. soznanie) to deliberately commit good deeds. It does not understand that, “if I do this, then that is going to take place.” That is why... prayers and mantras were read into the ears of animals in order to create a connection with the animal. There would be a karmic connection for [the animal] with the teachings of Buddha. When a karmic connection comes to be, [the animal] will necessarily meet again.”

The connection with the animal takes place at once between the sutra-reciting human and the

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42The lama wished to remain anonymous, and I will refer to him only as ‘the lama from Gandan-Darzhalin Datsan.’

43This is a tradition the lama knows from Tibet, and he seeks to revive it in Buriatia.
animal, as well as between the animal and the teachings of the Buddha. The assumption here is that being an other-than-human animal is less desirable than being human (i.e. the 'subhuman' level), and by making a connection with humans (and therefore with the Buddha's teachings) the animal is set on a trajectory towards higher rebirths. The lama explained this connection as a kind of benevolent imprint that invariably leads to a repeated encounter between entities:

“[A] person who has seen the Buddha—having believed in him, [or] even just having seen him—will always remain [with] an imprint [of this encounter] within him. He will necessarily meet [again]... There is a story in which a disciple of buddha, Sariputra [c. 568 – c. 484 BCE], who had also been a hunter—[at a time] when [Shakyamuni] was not in this world yet—had taken shelter in a cave from the rain, where [he saw a] drawing depicting the previous buddha on a wall... He saw it and believed. He began to have very strong faith, and as a result he entered the right path, that is the Buddhist Path.”

The conception of Sariputra's faith takes place inside a cave, enfolded in the landscape, and sheltered from the elements. It is fanned into flame by the depiction of another being, whose beauty isn now imprinted in his consciousness. This imprint creates in him a karmic tie that is prophetic in nature, and which calls for further encounters with other representatives of the same kind of being:

“Struck by [Kassapa Buddha's] beauty, he wished that in future he might meet an equally beautiful person [the coming buddha, Shakyamuni]. And for the animal there also exists such a thing. When they see it, when something is done for them, when mantras are read [to them], then too something like that is created [in them]. And the animal will be more or less good—there is something with which we can help the animal.”

In the lama's example, conviction and subjugation (i.e. 'taming') take place in sheltered conditions, that is, a new perception of self comes to be inside the womb-cave of mother earth. A transformation is affected in this space: Sariputra enters the cave with the perspective of a hunter, but emerges from the cave as a person who no longer purposefully sheds blood. For the
lama at Gandan-Darzhalin *datsan*, Buddhist domestication of sentient others pivots on this kind of encounter, in which landscape spirits (much like animals) are 'helped' on their way to higher rebirths and eventually to liberation.

**Domestication as Communicative Loss**

With deities (Bur. *burkhany*) divided into earthly and celestial entities, it is understood that, unlike the celestials, earthly master spirits do not possess generative power. Yet, earthly deities are to be reckoned for their immense power on earth, and because they still generate karma, this power can be dangerous. Speaking of earthly deities, the lama at Gandan-Darzhalin datsan explained:

“[S]ince these deities have inner emotions... such as anger, jealousy, envy... if [the deity] gives something to someone, [the gift] is tied to something. [The deity] has a motivation of his own ... and when he generates karma ... he does not create good. As long as karma exists, there exists an end for that being.”

Bringing the deity in line with buddhist teaching is a form of domestication in that the deity is gradually brought into the household of the Buddhist pantheon. At the same time, a celestial *burkhan*—that is, a spirit that has attained total enlightenment, a buddha—cannot be called upon by a hunter to aid in the killing of an animal. Such assistance would violate every tenet of buddhist liberation. An earthly deity (i.e. an unenlightened landscape spirit master), however, can assist a hunter in the taking of life, even if this calls the spirit to act against its commitment to Buddhist teachings. It could be argued, thus, that it is to the advantage of many residents of Oka that landscape entities not be domesticated, and that master spirits who have not become celestial, remain earthly, because day-to-day concerns of Soiot herders and hunters fall predominantly into the domain of earthly deities and their ability and willingness to aid in the taking of life.

This conflict, from the perspective of the lama at Gandan-Darzhalin *datsan*, is reflected in the divergent ways of shamans and lamas in approaching an earthly landscape spirit master:
“[W]hen a shaman makes offerings, he will sprinkle vodka (and other things) every day, up to the point that the spirit tires of it. [The spirit will say:] 'How tired I am of him! Everyone comes and asks for something... O well! Slaughter a lamb, and I will do what you ask.' The lama, on the other hand... will [say to the spirit]: 'take the offering and perform this good deed. By the power of your good action, you will be reborn in higher worlds. You will accrue good deeds.' The spirit will then act out of joy, and on his own [volition].”

From this perspective, it is as if the buddhist practitioner were whispering in the ear of the spirit, much like he does into the ear of an animal. The shaman, on the other hand, is understood to coax the spirit to conform to his wishes, and each of his encounters with the spirit is marked by resistance, often necessitating bloodshed in the form of sacrifices. A lama can rely on the predictability of a tamed deity, which does not require the shedding of blood. He expects the spirit to exercise benevolence on its own volition, and having attained a new perspective on what is desirable, the spirit must merely be reminded of its own good. It would seem then that the oath-bound spirit master is a colonized entity. No longer in need of subjugation, it now must be reminded only of its prior commitment for the benefit of its own enlightenment – a task that falls to the lama.

**Balancing Rival Meanings**

Anthropologist Axel M. Pedersen (2003) illustrates how the people of the Darkhad Depression in northwest Mongolia—people to whom several of my Soiot friends were related—perceived themselves as possessing a black side and a yellow side. The black side is that of shamanism, which is associated with the taiga and its many influences and unpredictabilities, moral ambiguities, powers, and “unstraightness,” while the yellow side is associated with a Buddhist

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44To reconcile the violence of initial spirit subjugation rituals in Tibet with the doctrine of nonviolence, these initial rituals were “often represented as merciful steps to ensure the liberation of evil forces” (Schrempf 1999:213). An example of more aggressive reminding comes from Sheri Ortner who has argued that in the Sherpa world regular threat of “demons” requires that Buddhist specialists “annually reassert [Buddhism’s] claims to people’s allegiance and dependence,” and that they “reconquer [Buddhism’s] ‘foes’, and re-establish its hegemony” (Ortner 1978:168-169 in Schrempf 1999:213).

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understanding of peace, domestication, and moral straightness found in the landscape of the steppe. Darhad possess both, Pedersen claims, but especially the yellow side remains invisible until it is exposed by an outsider, or by the outside. While Buddhism may be seen to have come as an ideological intrusion to the Darhad, attempting to marginalize and exterminate shamanism, a contemporary Darhad interpretation of their own history paints the Buddhist project in much brighter hues: Pedersen (2003:193) terms this the Darkhad 'subaltern perspective,' a view in which Darhad have always been 'tame' on the inside, but in which it required an enlightened outsider, such as the Mongolian Gelupga Buddhist church, to bring forward their hidden potential.

Although I did not encounter identical claims in Oka to those put forth by Pedersen for Darkhad, the willingness to entertain both sides, the 'wild' side of shamanism and the 'tame' side of Buddhism, was ever present in my encounters with people. The best way to approach this situation is, perhaps, on Stan Mumford's terms of the “unbounded and layered,” or even “interpenetrating” cultures he found among shamans and Gurung lamas of Nepal (1989:11ff). Rather than affiliating oneself purely with a single camp, individuals often found themselves between events belonging to various camps, and having to interpret the meaning of such events retrospectively: “Intentionality is pulled into a process of use over time, as one keeps negotiating “what is meant,” in light of rival meanings” (Mumford 1989:12). This is not an unusual phenomenon in 'frontier' and syncretic religious environments where proponents of opposing traditions are involved in acquiring each others' meaning-making processes; the ones in order to enrich their tradition, the others to ease proselytizing (cf. Snellgrove and Richardson 1968:108 in Mumford 1989:12). In Oka these dynamics were best witnessed in the highly localized practices of lamas such as Baldorzho45 (b. 1963) form the village of Bukson.

Baldorzho's grandfather had been a lama from Oka who had experienced Soviet religious repressions of the early 1930s. He had been arrested and taken away, and upon his

45Not his actual name.
release with advanced tuberculosis he had died an untimely death in his home. Because his name had been changed, there are no archival records for the grandfather, and neither was he listed as a repressed lama. But local elders remembered him well. As a teenager, Baldorzho had covertly nursed an interest in his religious heritage. But he had never met his grandfather, and in later years it was another elder lama who passed his knowledge to Baldorzho. With his teacher's death, the last holder of local knowledge was said to have passed. At the time of my stay, Baldorzho was in his own words the only lama in Oka who possessed oral tantric sutras composed by the earliest lamas who adapted Mongolian and Tibetan Buddhism to accommodate local shamanic ways of knowing. Given this knowledge, Baldorzho was a special kind of lama, not to be confused with a Buriat mountain cult specialist (Bur. khadasha)\textsuperscript{46}.

**Buddhist Hunters and the Zaian-Tengeri**

"Reconciling Buddhist teaching with a hunting culture is a difficult task (Rus. trudnyi vopros)," according to Baldorzho. When Buddhism first came to Oka, it was not transferred 'as is,' but itinerant lamas had to test every sutra and Tantric ritual for efficacy in the new landscape. Many practices were adjusted, which is evident in the local moon calendar. Here Tibetan dates were changed to reflect south Siberian geography, as well as the lives of those residing within it. According to Baldorzho,

\begin{quote}
In the past, lamas in Oka were very powerful, having 15 to 16 years of intensive training. But there were also highly skilled hunters here. Ordained clergy abstained from hunting, but lay persons hunted for a living, and they would prepare for the hunt in accordance with the astrological calendar, which recommended days advantageous for hunting. The hunter petitioned *burkhan* for a gift of prey, and as he went hunting he was ever concerned for the souls of the animals he killed\textsuperscript{47}. His goal was that the soul of each
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{46}A Buriat specialist of the mountain cult, identified not as a shaman, nor as a lama, but as a practitioner positioned between the two (e.g., Zandanova 2005; Batomunkueva 2011).

\textsuperscript{47}Concern for the rebirth of departed souls of hunted animals is a good example of the synthesis of Buddhist and shamanist actions in Oka: The concept of the soul (Rus. *dusha*) is essential in Buriat animism, where every object and being can possess volition and falls into a hierarchy of wills, in which younger tree souls submit to those of older trees, who in turn submit to valley master spirits, who submit to mountain master spirits, etc.
animal would leave the body in peace, finding its path to [a higher] rebirth. Some hunters would light a candle, aiding the prey’s soul to find the way. And when a hunter aimed to shoot, he would recite a special mantra on behalf of the rebirth of his prey's soul in another body.'

One night Baldorzho came to visit my host's house at the winter pasture to perform an annual consecration ritual. He had brought a traditional ritual object, hidden in a square sheath and wrapped in a blue silken shawl (Bur. khadag) with embroidered Tibetan letters. Baldorzho referred to the ritual object as ‘worship of the eternal heaven’ (Bur. Zaian-Tengeri; Rus. poklonenie vechnemu nebo). It somewhat resembled a sword by shape, but was made from a gun barrel which had been cut in half along its shaft, maintaining its tubular shape in the handle area. A rubber grip had been affixed, and at the end of the grip a brass ‘diamond’ (Rus. almaz) had been attached. A row of four holes had been drilled into the blade; one near the tip of the curved blade, and three holes between the handle and the tip. Baldorzho removed the Zaian-Tengeri from its sheath and pushed it through the ventilation hole in my host’s hearth. When the Zaian-Tengeri had reached a glow, Baldorzho asked my host to stand up in the middle of the room, with his arms spread out and with a gap between his legs. Reciting a prayer or a mantra, Baldorzho now penetrated the air with the smoking sword on all sides of my host’s body. Then he placed the sword back in the glowing coals of the hearth.

After pouring water into a clean glass jar on the kitchen table, my host took position in the centre of the room again, this time with his shirt lifted, exposing the bare skin of his upper body. Again Baldorzho pulled the sword from the coals, and lifting it to his mouth, he repeatedly

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Animal souls submit to master spirits in like manner. Master spirits who compete with each other in playing cards can loose all their animals to a neighbouring opponent, thus explaining the wane of wildlife in any particular domain (Petri 2014[1928]:65).

48The Zaian-Tengeri ritual was passed on to the lama from a late elder, and it is a practice believed to have come from Mongolia. Garma Sanzheev (1928) describes how the white Tengeri sent Boshintoi (celestial smith) and his nine sons to teach the ancestors of human smiths the skill of metallurgy. In reenacting this event, the person representing Boshintoi touches molten iron (see also Eliade 1972:471-472). Similar ritual objects, such as the tenerenin kylyzhi (“sky sword”), are described in ethnographic materials from Tyva (Anokhin 1910 in Znamenski 2003:52): “The “sky sword” is transferred within the same lineage group to a person who is “called” to become a shaman.” It illuminates the practitioner's way on his voyages, and it protects him or her from evil spirits.
touched glowing steel blade with his bare tongue. Then he took a sip of water from the jar and blew it through the holes in the blade, and onto my host’s chest. He repeated the procedure for his back, before placing the ritual object into the water jar on the table. The water was now considered sacred and had to be kept overnight. In the morning my host was to take it outside and have each member of the household wash their hands and faces with it, drinking up all that remained. Although the Zaian-Tengeri was a general ritual performed for the wellbeing of a household, a client had the liberty during the ritual to silently petition the “owner of the fire” for more specific things, such as the withdrawal of wolves from a valley. In this way, the Zaian-Tengeri ritual served as a practice in which buddhist and shamanic activities overlapped49.

Among Sutras a Hunter's Sutra
On another encounter with Baldorzho I learned of a further adaptation that had been made to buddhist ritual by his ancestors: the composition of a hunter's sutra. Although Baldorzho said he would eventually show me the text of the sutra, even after many visits he never produced it. Perhaps the perpetual delay was intentional. He had been very protective of the text and asked me not to photograph or otherwise copy it when he would bring it50. What he told me about it was that it had been written down especially for use in Oka. His predecessor had passed the sutra on to him before his death. It was written in Burjat, unlike most other sutras, which were written in Tibetan. Baldorzho described how hunters would come to see him, asking for prayers for their hunting success. He would recite a number of Tibetan sutras, mixing in the hunter’s sutra. It would take him about 35 minutes to read out loud. It was considered a relatively short sutra, judging by the indication of Baldorzho's fingers: it measured less than a centimeter in thickness. After its reading, the lama would sprinkle vodka, milk, or milky tea to all four directions of the horizon, following a clock-wise pattern.

49Baldorzho mentioned that he was the only lama in the region allowed to use this ritual, because he had reached an appropriate level of seniority within Buddhist training. Soiot shaman Dondok of Orlik made use of the same ritual in some of his seances, but unlike Baldorzho, Dondok was not subject to Buddhist precepts.

50Another possible reason for Baldorzho's caution may have been fear that public attention to these materials might initiate unwanted conflict with other representatives of Buddhism in Oka, particularly because such practices could easily be abused or misunderstood by outsiders.
Having reached his level of Buddhist training, Baldorzho was no longer allowed to hunt. As a young man he had hunted, and he could recall how in years past hunters had often brought gifts of game to the datsan. Hunters would come to the datsan to have their moral burdens alleviated by the lamas' recitation of sutras, and they would bring the skins of their animals as offerings. Those who did not hunt would bring a lamb, and people who did not possess even a lamb would bring its monetary equivalent. The cooks at the datsan prepared the meat of these hunted and herded animals for the people who lived and worked at the temple complex. A large ritual drum at a datsan in Orlik had been made from the skin of a hunted animal brought as an offering. Yet, none of these animal gifts had been sacrifices, a point all lamas stressed repeatedly. Animal sacrifices were forbidden in Buddhism. Animal gifts or offerings to the datsan were allowed.

Conclusion
This chapter illustrated how the people of Uro lived between the notions of two cosmological households by incorporating activities of shamans and of lamas in their daily lives. Affiliation with each perspective afforded them a different view of the landscape. Although most Soiots seemed to be moving back and forth effortlessly between the two, at times incorporating parts of one with the other, there were situations, such as the blood sacrifice, in which shamanism was put forth as a matter of differentiation and political separatism. Such politicization of shamanism vis-a-vis Buddhism, however, was largely limited to select influential Soiots who represented their people as an indigenous minority among a Buriat majority. On a more practical level, the seemingly peaceful overlap between buddhist and shamanist perspectives broke down only when a spirit master had been completely domesticated through buddhist ritual (i.e. by way of its attaining enlightenment), at which point a Soiot hunter could no longer rely on the spirit's willingness to engage in reciprocal exchanges of animals, and on the sacrifice system. Where this had taken place, the system of balance, which ensured harmony between humans, animals, and the landscape, had lost its productivity.
For most Soiots it was safer to remain between the two cosmological households rather than to renounce one and embrace the other completely. As much as people had come to rely on a combination of herding and hunting activities, so their households had come to rely on ritual activities associated with either domain. Although one might assume that a lama would be called exclusively to affairs associated with yak, cattle, sheep, or horses, and a shaman to matters of the hunt, Tantric practitioners such as Baldorzho of Bukson suggested a deliberate blurring of the two domains. It may be concluded thus that buddhist domestication of master spirits was as undesirable for Soiot householders as was the 'complete' domestication of animals.

In order to maintain balance in one's social relations with all sentient beings, it was essential that mutual exchanges continue, and this in turn required that each party maintain some volitional freedom. Where buddhist taming and domesticating had progressed to the point of denying spirits and animals this volitional volatility, there the relationship between the two ritual domains had become unproductive. But where a degree of ambiguity could be maintained, and where master spirits remained earthly beings, there people were able to benefit from both perspectives of the landscape.
PART II PROXIMITY: COLLABORATIVE FLUCTUATIONS IN TIME AND SPACE
Chapter Five: Dogs

Introduction: Listening For the Dogs

16 October 2013. In the morning we got up and drank Uncle Borzhon's tea. Soon after Borzhon and Buinto, his younger son, mounted their horses and rode upstream with their three dogs running ahead. They were going to start the day by tracking musk-deer (Rus. kabarga). Regbi, Borzhon's eldest son, and I had been commissioned to wait at the hunting cabin, and to follow only later. Regbi used the time to go down to the creek where he cleaned the fish we had caught the previous night. He said it was fine to clean fish in the creek because the fish had come from the water. In contrast, the blood of no other animal was allowed to come in contact with running water. 'One cannot wash the meat of other animals in the river, neither is it allowed to wash one’s bloody hands in running freshwater.' After some time had passed, Regbi and I started up the Chinese quad we had borrowed from Iumzhap, and slowly we followed the trail Borzhon and Buinto had taken upstream on horseback. Regbi knew that the riders and their dogs had turned left, crossing the river and entering into a side valley. The men had begun to look for musk-deer tracks in the snow, starting at the base of a south facing hillside. From here the dogs were supposed to take up scent, following it to the musk-deer. Once the dogs had located the deer, they knew to chase it back and down the other side of the same hill. Regbi and I had by now positioned ourselves on a steep slope of yet another side valley, waiting for the deer to emerge ahead of us.

Several times I thought I could hear the dogs barking in the distance, but no matter how hard I scanned the hillside across from us, the dogs never showed up, and there was no sight of musk-deer either. The deer are known to keep a trail across the hills passing by the spot where Regbi and I were waiting. The dogs were supposed to drive the deer down the hill opposite us, then up again on our side. Dogs and deer would pass us—and were the deer to escape Regbi’s rifle, the yelping canines would continue their chase up the hill behind us which turned into a rocky outcrop. There the dogs knew to press the deer against the edge of the precipice until
Borzhon and Buinto would show up at the base of the cliff with their rifles loaded and in position. After an hour of intent listening and waiting, Regbi decided we should leave our post and return to the cabin. From afar, through the scope of Regbi’s rifle, we could see that the other two hunters had already arrived at the cabin, and so had the dogs. It had been an unsuccessful hunt. There had been no fresh tracks for the dogs to follow. We drank some tea, ate some bread, and set out to check on the fishing nets. The dogs were bored, and whenever a caught fish was thrown ashore, they would pounce upon the flapping catch as if it were a musk-deer.

Illustration 12: Strelka, Tsydyp’s hunting-watchdog. © 2014, Author

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The previous chapter showed the importance of keeping Buddhist landscape domestication incomplete in order to leave room for an ongoing communication of intentions between humans and other beings. In this chapter, I turn to dog-human relations to show how a similar need for communication and exchange is met in the recognition of autonomy in dogs. The main argument of the chapter is that Soiot human-dog relations are defined by a balance between restriction and autonomy, relative to the seasonal importance of dogs in the household. Seen as hunters in their own right, dogs maintain a degree of autonomy that can be utilized in seasonal
collaboration. As was the case with spirit masters, whose autonomous movement sustained an ambiguity of outcome in mutual encounters, so human-dog encounters were never entirely predictable, a fact that was sustained in daily practice. In fact, only where room was left for independent movement in dogs, could both parties engage in mutually profitable communication. Although subordinate in the household, dogs enjoyed respect for skills only they could volunteer. While it may seem that dogs were the single most harshly confined animals in the Soiot domus, they could also be construed as among its most autonomous members; as hunters in their own right.

Unlike many Western contexts, in which dogs are objects of affection, Soiot dogs were not considered pets. None of the dogs I came to know at Uro were accustomed to affectionate physical contact, although they were highly communicative. Once a dog had proven itself a useful watchdog, or a skillful hunter, it had an established position within the household. Yet I never saw a dog enter a house at Uro. Positioned close to human abode, people relied on their dogs for alarms of intruders. Several watchdogs had been killed by wolves in the past, but in most cases a dog's barking would allow householders to scan the horizon, check on their sheep, and load a rifle if need be. Both men and women fed dogs, and children freely played with their puppies. But a dog's primary relation with the household was established through the master (Rus. khoziain) of the household through hunting. Hunting, watching, and feeding were closely interrelated, as a sense of hunger was thought to keep a dog alert and ready to take initiative at all times.

Going back and forth between periods of tight leashing and loose rambling, a dog's relation with its human household and master was characterized not so much by seasonal fluctuation in proximity, but by variation in communicative and collaborative intensity. This flux, I argue, helped maintain balance in dog-human relations. Although the recognition of a dog's intention never called into question its masters' superiority, there was an understanding of interdependency between dogs and humans, especially in the execution of joint tasks. The latter
demanded a degree of respect for dogs as skilled collaborators. In this chapter, I examine practices that accentuated dog autonomy, such as dog-driven food procurement and dog-initiated hunting collaboration, as well as practices in which dog autonomy was more marginalized, such as castration and selective culling. The chapter concludes with the annual high point of dog-human communication and collaboration, evidenced in an autumn hunt for sable.

**Feeding Hunting Dogs**

Historically, in Oka the composition of a dog's diet fluctuated seasonally, depending on the availability of food scraps and the importance of the dog to the household. Although there is little information on how Soiot dogs were fed in the past, we do have some historical information for Tofa dogs who lived under similar circumstances to those of Oka. Mel'nikova (1994:46) writes:

“In summer they barely fed them, only once a day they would provide some batter (Tof. Talkhan-bulkhar; Rus. boltushka). One to two handfuls of flour were dissolved in hot water. [The liquid] was poured into separate bowls for each dog. [The dogs] searched for the remainder of their subsistence. But prior to the hunt, and during the hunt, dogs were fed well. The dogs lived in chums together with people, sleeping near the hearth. Every hunter had two to three dogs on average. Pups were carefully nursed (hunting dogs gave birth in chums where a warm corner was specially set aside for them).”

The feeding pattern in this account of historic Tofa dogs is largely consistent with contemporary Soiot dog keeping.

One afternoon in late September, when I was visiting Grandfather Tseren-Dorzho at his

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51 This “searching,” according to B. E. Petri (1928:31), was a matter of being “intrusive,” and “trying to carry off or lick up [anything they could find].” For most of the day, however, the dogs would sleep, “running nowhere, catching [not even] mice” (Petri 1928:31).

52 Charlier (2015:38) explains that Mongolian herders from Uvs district attempted to keep their dogs at a distance from the yurt due to associations of uncleanness. This does not seem to have applied historically to Tofas. In Uro, however, dogs were never let into the house.
cabin in Uro, his three dogs were furiously barking at a chipmunk outside his cabin. They had not caught the animal yet – primarily because they were chained to three wooden boxes, which served as their dog huts. Whenever I came to visit, the dogs would stand on top of their boxes, barking relentlessly. Panda (who looked like a black and white bear) was the eldest at 14 years. He had lost his hearing and looked genuinely tired of life. Sharik (Rus. for ‘Little Ball’) was five years old, and Druzhok (Rus. for ‘Little Friend’) was the youngest at three years of age. The chipmunk had reminded Grandfather of his hungry dogs, allowing me to see how dogs were fed: “Flour, water, milk. They don’t eat much,” Grandfather explained. Then he poured two large ladles of flour into a basin with cold water: “This way it doesn’t lump.” Transferring the flour water into a metal bucket, he added some leftover milk and set the mix on his hearth. Over the glowing ambers the feed slowly thickened. Reminded of Tofa tradition, I asked whether dogs were ever let into the house. “No!”, he replied. But, then he recalled how one winter, when his dogs were puppies, he had allowed them into the cabin. At first he had wanted to kill them, but feeling sorry for them, he had let them into the house. And, as it turned out, “they liked candy!”

According to Rassadin (2000:40-41), Tofa dogs were used in hunting all kinds of game, but they received special training to go fur hunting (cf. Petri 1928). Larger meat bearing fauna (e.g. Manchurian wapiti, bears, red deer, musk deer) were obtained serendipitously during the fur hunt. Squirrel and sable had been mainstays for trade until the preputial glands of Siberian musk deer (Moschus moschiferus) took their place in recent years.\textsuperscript{53} Dogs were trained to specialize in tracking either squirrel or sable,\textsuperscript{54} and it was rare to find one truly skilled in tracking both. During training, as well as later on in a dog's life, Tofa hunters would use squirrel

\textsuperscript{53}The decline in pelt prices has led to changes in hunting emphases all over the Saian region. It is to be expected that the training of hunting dogs reflects these changes. In Tofalariia, where hunting still constitutes the majority of a households' annual income, the illegal sale of musk deer glands has taken the place of sable and to a lesser degree of squirrel. But musk deer were an important prey long before the drop in fur prices (e.g. Meñikova 1994:45).

\textsuperscript{54}Rassadin (2000:42) explains further, “When a sable track was found, the young dog would be incited to follow it. If the dog was by nature to be a sable hunter (Rus. soboliatnitsa), then it would immediately follow its trail, sometimes even completely ignoring squirrel tracks. Such a dog would remain a soboliatnitsa for life.”
carcasses and intestines of other prey as lure for their dogs. More choice meat was rarely part of hunter provided feed. Instead it served as reward and communicative means in forging and sustaining behavioral associations, especially in young dogs. When a novice hunting dog had located a squirrel on a tree, the squirrel was shot and skinned, and its carcass was fed to the dog immediately. This sequence of events cemented a link between the taste of squirrel meat and the task of tracking and cornering the animal. Meat was therefore a relatively rare supplementation to a dog's diet, and it signified a time of year when humans and dogs collaborated intimately in the taiga.

Waves of Attention
A combination of significantly reduced hunting responsibilities and low grain stashes during the summer meant that Tofa dogs were fed minimal rations and expected to fend for themselves (e.g. Rassadin 2000; Mel'nikova 1994; Petri 1928). Having to scavenge for part of their own food, they would hunt for rodents and other small game, activities that were thought to spur their hunting instinct (Rassadin 2000:41). Little information exists on historical dog-human interaction for these times of year. Conversely, autumn and winter months were so labour intensive in a dog's life that independent scavenging for small game was impossible. To keep their hard working dogs alive during these intense times, Tofa hunters “fed a rye flour mash, the stock of which was transported to hunting taigas specifically on their behalf” (Rassadin 2000:41). It would seem then that the ways in which hunting dogs obtained and consumed food throughout the year stood in direct relation to their seasonal importance to the hunter's household.

With a rise in the importance of cattle and other stock for Soiot households, it would be reasonable to assume that the role of dogs in the Soiot domus would have had to shift. At least three scenarios could be observed during my fieldwork: Firstly, there were dogs who were raised specifically for hunting purposes. The relationship between hunters and such dogs still

This observation contradicts B. E. Petri's (1928:31) findings described above.
much resembled the pattern described for traditional Tofa dogs, even if larger game had gradually replaced the focus on sable and squirrel. Several of these dogs were well known for their skills, and people were keen on borrowing them, which I will describe below. Secondly, there were dogs who served primarily as chained watchdogs, but who were occasionally taken out to hunt, particularly in autumn. This was perhaps the most common scenario. Less training effort went into such dogs, but a number of them were quite prolific hunters nonetheless. Finally, there were dogs who never went hunting, and whose sole purpose was to watch over the comings and goings of the household.

Arguably, one of the benefits of releasing dogs for the summer had been the fact that they maintained a good level of physical activity between hunting seasons. Contemporary hunting dogs in Oka had much steeper physical reconditioning curves to overcome: Strelka (Rus. for “little arrow”), my second host Tsydyp's hunting-watchdog, had been on her chain for six months when she was released to migrate with us to summer camp. We had last taken her hunting in December, and it was now June. Similarly, Tsydyp’s second dog Aslan (Tur. for “lion”), a less experienced two-year-old male, had not moved much before he was chained to our tractor trailer, having to walk the entire distance from winter to summer pasture, crossing streams and navigating deep mud, all in one day.

**Sharing Bodies, Building Skill**

Months earlier, sometime in the autumn, Borzhon had invited me to come hunting with his sons. On our second day in the bush I notice that one of our three dogs suffered from a severe trauma in his right rear leg. It didn't look like anything new, but as far as I could recall, none of Borzhon's dogs had a limp. Whose dog was this? With thick legs, a strong chest, and a whitish coat, he was an expert tracker. Then it dawned on me. This same dog had come to my cabin in the past, feeding on leftovers. I had noticed his limp then. Later Borzhon's son, Regbi, told me that several years ago this dog had plummeted from a steep cliff together with his prey, a musk deer. He had driven it to the edge of a cliff. The hunters were surprised the dog had survived
the fall. When I visited former reindeer herder Iumzhap several days later, he asked me whether I had seen his dog—the one with a limp. White Sheik (Rus. belyi sheikh) was his name. The dog had disappeared again. Knowing that I had been hunting with Borzhon and his sons, Iumzhap asked me if his dog had joined our group. I told him he had joined us. Iumzhap did not seem the slightest annoyed, nor did he seem to anticipate any share of game.

This was my introduction to the sharing of dogs and their skills. Neither Borzhon nor Iumzhap had arranged for the limping dog to join the hunt. But since he had slipped off his chain, he had forded the stream, and was walking between households on the other side of the valley. On the morning of our departure, White Sheik had observed Borzhon release his excited dogs before mounting his horse. As we left the valley, White Sheik joined the trot of Borzhon's dogs. And, on the following day, with White Sheik still among us, Borzhon set him on track for musk deer alongside his own dogs. Familiar with Burzhon, his sons, and their dogs, White Sheik seemed to obey all Borzhon's commands. Not only was the dog familiar with the members of the party he had chosen to join, he was also deeply familiar with this landscape: its trails, creeks, slopes, and rocky outcrops onto which he was to chase the musk deer. Clearly, he had been here many times. And, quite likely a good number of these outings had not been initiated by his owner, Iumzhap. Although we had not deliberately 'taken' him with us on this trip, he had lent his skilled body to us as a fellow hunter in a place deeply familiar to him.

I soon learned that this kind of dog sharing was quite common. One morning, late in autumn, Afanasiev called my host Baianbata from the village of Sorok. Afanasiev was a respected elder and former director of the village kolkhoz. He said he was planning to hunt for sable, and he was asking for one of Alesha’s dogs to be sent to Sorok. These were the very same dogs about which I had asked Borzhon several days earlier. I asked Baianbata whether

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56Iumzhap's family lived across the river from Borzhon's. He belonged to the other of two main extended families that had taken abode in the valley, each of their respective households being located on opposite sides of the river. The fact that a dog from a non-kin household joined the hunt further confirms that dogs are often shared. Although Iumzhap's younger brother had joined us on the hunt, he had not taken command over the dog, further leaving me under the impression that the dog had belonged to Borzhon.
Afanasiev was going to pay Alesha in return for the use of his dog. But Baianbata did not think so. When I saw Alesha's friend Regdel that same day, I asked again whether Alesha would get anything in return for lending his prized dogs. “Of course he will not get anything for it!” In fact, said Regdel, Alesha would probably deliver the dogs to Sorok at his own cost, to make sure Afanasiev would take them hunting. It was in Alesha’s interest to have his dogs taken out by another hunter. 'Better for the dogs to be out hunting than to be sitting in the yard on their chains.' Each hunt would increase their skill—no matter who took them into the forest. Each outing would make them more versatile hunters, adding to their value for the household to which they belonged.

Alesha and Iumzhap's dogs provide examples of at least two dynamics. Firstly, the boundaries of belonging to specific masters were suspended as the dogs moved back and forth between social engagements with other households. Secondly, in the case of White Sheik, there emerged a degree of dog autonomy in which the dog opportunistically decided which household to join. Although no one would sell or exchange a prized hunting dog, evidently even the best of dogs could circulate among hunters in these ways. Increased sharing meant increasing skill in one's dogs, even if this came at the price of risking the loss of one's dog during another hunter's outing. Because sharing could occur without the owner's knowing, and as the result of a dog's own volition to join another hunting party, it would seem that there occurred an interplay of human and dog interests above and beyond common property claims. The dogs were navigating between relationships and humans were responding to this navigation. Like the spirit master described by Burjat shaman Stepanovich (previous chapter), who knew and acted upon the life history of a human visitor from another territory, so Borzhon was aware of White Sheik's life history, employing and rewarding his skills accordingly. Besides recognizing that one's dogs sometimes chose with whom to hunt, they were also understood to co-determine when to hunt.

57B. E. Petri (1928:32) reported that although Tofa hunters would generally not sell their dogs, a good hunting dog was worth two horses.
Dogs as Hunters in Their Own Right

Although a human hunter collaborates with dogs during the hunt, it could also be said that in some ways it is the dog who hunts for the human master. Illia, a seasoned hunter who lived on Tustuk river in winter, illustrated this point when he described how he would let his dogs run off into the forest. He told me one day: “My dogs hunt for me.” After releasing the dogs, he would ride his horse to the base of the nearest cliff, an outcrop his dogs were well familiar with. At the base of the cliff he would wait with his firearm in position, his horse tied off to the side. Ilia's dogs could take between two and three hours before their barking would emerge from the forest, and their prey would appear at the edge of the cliff. Once the prey was cornered by his excited dogs, Ilia would aim and shoot. This summary account is consistent, if generalized, with my own observations and the accounts of many other hunters. Ilia took great pride as a subsistence hunter, bringing home meat for his immediate family, but sharing also with his aging mother and with his brothers. Proud of his WWII era German-made rifle, Ilia saw himself as a proper hunter – but a hunter, nonetheless, primarily by way of his dogs.

Not all hunters I encountered took pride in the work of hunting dogs. Two avid hunters from Sorok (b. ca. 1980) told me they did not hunt with dogs at all. “It's not interesting!” The dogs do all the work while the hunter merely shoots the animal at the end.’ These young men preferred tracking prey on their own from their horses. For them dogs were hunters in their own right. They had felt that their skill as hunters was brought into question by the work and skill of dogs. It must be added, however, that both men were employed as water truck drivers in Sorok, and drawing on a monthly paycheck they were less likely to rely on meat from the forest in quite the same way as my herder-hunter friends from Uro. In either case, Ilia's account and the water truck drivers' preferences testify to the ways in which dogs were recognized as skillful hunters, and not merely as assistants in the process. Understanding dogs as autonomous hunters would have been foundational to Tofa releasing dogs between seasons. Yet this recognition of autonomy in dogs surfaces also in collaborative hunting with human partners.
Talking about the hunt, its right timing and balance between hunter, landscape, and owner spirit, Iumzhap once explained to me: “You get up in the morning and look at your dog to see what mood he is in. You then decide whether to go hunting or not.” If the dog is running in circles, pulling on his chain, and barking—it means that he is in a good mood (or in the right mood). If he is lying lazily by his hut, then he is in a bad mood (or in the wrong mood). It followed that only after one's dogs had been assessed did one make decisions regarding the hunt. While many factors played into right timing, it made little sense for Iumzhap to head into the forest with dogs that were found to be in the wrong mood. A dog's disposition was so important for a hunter to understand, precisely because his relations with a dog were not defined merely by his authority as master. Iumzhap knew he could coerce his dogs into tracking game for him, but he also knew that by forcing his dogs to work for him, he would essentially work against himself. Unable to establish a space for productive collaboration, the balance in their relationship would be lost. Waiting for the right disposition in his dogs thus allowed Iumzhap to tap into the dogs' own intentions, affording far better collaboration.

Selecting for Self Initiative and Fearlessness

In early June, two days before our household was to migrate to the summer pastures, Tsydyp's female hunting dog Strelka gave birth to six pups. Two of her litter were females, and three were males. When I arrived at her wooden hut on the day of our departure, several men were gathered around it, attempting to pull her out from it. Strelka was resisting with all her might, attempting to shelter her litter. When the men had succeeded in separating Strelka from her offspring, they held her tightly to the ground, while Tsydyp reached into her house, bringing forward her pups. One by one he lay them into a box of corrugated board. Strelka continued

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58In Tofalaria the hunters I spent time with had similar experiences. For them, too, dogs were hunters in their own right, and their services were shared by people. But in recent years, as they had observed, hunting dogs were increasingly following their own agendas. Particularly in certain locations, such as a rocky outcrop (Rus. otstoi) we passed during one outing, it was exceedingly difficult to corner Siberian musk deer because the dogs would not drive them all the way to the cliff. Most hunters seemed dissatisfied with contemporary dogs because often they would hunt for one species when the hunter had intended to obtain another. Whether this reported increase in the failure to reconcile intentional discrepancies resulted from a decrease in proper training, breeding, or field communication was unclear.
pulling and barking fiercely. I assumed Tsydyp was going to drown them. Instead he put the box in his jeep. As we departed for summer camp on the upper Tustuk river, Strelka was left to run behind the jeep, and we soon lost sight of her. She had been tied up since our last sable hunt in late autumn, and she was now weak from pregnancy and labour. Tsydyp stopped the jeep, climbed on the roof, and called for her. After some time she appeared on the horizon, driving a herd of sheep that did not belong to Tsydyp, and which were not supposed to come with us. Shouting and throwing sticks, Tsydyp was able to convince the sheep to return to the side valley from whence they had come. When Strelka reached us, she was allowed to join her pups in the jeep where she settled into feeding them.

According to Tsydyp, the average lifespan of a dog in Oka was eight to nine years. Although there were no purebreds in any of the households, this estimated average still lies below European mixed breeds who have an average life expectancy of ten years (e.g. Proschowsky, et al. 2003). Iumzhap, Tsydyp’s elder brother and owner of White Sheik, had owned a bitch who had given him her last litter prior to falling to her death from a cliff. From this litter Iumzhap had chosen several good looking pups who had grown into his present hunting dogs. The rest he had killed. According to Iumzhap it was common practice to cull all female offspring on the spot, unless one were looking for a bitch. To be able to tell which members of a litter had promising features, one had to wait for several weeks. The runt had to be identified, and the fastest growing and stoutest looking pups were then identified. At summer camp Tsydyp periodically checked on the growth of Strelka’s litter. It was unclear who had fathered the litter. All were growing slow compared to other litters that season. Two or three weeks after our arrival at summer pasture, the first runt had died, and four slow growing pups remained. Tsydyp decided to let the litter live, at least until their first hunt.

The first hunt in a dog’s life was a pivotal point in selecting dogs. Illia from Tustuk river was known as an expert horse breeder, but he also had a passion for hunting dogs. His dogs had descended from “first-class” animals. One of their grandmothers had been an East Siberian
Laika [probably a Siberian Husky or Iakut Laika] which had come to him from Iakutia. Another ancestor had been a very talented hunter, the origin or breed of which Illia could not recall. What made a great hunting dog, according to Illia, was the skill to quickly identify a track and following it until the animal was located. In this regard, Illia had seen many “lazy” (Rus. lenivyie) dogs. While some dogs were lazy, other dogs were “fearful.” Neither trait made for a good hunting dog. Such dogs were 'done away with' immediately. According to Iumzhap, 'Once a dog is a year old, it is taken on a hunting trip during which it is trained to identify tracks, following them over long distances, and to drive the prey in direction of the hunter.' For this purpose Iumzhap brought along an experienced dog, like White Sheik. The yearling would pick up tracking skills from the senior dog, and with every subsequent hunt it would build its skill set. A yearling, who only followed the human hunter, was shot on the spot. What counted was a dog's fearlessness and self-initiative. White Sheik always led the way – whether we went to fetch sand or sable. In the words of Iumzhap, “This is how you select a hunting dog.”

**Burial and Castration**

After years of service, a good dog's life was celebrated with a special last rite, which Grandfather explained as follows:

“When a dog gets too old, or when it’s hurt, it is killed, its tail is chopped off and put under its head, and a piece of fat (Rus. salo) or butter, or something else that is delicious, is put in its mouth. That’s how we bury our dogs. That’s how I do it too. [...] A dog is usually hanged. Or it can be shot. But usually it is hanged.”

When I visited Grandfather in the spring, he had already laid his eldest dog Panda to rest. Although I had not been there for the procedure, I imagined his body resting in the ground, somewhere nearby Grandfather's cabin, with his lower jaw perched on his scruffy black tail.

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59 Although all Iumzhap's dogs feared wolves, they were not considered fearful dogs. According to Iumzhap, White Sheik was a fearless dog, yet he rightfully feared wolves. He said, wolves could easily eat White Sheik, given they were bigger than him: “All they would leave of him is his tail.” But Iumzhap had already docked the tail.
and with a piece of cured pork on his old tongue. Anthropologist Bernard Charlier (2015:38) has explained the meaning of this ritual in Mongolia as “a process supposed to guarantee its human reincarnation.” Grandfather never offered such explanations, but in either case the Soiot variant of this last rite seems to be a blend of Tofa and Mongolian traditions.

During a dog's life time, docking and castration were rarely practiced. One exception were Uncle Ivan and Aunty Irina's dogs. Living a distance away from Uro proper, Ivan kept three dogs, two of which he had castrated. Ivan did not fear unwanted offspring—both were good dogs. Instead, he sought to prevent them from running after bitches belonging to households in Uro proper. Ivan was concerned that his 'well mannered' dogs would be in contact with 'badly mannered' dogs. He described bad manners as nipping yak, chasing cows, and other unruly behavior that would potentially disturb or harm his stock. Were such habits to rub off on his dogs, they would become useless to him. Good demeanor around livestock he seemed to see not as a genetic trait so much as a learned behavior hard to come by in an Oka dog. There had been no history of herding dogs in Oka, yet sensitivity to stock in dogs had become increasingly important to Ivan, especially since the fall in fur prices over the past few years.

Ivan's isolation from the rest of Uro's households had more than grazing reasons, and it would seem that his dog castrations must be understood in this context. There were tensions between members of his household and several individuals at Uro proper. In Oka overall disposition, mood, or character of an animal or even of a herd could be understood to reflect the mood or character of its owners, particularly of its male head. In Ivan's case, castrating his dogs may have been a way to demarcate the good demeanor of his own household from that of certain male heads and their households in Uro. This link between people and their animals was illustrated in Ivan's eldest dog who had lost his hearing. Although Ivan described him as 'mean' (Rus. zloj), he had no intention to put him down. Quite to the contrary: Ivan seemed to value

According to B. E. Petri (1928:33), a Tofa hunter would walk his aging but revered dog to “a good place” (usually atop a hill), where he “fed it for the road.” He would say: “Mende, good-bye; do not be angered; you served me well; always helped me out on the hunt and in life; step now into your place; mende!” Then he would shoot it and cover it with boughs and moss.
the dog's irritation with certain people. 'The dog “senses” (Rus. chustvuet) people with a temper and will attack them.' Ivan went on to list the names of men from Uro whom the dog could not stand, adding, 'the dog will not bother any women or people of ‘gentle’ (Rus. smirnyi) character.' Dog castration in this chase not only prevented the corruption of dog behavior, it also symbolized and accentuated inter household distinctions.

Dogs and People in the Taiga
Nowhere else does collaboration between dog and human hunters become as evident as in the woods, and nowhere else do their intentions come to align as intimately as here. Although human masters may continue to employ coercive measures, such as occasional forceful beatings, these displays of force do not dominate their relationship. Rather, coercive behavior merely co-defines the collaborative space in which careful observation and communication between dog and human hunters emerge as most crucial. The forest then becomes a seasonal stage for the intricate social interplay of various kinds of hunters and their specific performances and skill sets. Before describing one such play, involving a sable, two dogs, a human hunter, and myself, I will briefly introduce how hunting dogs were viewed by the state and non-indigenous hunters in Buriatia during the Soviet years, so as to contrast these ways with contemporary Soiot human-dog interactions.

In September of 1957 a group of hunting dog enthusiasts, belonging to the 'Buriat-Mongol Volunteer Hunters Society' from Ulan-Ude had organized what they called “the first Buriat-Mongol field test for hunting small fur animals and upland birds with Laikas.” The event followed guidelines especially developed for the staging of hunting dog inspections and competitions (GARB 1951, 1666-1-56:1-6), and it took place in mountainous terrain 60 kilometers outside of the capital city of Ulan-Ude. Official judges had been invited for the day, and a careful program directed every activity over the course of two days spent in the forest. After the event's completion, a report (GARB 1957, 1666-1-183:1, 3, 4) was handed to the head

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61Rus.: Buriat-Mongol'skoe dobrovol'noe obshestvo okhotnikov.
of the state hunting inspectorate of the Buriat Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic. Although not state-initiated, the event had in part been sponsored by the state, representing an emerging interest in the 1950s to assess and raise the profile of hunting dogs, and to optimize their efficiency as key players in the Soviet industrial hunting complex.62

The 1957 report describes the behavior of three successful hunting dogs; Kazbek, Liustra, and Pestrik, all of whom belonged to a three-year-old brown-pelted Laika litter of unknown origin. The dogs were owned by a male club member from Ulan-Ude. Following, the official report's description of Kazbek's behavior during the event:

“Released to search among mixed tree stands, along the crest of a hill, [Kazbek] moved with a lively gallop (Rus. bodrym galopom). His search was energetic, but not elegant (Rus. figurnyi). The dog tended to run on the left side, ending up behind the lead person. By minute 25 of the search, he had found a chipmunk, and in sight of the judges he

Illustration 13: A sample page from 80 dog profiles obtained in 10 villages (Pokrovka to Kholma) (Grigor’ev 1956). Most dogs were of the eastern Siberian Laika breed. (GARB 1666-1-90:7-8)

62 This new attention to hunting dogs was also evidenced in contemporaneous surveys conducted by students of Irkutsk Agricultural Institute, which had suggested that greater economic emphasis be placed on fur hunting in the Baikal region (Grigor’ev 1956; Khalkhaev 1956; Tugutov 1956).
chased the animal up a larch tree. At a height of 5-6 meters the chipmunk spiraled up the trunk, exciting the dog, but Kazbek observed the chipmunk silently, refraining from barking. His owner was very pleased and explained to the judges how he had trained his Laika to abstain from barking at chipmunks. Upon first command, Kazbek stepped back from the larch on which the chipmunk was located, evidencing good obedience. For the last quarter of an hour's work, Kazbek significantly reduced the speed of his search, transitioned to a trot, and intermittently to a walk (Rus. *shag*), while narrowing his search with regular returns to the leading person.”

While there are some parallels between the staged hunt of the Volunteer Hunter's Society and the practices of Soiot hunters and their dogs, a number of important differences can be gleaned. The state had emphasized the importance of dogs pedigree, which is evident in the introduction of dog passports (GARB 1947, 1666-1-17:1-49). But Kasbek's exact genealogy remained unknown, something that seemed normal also for most Soiot hunting dogs. But unlike Soiot dogs, Kasbek's behavior was judged in isolation from other dogs. All the hunters I worked with in Oka would bring more than one dog to the forest, and teamwork among their dogs played an important role in the hunt. While the staged Buriat event seemed to value rut obedience, Soiot hunting emphasized the importance of visual communication between hunters and dogs, as well as between dogs. Also, a Soiot hunter would likely have given greater attention to details in the dog's habits as based on its particular life history (i.e., why did he run on the left side?). And while elegance seemed to be of importance to the judges, they gave less attention to the analysis of actual maneuvers. In what follows, I will provide a description of hunter-dog and dog-dog interactions as I observed them during a sable hunt.

**Hunting Sable with Tsydyp, Strelka, and Aslan**

An eerie silence enveloped my hut when I awoke early one November morning. A peek through

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63The document “Excerpts from the auxiliary pedigree book for hunting dogs” contains approx. 24 hunting dog passports. Although not completely filled, the passports have a form that allows documentation of an animal’s line of descent. Most of the dogs, judging by their addresses, are from the Prebaikal area.
the window confirmed it: first snow had fallen in the night. I jumped out of bed and hastily lit a fire in the hearth. Waiting for the water to boil, I noticed that Uncle Borzhon had already caught his riding horse. Tied to the serge, and shaking his black mane, the stallion was patiently waiting for Borzhon to finish drinking tea. By the time I had made tea, Borzhon had disappeared into the hills, rifle across his back. I left my cabin to see Tsydyp on the other side of the valley. We had arranged to go hunting, come first snow. From the snow around his house I could tell that no one had left yet, except to use the outhouse. Tsydyp was still in bed, when his wife Dagzama poured me another cup of tea. As I was getting restless, Tsydyp got up to ready his rifle in the lean-to. Minutes later we were on our way—on foot—into the hills east of Uro. Both of Tsydyp's dogs had come with us; Aslan his less experienced two-year-old male, and Strelka, his more experienced bitch. He kept Aslan on a leash to prevent him from chasing the neighbors’ sheep and from running after their dogs. Once we reached the forest he let him loose.

Scrambling a steep hillside, Tsydyp recalled a sable that had lived in this area. Today there was no sign of it. Strelka and Aslan had run well ahead of us, and we were following in their tracks, scanning the snow cover for signs of life. Tsydyp was confident that if the sable was not here, we would find him further uphill. I found it difficult to move at his pace, and at the same time remain attentive to the forest. So I decided to follow Tsydyp between the trees, mimicking his movements. Perhaps I would see what he saw if I aligned my gate and gaze with his, like Aslan who was to learn from Strelka. We had climbed for a good while when we heard barking in the distance. I asked Tsydyp which of the dogs had barked and why. He said it was Aslan who had probably picked up the track of a deer. We walked on, until both dogs stopped beneath two trees leaning on each other. Both dogs were intently looking up the trunk, barking. When we reached the trees, the dogs were sniffing the ground near the base of the leaning trees. Here Tsydyp found sable tracks so elusive, that I could not see them. The uneven ground, strewn with rock boulders the size of large cushions, was covered under a fine white blanket. Walking here was a slippery and treacherous task. For small animals like the sable, the countless holes
and cracks between the boulders provided innumerable opportunities to disappear.

Illustration 14: A typical sable boulder patch, here shown in summer. © 2014, Author

I was standing on a raised boulder, dizzied by the endless number of possible directions in which the sable might have run, I noticed how Aslan and Strelka were closing in on a several distinct boulders. Tsydyp and I quickly circled the area in a 10 metre radius, checking for tracks that might breakk our circle. Our foot and paw prints were now covering the site. Neither Tsydyp nor I could see the sable. Although I felt like we were chasing a ghost, my companions' confidence that a sable was near made me yearn to see the forest as they did. Keeping the boulders in sight, Tsydyp and I swiftly collected piles of dry brush and needles from beneath nearby larches. With a bit of newspaper I helped Tsydyp light four fires, strategically placed throughout the boulder patch. We fed the flames with moss, lichen, and dry grass to intensify their smoke, and Tsydyp used a thin board to direct the smoke into several cracks near the dogs. Strelka and Aslan were now intently moving between two or three openings. Then Strelka sat back on one side of the boulder patch, while Aslan frantically wiggled a rock slab, attempting to gain access to what lay beneath it. Pointing to Strelka, Tsydyp joked: “There, that’s what old
age does.” Seconds later, Tsydyyp identified a fresh set of tracks leading away from the boulders. The sable had escaped! Strelka had not sat back from fatigue, she had registered the loss of scent. Not seeing it leave, she had sat back to observe the scene. Upset we had missed the escape, Tsydyyp pursued its tracks. Passing him, his dogs ran ahead.

Further downhill Tsydyyp picked back up on the tracks, keeping a close eye on the dogs. Several minutes had passed when Aslan and Strelka began circling another boulder patch, similar to the previous one. Strelka was focused on a slab, sniffing intently, and scratching with her paws in one direction. Tsydyyp was certain the sable was here. I could still see nothing; no tracks, no sable. Again we set fires—three this time—fanning smoke into cracks. With increased certainty of their success, the dogs reversed roles. Aslan was now watching from a slight distance while Strelka was intently waiting at the opening under a rock slab. We spent a good while feeding and fanning the fires, and Tsydyyp was as certain as Strelka that the sable was still under one of the slab. Then Strelka changed position, and gazing at an adjacent opening, both dogs froze in perfect silence. Out of the stillness, Tsydyyp suddenly cried out as something black and furry shot past me from under the cracks. The dogs took after it up the hill. Tsydyyp grabbed his rifle, and we ran after the dogs. A stone’s throw up the hill, one of the dogs had gotten hold of the sable, then lost it again. When we had reached the dogs, Aslan was in control of the fighting sable, refusing to release it. Showering curses on his dog, and beating him frantically with a thick branch, Tsydyyp eventually convinced Aslan to release the sable.

The sable leaped uphill, but catching up with it, Tsydyyp held down its neck with the arch of his sole. He grabbed a stick and knocked it over the head three times. Then he picked it up. Its fur was crusted with frozen canine saliva, but it had remained unharmed from the dogs’ fangs. Tsydyyp’s blows to the head had killed it, and its warm body now hung lax from his grip. Its shiny eyes were wide open and its mouth slightly ajar, exposing glistening gums and sharp little teeth. It was a smaller sable with little claws, about one third smaller than the regional ‘ideal’. I held it for a while, inspecting its shape and distinct facial expression, as its body was
stiffening in my hands. Still excited, Aslan and Strelka attempted to take the body off my hands. We put the sable in Tsydyp’s backpack, left our fires smoking, and left. Sabel roam the forest on their own, according to Tsydyp, so there was no point in looking for a companion nearby.

**Learning through Movement and Observation**

On this excursion I had learned from Tsydyp primarily through observation. I tried not to speak, and when I did ask a question, I did so only a while later, and never in the situation itself. Speaking was not a primary part of this mode of movement in the forest. Yet speaking in retrospective served as a great interpretative aid. It allowed me to confirm with him what I had gleaned from our doings in the moment. Tsydyp and I had been moving in unison. Mimicking his body, his breathing, his way of looking, I tried to align my own way of seeing as much as possible with his. I would stop as he stopped, I would listen when he listened. I would try to see what he was looking at and attempted to follow his shifts in attention, even if I was yet unaware of why he had shifted when he had, and how he had decided what to shift his attention to next. Like Aslan, who was learning from Strelka, so I was learning from Tsydyp and his dogs. While the levels of experience held by each member of our group differed vastly—along with our sensory capacities allowing us to know the forest in different ways—each of us was building our skill set.

All four of us moved through the forest, guided by a common goal that was incrementally communicated and solidified through a series of movements upon entering the forest. Presumably there were tracks of various animals in the forest that morning, and Tsydyp did interpret the dogs' barking as their discovery of deer. But unlike myself, Strelka and Aslan had not been informed directly of our primary aim that day. Although Tsydyp did mention sable to me days ago, and again over tea in the morning, he had entered the forest with an opportunistic mind. His intention for sable was made apparent to the dogs only when he deliberately showed interest in a sable track and changed direction to follow it into a boulder patch. Although still interested in other animals, our attention to a particular track and scent,
and our movement into a particular landscape, non-verbally communicated Tsydyp's intention to the dogs. While each member in the group may have recognized different opportunities along the trail, we aligned our actions under Tsydyp's leadership. He expressed his intention through movement in a particular direction, and we responded by reading his movements, interpreting them as sable hunting, and beginning to search accordingly.

On our return home, Tsydyp and I talked about the sable's escape at the first boulder patch. He said, he had noticed the sable's escape before his dogs had. Yet, when Tsydyp saw Strelka sitting down, he had initially misread her behavior. She had not tired, and as soon as Tsydyp had discovered the new tracks, Strelka's behavior gained new meaning. Having lost the sable's scent, she had no longer focused on the hole alone. Instead, she had sat back to visually consult the movements of Aslan, Tsydyp, and myself. When she noticed Tsydyp's excitement further downhill, she interpreted it as the missing link that had grounded her for several moments. Jumping, she picked up on the fresh tracks and proceeded to direct us to the second boulder patch, relying on her nose once again. This back and forth between the senses of three hunters was what fueled the hunt: Tsydyp was relying on his dogs' capacity to track scent, while they in turn relied on his eyes. When one system broke down, each looked to the other to recalibrate their own search. Thus Tsydyp's eyes helped Strelka bridge the gap she had encountered in scent. At the same time, both Strelka and Tsydyp had been guessing the meaning of each others' responses to changes in the situation. In so doing, both were collaborating by sharing in each other's perspectives of the landscape.

**Conclusion**
The purpose of this chapter was to illustrate Soiot human-dog relations in terms of communication and collaboration - relational qualities that were rooted in the recognition of autonomy in dogs as hunters in their own right. Ascribing autonomy to dogs brought with it a degree of unpredictability to dog-human encounters. This was evident in hunters who consulted their dogs' demeanour prior to departing for a hunt. Success in collaboration had to take into
account another's disposition. Yet the level of attention paid to dogs by households and masters fluctuated, depending on the relative economic importance of dogs as hunters at a given time. Hunting dogs enjoyed greater attention during the autumn months when hunting activities were most intense. This flux of human attention was also reflected in the mode and quality of their feed, and rather than asserting perfect control over their canine partners, Soiot householders allowed their more mature dogs periods of free roaming. But even where dogs spent the majority of their time on a chain, intermittent releases enabled some to join the hunting activities of other households on their own accord, further confirming their status as hunters in their own right.

Similarly, dogs were deliberately shared among hunters to increase the animal's skill base by maximizing its time spent in pursuit of prey, a practice that was seen to increase a dog's value to the household, even if no payment was received for its lending. Self initiative and fearlessness were the two most prized qualities in a hunting dog, followed by the ability to collaborate as part of a team of hunters. The success of a hunting team consisting of humans, dogs, horses, and sometimes reindeer, relied on affective communication between the perspectives each member held of the landscape. A good team was able to align their intentions under a human master, jointly profiting from the bouquet of skills that emerged in their coming together. Drawing on each other's sense of smell, eyesight, ability to lay fires, and body size, such teams hunted as a unit, feeding off each others' cues. Come the end of the season, this communicative intensity between dogs and their masters would wane only to be picked back up the following year.
Chapter Six: Reindeer

Introduction: Bells Among the Trees

17 September 2014. I was awakened by small pieces of ice that had fallen onto my face. When I opened my eyes it was still dark, but I could make out the frosty green tarp that had sheltered my body for the night in a deep pasture on Kara-Buren' river. Members of our team were still sleeping in two other tents. Light snow had fallen, and the forest encircling us was perfectly still. Only the gentle movement of the Kara-Buren' was audible. Our horses were still roaming in the forest somewhere. After a long ride on the previous day their sweaty saddles were airing out in the night air. In a hunter's cabin on the river, our Tofa guides, Denis and Aleksandr, were still fast asleep. Breathing softly - muzzles to the ground - our two dogs had found shelter from the snow under the saddles. It was time to gather wood for an early morning tea and wait for dawn. As the hills above our camp slowly came into light, I began to hear the sound of faint bells. As the sound came closer, I could make out rhythmical breathing. Looking up from the fire I made out two hunter-led caravans of 13 reindeer each. Quietly passing by our camp, without stopping or slowing down, they soon had disappeared into the woods again. Had it not been for their fresh tracks in the snow, it could have been a dream.

Two days earlier, I had spoken to Vitalii Lomov in the village of Alygdzher from where we had come. Vitka, as he was known locally, had herded reindeer for many years. In fact, he had been in Uro for two years in the mid 1990s to assist several of my Soirot reindeer herding friends after the Sorok administration had purchased a herd from Tofalariia. I had heard so much about Vitka that, at times, it felt as if I had known him from long before we first met. Vitka's expertise was pivotal in bringing reindeer herding back to Oka. Together we flipped through entries from a journal describing his days as instructor in Oka. After conveying greetings from

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64 In September of 2014 I traveled to Tofalariia, together with reindeer specialist K. Klokov, archaeologist K. Milek, and palynologists I. Kamerling and M. Kuoppomaa as part of the Arctic Domus research project. The team's main purpose was to identify and compare historical and contemporary reindeer herding sites, generate surface maps, collect pollen samples, and to gather related ethnographic data. By using 'us' in the text I refer to our team.
the herders he had trained 20 years earlier, I updated him on the current state of the Soiot herd.

No one had seen Vitka since his return to Alygdzher in 1996, and my friends in Oka were not certain whether he still lived. With a past of heavy drinking, it was a joy to see him cleared up and building his own house in Alygdzher. But not only Vitka's life had changed since his return to Tofalaria. The whole of Tofa reindeer herding had undergone significant changes - even within the past ten years.

As I found out later, the caravans that had passed us on Kara Buren' river in the morning had been led by two salaried reindeer herders. Several weeks ago they had moved to the reindeer camp at Aleksandr Viktorovich Gimadeev’s hunting cabin on the upper Dugol'ma river. Here they had prepared for the annual arrival of hunters from Alygdzher who at this time of year were collecting their riding and transportation reindeer from the collectively held herd in preparation for setting out to their winter hunting territories, also known as taigas. Many working reindeer had already been collected when we arrived. Every day the herders had been luring reindeer to the camp site, scattering coarse salt onto exposed boulders at the centre of a clearing. During the day reindeer would come from the forest, vigorously licking the boulders. Their young ones would nibble with great interest on every human implement they could find. The does' (Rus. matochki; matukhi; matki) velvety antler skin was flapping in the wind like rags, and the herders had been trimming tines every day. Now that the two herders had left camp with their own reindeer in tow, visiting hunters volunteered by attending to herding tasks on a rotational basis.

65 According to hunter Nikolai, the herder's position was paid RUB 24,000 per month, of which only 7,000 actually made it to the herder, while the remainder ended up in the pockets of bureaucrats ranging from higher government to administrative staff. This low pay seemed to be accepted as an excuse for the herders' early abandonment of their reindeer duties. During Soviet times, 4-5 people had been employed with the herd. Among them had been a chief herder (Rus. starshy) and a birther (Rus. teliatnik).

66 The herd is officially owned by 'Tofalarskaia obshina Barbitai,' an indigenous association that was headed at the time of our visit by Vadim Nikolaevich Partfienov.

67 Fore antlers are shortened on bulls to prevent lethal outcomes in mating duels (and on all other reindeer to enable feeding in deeper snow). Hind antlers are trimmed on riding reindeer to prevent injury to the rider, and wide racks are cut to allow passage in dense forest (cf. Grøn 2010).
In what follows I assemble a brief summary of reindeer domestication in south central Siberia with my own observations of contemporary Tofa and Soiot herding practices. The main aim of this chapter is to show how proximity between people and reindeer can fluctuate over time, particularly as the result of other species entering the household. The first section of this chapter outlines what have been the main theories of reindeer domestication in the Saians, so as to lay the groundwork on which to argue for a vision of human-reindeer relations that goes beyond a single species focus. My perspective does not ignore or debunk older theories, rather it builds on them, firstly by describing a recent transition in Tofa reindeer herding practices from a more constrictive approach to a more invitational one. Here historical developments—particularly the establishment, collapse, and later privatization of the kolkhoz system—have affected the proximity between humans and reindeer, and therewith the ways in which they relate to each other. Secondly, I build on these theories by making visible the impact of other species on human-reindeer relations by revisiting recent attempts to reintroduce reindeer to the Soiot household. Both examples emphasize the flux of reindeer as key species in the south Siberian *domus.*
The propensity to move back and forth between domestic and non-domestic affordances described earlier in this thesis is particularly evident in reindeer. Also, autonomy resurfaces here, as a large enough reindeer herd will follow its own intentions regarding the timing and routing of their movement across the landscape, even when under the care of humans (cf. Grøn 2011). What this chapter adds to these observations is an attention to the presence of other species. Mongolian horses traded from Oka-Buriats have for a long time played an important role in the lives of Tofa hunter-herders, especially during the summer when reindeer graze at high altitude and can't be bothered to transport people and objects from place to place (cf. Rassadin 2000:35; Petri 1927:34). Tofalars are said to have begun breeding their own horses beginning around the turn of the century (Melnikova 1994:52), although a Turkic equine breeding tradition may predate Tofa contact with Russians and Buriats, as is suggested by Tofa folklore, cosmology, and lexicon (I.V. Rassadin 2000; V.I. Rassadin 1996). An analysis of the extent to which horses and reindeer have competed for importance in the Tofa domus goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but I will address fluctuations in the importance of reindeer and of yak in Soiot households. As we have seen in previous chapters, for Soiots, not only the Mongolian horse but also yak herds have played a key role, at least since 1829 (Nefedev & Gergesov 1929:38-43). In light of these findings, this chapter suggests that fluctuations in importance ascribed to particular domestic species may not be 'modern' occurrences so much as they are characteristic of a much older regional pattern, reflected in the prehistoric movements of people and animals in and out of the Eastern Saians.

A 'Birthplace' for Reindeer Domestication
The origins of reindeer domestication feature as an early and prominent theme in the ethnographic literature of Southern Siberia. Particularly the Altai-Saian region is associated with ‘birth place’ notions for reindeer domestication in Eurasia, debates on which have been summarized more than once for an English readership (e.g. Whitaker 1981; Mirov 1945; Zolotarev and Levin 1940). Two main theories emerge from the material: the so-called diffusion
theory (Aronsson 1991; Laufer 1974; Hatt 1918; Sirelius 1916), arguing reindeer domestication spread from Southern Siberia into northern Siberia and on to Scandinavia; the other view being 'evolution theory' (Storli 1996; Mulk 1994; Wiklund 1918), which advocates multiple and independent points of origin for domestication. Explorer Douglas Carruthers (1914) and Norwegian zoologist Ørjan Olsen (1915) were among the earliest ethnographers who examined human-reindeer relations in the Saian region. Carruthers and Olsen independently spent three summer months among the Tozhu of eastern Tyva in 1910 and 1914, respectively (Stepanoff 2012:288; I. Whitaker 1981:342). One of Olsen’s goals was to show similarities between Sami and Tozhu reindeer-herding practices. He did this by comparing the use of plant and animal products, and various other elements of material culture, leading him to suggest a single origin of domestication in South Siberia (cf. Whitaker 1981:341, 347), which opened up further discussion and research for years to come.

Debates on whether reindeer had been domesticated prior to other species in the area, and whether the Saian region was indeed the birthplace for reindeer domestication, were carried on by several other Western and Soviet scholars after Olsen (i.e. Skalon 1956; Skalon and Khoroshikh 1951; Vasilevich and Levin 1951; Schmidt 1951; Leimbach 1936; Manchen-Helfen 1931; Maksimov 1928; Laufer 1920; Hatt 1918). In fact, A. M. Maksimov suggested that “some Turkic or Mongol tribe” had been herding deer for some time prior to adopting cattle (1928:33), on the basis of which Vasilevich and Levin (1951:87) proposed that it may have been under this influence that Samoyeds adopted the practice, taking it with them further north (in Vainshtein 1980:133). This led Sevian Vainshtein (1972, 1980) to develop a three stage single origin explanation for Eurasian reindeer herding in eastern Tyva. His theory attempted to account for the domestication of reindeer at large, as well as for the development of the Saian style of reindeer husbandry in particular. Based on his study of cultural transformations in the Saian

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68 More recently, the focus in reindeer domestication studies has shifted to an analysis of genetic material from Russia (e.g., Kol and Lazebny 2006) and Scandinavia (e.g., Røed et al. 2008; Røed et al. 2011). Both sources tend to support an independent evolution model.
region, Vainshtein (1960) concluded that the use of reindeer as load carriers preceded their use as a means for human transportation, a theory that he found to parallel the findings of ethnographers working with other reindeer herders, such as the Tungus (Vasilevich 1964). Studying saddle designs in archaeological and ethnographic records, Vainshtein concluded that reindeer herding had originated in the Saian region in ancient times, but that people had started riding reindeer only in the 14th century (1980:131).

Vainshtein's argument that reindeer herding may first have appeared in the Saian region is based in part on the presence of an ancient breed of reindeer, not found anywhere outside of the Saian region, and on Mashkovtsev’s (1940) and Kertselli’s (1925) observations that Saian reindeer are easier to handle than any other known reindeer (Vainshtein 1980:132). This ease may, in part, attest to a first stage of reindeer domestication at a time when Samoyeds, who had been familiar with other forms of steppe pastoralism as early as 2000 B.C., were pushed towards taiga regions by Karasuk and Tagar tribes who had moved into the Minusin Depression. Now located between steppe and taiga, Samoyeds would have herded deer alongside other species, presumably for meat (Vainshtein 1980:133). According to this theory, the second stage occurred before A.D. 1000, when Samoyeds began to move deeper into the taiga, equipping their reindeer with pack saddles. Thus reindeer herding was set apart from other forms of pastoralism. After spreading across the Saian region, the practice is believed to have come to an end in the area when Samoyeds were pushed north by horse-breeding Turkic groups (Vainshtein 1980:134). The final stage would have been the birth of the 'Saian style' of reindeer herding, occurring when Turkic-speaking tribes of the Saians (being in close contact with their Samoyed neighbours to the north) adopted reindeer husbandry. Here they would have applied horse-related practices of milking and saddle-based riding to their reindeer (Vainshtein 1980:135–6). It is on the basis of such inter-species application of practices, that I argue for the need of a stronger multi-species emphasis in Saian ethnography.
Vainshtein's assumptions, speculative as they may seem, take into account the pivotal role that inter-species relations may have played in reindeer domestication. In his perspective, Samoyeds of the Minusinite Depression had been herders long before they encountered reindeer. And when they eventually began herding deer, they would not have given up the herding of other species alongside. Because Turkic speaking ancestors of Soiots brought with them an ancient horse breeding tradition, it is logical to assume not only that the continued importance of horses alongside reindeer represents a long-standing tradition in the Saians, but also that the extension of equestrian material culture to reindeer constitutes an example of regional fluctuation in species-specific focus. The growing focus on yak herding among Soiots, particularly as the result of assimilative pressures from Buriat settlers peaking toward the end of the 19th century, hardly comes as a surprise if seen in light of the continuous prehistoric changes that have taken place in regional hunter-herder practices. If the ancestors of Soiots had indeed been steppe herders who had transitioned to hunting in a taiga setting, then assimilating Buriat herding practices in taiga pasturelands would have marked little more than another shift of focus in a series of fluctuating subsistence and species emphases. Transitioning from being hunters who herd to becoming herders who hunt may be seen as paralleling the general pattern described by Vainshtein and others for this region.69

During my fieldwork in Oka, I searched for Soiot oral traditions on the domestication of reindeer. Such accounts have been recorded for Dukha (Tsataan) (cf. Keay 2006: 2; Ragagnin 2011: 256) and Tofalars. Anthropologist B. E. Petri recorded one such oral history while visiting with Tofa hunters (1927b:45):

“A Karagas [Tofa] was walking and searching for something to ride on the hunt. This was long ago... Karagas didn't even have reindeer then. He met a person.

69 A Tofa hunting guide was of the opinion that his ancestors had kept reindeer primarily for meat, and that they had hunted wild game only on occasion. Although incompatible with contemporary ethnographic consensus, this view supports Vainshtein's hypothesis for a strong herding influence that would have come from eastern Tyva. It also echoes with Caruther's emphasis (contrary to Olson's) on herding over hunting activities among Tozhus.
— What are you looking for?

— I am looking for something to ride on during the hunt.

— Go to the green outcrop at the top of the Uda [river], two reindeer walk there. A white one and a black one walk there. The white one I've caught—he's calm, and the black one I haven't caught—he's wild70. I let the white one go—didn't need him. Take it, you'll have livestock. The Karagras went and caught it. From that white reindeer all Karagas reindeer descended. From that time on we've had reindeer.” (Transl. from Russian by author)

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Interestingly, this origin account takes for granted at least two details: Firstly, that Karagas reindeer did not require much taming to begin with, because all domestic reindeer find their origin with a single already tame (Rus. *smirnyi*, Eng. *gentle, manageable*) individual. Secondly, the calm original individual was of a white coat colour, a colour known to indicate domestication in reindeer, that is to say, as a genetic mutation facilitated by domestication (e.g., Rødven et al. 2009; Våge et al. 2014). While the domestication of reindeer among Tofalars is thought to have a starting point—namely on the Upper Uda river, possibly in a location known as Wild Ridge (Rus. *Dikii Khrebret, elev. 2070-2094m*) in eastern Tofa country, the taming...

70It is not clear from the source of this account what Tofa word was used to describe the animal as “wild.” Petri renders tame as *smirnyi*, and wild as *dikii* in Russian.
aspect of domestication itself is not thought to have a particular origin point. The latter is rather seen as an affordance that is already in existence, a waiting merely to become recognized and utilized. A Soiot variant of such an origin account would have to allow for a tantalizing comparison, possibly indicating how more dialogue with incoming ritual practices might have affected human-reindeer relations. However none of the Soiot elders I spoke with could recall such an oral account. Neither was I able to locate textual variants in the literature or in local print. An anonymous religious Soiot specialist from Bukson (b. 1963) explained the loss of this knowledge as the result of years of Soviet ideological repression. In his opinion Soiot elders had taken most of this knowledge to their graves.

**Reindeer–Yak Transitions**

Another explanation for the absence of such an oral account may be the in-migration of Buriats to the southeastern Saians. The influx of Buriat settlers was, indeed, accompanied by a growing Soiot emphasis on yak and cows (e.g. Pavlinskaia 2002: Petri 1927:14) that predated Soviet collectivization and industrial intensification. As might be expected, an oral Buriat account for the origin and initial domestication of yak, as well as for crossbred hybrids (Bur./Rus. *khainak*), does exist in Oka (Legendy Oki, transl. by K. D. Tulueva, AKHA, 9. August 2001, p. 2.). B. E. Petri (1927:14), in turn, divided Oka-Soiots into five economic groups in the 1920s, all of whom he described as transitioning from hunting and reindeer herding to stockbreeding or agricultural practices, the latter specifically in the Tunka valley. Soviet collective farms subsequently built on this perceived trend, further intensifying milk and meat production, and maintaining transportation reindeer only until the early 1960s.73

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71 The staff at the adult and children libraries in Orlik self-publish pamphlets on regional history from time to time. Orlik-based newspaper “AKHA” also has published several of these texts, but an account of reindeer domestication is not among them.

72 Petri’s emphasis on Soiot economical transitions must, perhaps, be understood in light of his reported adherence to 19th century cultural evolutionary thought (Sirina 1999:61).

73 This event is remembered locally, and it is mentioned in the literature. However, I have been unable to locate original documentation attesting to the extermination of kolkhoz reindeer in the archives of Irkutsk, Ulan-Ude, Kyren’, or Orlik. It has been suggested to me by archivists that the original documentation may have been lost or destroyed.
In a summary of his 1926 expedition to Oka, Petri (1927a) reports that only one group of Soiots was still actively engaged in herding reindeer. Among them the Badmaev household was collecting reindeer belonging to neighbouring households and taking them to high altitude pastures in the summer. This freed their owners to herd cattle at lower altitude (Petri 1927a:16). Cattle owners would still use their reindeer for transportation during autumn and winter hunts, but a division of labour was needed to accommodate the divergent needs of yak and reindeer in summer. According to Petri a shortage in marriageable women among the Irkit clan necessitated intermarriages with Buriats, which accelerated the transition to cattle breeding (Petri 1927a:19). By the 1920s the only group that was still predominantly herding reindeer consisted of eight households (*see Illustration 16*), numbering 28 individuals, 63 reindeer, 37 cattle, 23 horses, and nine dogs, all of whom were living around Lake Il’chir (Petri 1927a:14-15). Further north, on Khonchon and Khan-Modon rivers, two other groups were still in possession of reindeer. Here a total of 56 individuals were in possession of 32 reindeer (Petri 1927:14-15). Although avid fur hunters, they were also keeping 203 head of cattle (yaks and Mongolian cows) and 73 sheep and goats (Petri 1927a:14). The remaining Soiot groups had given up their reindeer for cattle, although they too continued hunting for furs in autumn and winter (Petri 1927:18). Taken together, 250 Soiots owned 124 reindeer, alongside 1,178 head of cattle74 in eight areas of Oka (Petri 1927a:15) during the time of Petri's expedition75.

Much like reindeer, yak herds roamed over extensive territory in herds of 30 to 100 during my fieldwork. Unlike yak and hybrids who mingled with Mongolian cows near the household, larger yak herds were not subject to the ways in which domestic cattle were held. They did not, for instance, use winter stables, neither were they accounted for in the summer hay harvest. Instead they grazed freely from valley to valley, taking advantage of the cooling

74There is a tendency in archived tables (such as Petri's and all later kolkhoz farm records) to list yak together with other cattle. Although it makes sense to count yak with other cattle in so far as they are often held together (hence producing hybrids), this kind of listing is disadvantageous to understanding the movement of large yak herds.

75The numbers Petri lists for Soiot households included data from households in Tunka valley and Mongolia, both of which I have omitted here for a tighter regional focus.
affect of snow patches at higher altitudes in summer, and passing by their owner's household only sporadically\textsuperscript{76}. They were driven into corrals only for mandatory inoculations, to have their owner's paint marks renewed, or to transition between summer and winter grazing areas. For the remainder of time they roamed freely, often lacking human supervision for extended periods. During these times, herders would ride out to them only for rough stock counts or to establish their general location. Even in winter, when forage was scratched from beneath soft layers of snow, yak maintained a high degree of autonomy\textsuperscript{77}. In June, herders move their yak to pastures at higher altitude. While reindeer were kept near camp during the calving period in late April and into May, yak at Uro preferred to give birth far away from human settlement. During the calving period they were highly protective of their young, often actively hiding their offspring from anyone's sight. Only later, when the mother felt her offspring was ready, would she approach the human household accompanied by her young. Much like reindeer, yak had been milked beginning with the calving season. Although in many ways yak paralleled the place reindeer had once held in the Soiot household, yak never met transportation needs. An age-old horse breeding tradition, and more recently motorization, had filled this gap.

To gain a better picture of what Soiot life might have looked like prior to the introduction of yak, I decided to visit Tofalariia in the autumn of 2014. Here I would be able to see the place of reindeer in contemporary Tofa society, alongside horses and some cattle, which here had been introduced by Russian settlers. The majority of contemporary Soiot reindeer, which I will discuss later in this chapter, had come from Tofalariia. Tofas who reside in Irkutskaia Oblast are the northern neighbours of Tozhu, Soiots, and Buriats. Many of their communities are connected by an extensive trail system that predates Soviet sedentarization. These cross-border trails are not used on a regular basis now, but stories of historical and even more recent visits

\textsuperscript{76} Uncle Borzhon's herding style, described in chapter three, was not representative of every Soiot household. His brother Baianbata—like many others—followed the herding style described here.

\textsuperscript{77} There are years of exception (e.g. the winter of 2012), when the snow cover froze to form an impenetrable crust. During this winter, herders had to feed hay to their yak. Due to limited hay production in the valleys, herders can lose large numbers of yak to starvation in this way. In 2012 the local administration subsidized imported emergency feed, yet a number of animals perished.
along these tracks abound. Denis, a Tofa hunter I met in Tofalariia recalled that, “a very long
time ago – maybe as long as 100 years ago - Tofa herders were keeping reindeer near Ia river.”
Here the grazing range overlapped with that of Soiot reindeer herders from Shasnur in northwest
Oka. What follows is a description of my encounters with Tofa reindeer herders and hunters.

**Tofa Reindeer in Gimadeev's Taiga**
Early in the evening when we arrived at Gimadeev’s hunting camp, which currently served as
reindeer camp, hunters Nikolai Semenovich Kangaraev (b. ca. 1965) and a younger hunter by
the name of Sania welcomed us. Both had come here in search of their transportation deer.
Nikolai had been looking above the tree line for several weeks now, and he was still short of
two castrates. In low brush on a slope near the edge of camp, six of his adult riding deer were
calmly resting next to three of Sania's. Each animal was tied down by a rope from its halter to
exposed roots of a tree, or to a loose tree trunk laying on the ground. This ensured a grazing
radius of 3-4 meters for each animal, and a distance of at least two meters between each animal.
On his morning and afternoon searches, Nikolai would encounter bulls and does belonging to
the collective herd, as well as yet uncaught castrates belonging to other hunters. When he
spotted a castrate with his initials 78 scissored into the pelt, or with one of his ear marks, Nikolai
would calmly walk 79 up to it with salt in his hand. Gently but firmly he would take hold of an
antler, tying a rope around its base. Together they would descend into the valley where the
animal would join the others beneath the trees. Once Nikolai had found all eight of his working
deer, he would walk them to Alygdzher for proper saddling and packing. Then he was going to
depart on them to his taiga for the winter hunt.

During our visit at Gimadeev's camp, every day multiple groups of five to ten reindeer
would come running onto the premises. Together they would lick salt and human urine from the

78 According to Vitka Lomov, one initial was given for the owner's first name, and one for his last name. A
patronymic was not used “because all hunters know each other.” Only in the case of doubles was a third letter
added.
79 Depending on the area and on personal preference, some hunters used horses to catch reindeer, while others
preferred to walk. Terrain above the treeline can be particularly treacherous for horses.
large boulders in front of Gimadeev's cabin, while large unruly bulls would chase the does around camp. Each time a group came in, the hunters would look up from their tasks, checking for new arrivals. Mother does and their offspring were marked in their fur with corresponding numbers, and if they had just arrived, their antlers had not been trimmed yet. On several occasions a doe and her two year old offspring had shown up without numbers. These were not 'wild' animals. They had simply opted not to return to human encampment for one or two whole years. Upon their return, their numbers were trimmed anew. Nikolai explained that when a doe had become sufficiently tired of the chasing game at camp, she would settle on a single bull. Allowing the bull to stay near her she would benefit from his protection against other pressing male suitors. In the bull's company, and together with her yearling, she would eventually leave camp for the winter. These small family units could then be seen grazing the banks of upper streams. For the remainder of the winter the free herd would roam the forest, staying together loosely.

Two or three years prior to our visit, pregnant does had been making their way to calving camp in late April and throughout May. This site was now in disuse, and come birthing time the does were on their own. All that was left of the site were a collapsed corral and several stakes for the tying down of does, less than a kilometer downstream from winter camp. Pregnant does would stand here in anticipation of bad weather\(^80\). During the birthing season herders tied down newborn animals during the day, releasing their mothers to graze. In the evening they would release the little ones and tie down their mothers. Mothers would not venture far from their little ones during the day, and their babies stayed near them throughout the night. This carried on also at summer camp (cf. Mel'nikova 1994:66-72). In autumn, when new offspring had grown in size, herders would reverse the process. The young would graze during the day, and with their mothers tied down at camp, they would return for milk in the evening. After activating a mother's lactation by nudging her teets, young reindeer were taken aside, and the herders would

\(^{80}\)Neither Nikolai nor the other hunters seemed to know why bad weather was preferential.
milk for their own needs. Up to 1.5 glasses (Rus. *stakan*) (200-300ml) of 17% milk could be collected per doe per day, if milked morning and evening. By mid-September production would slow down, and by mid-October it would run dry (cf. Mel'nikova 1994:70). Although Nikolai had recently milked a deer, the last time he had seen this done regularly was in 1982.

Illustration 17: Reindeer gathering at salt lick in Gimadeev’s Taiga. © 2014, K. Klokov

Early one evening, while chatting with several hunters inside Gimadeev’s cabin, we could see through the open door a number of does descending into camp. They were all carrying complete racks, indicating that this was one of their first visits to inspect the boulders for salt and urine. The men briefly looked at each other, got up, and grabbing rope and saw approached the does. With their bare hands, Denis and Sania caught two of the does by their antlers. Tying a rope around head and antler base to form a halter, they walked each doe to a nearby tree. While Denis held the animal tightly against the stem of the tree, Sania sawed through the bone material, trimming right and left antlers consecutively. To keep the area uncluttered, clipped tines were immediately thrown into the stream behind our camp, where countless antler pieces

81We had been instructed never to catch a reindeer by its antlers.
from previous seasons were piling up under the rushing waters. Unlike the does, who had lost most of their velvet already, the working castrates were not yet shedding their antler velvet. To prevent infection, the hunters would not trim their antlers until shedding had set in, which would occur only with a further drop in temperature.

**Rounding-up and Grazing Castrates**

According to Vitka Lomov, the kolkhoz had given working animals identification numbers, which the animals retained for life. Presently numbers were given only to animals belonging to the collectively held reproductive herd (Rus. *matochnaia stada*), and hunters like Nikolai identified and named their castrates on the basis of primary coat color, pace, gait, personality, or other unique features. During kolkhoz times, the chief herder (Rus. *glavniy pastukh*) would lend reindeer to hunters in autumn. Larger animals were allocated to hunters whose taiga was further afield, smaller ones to those with hunting grounds close by, and elders had received particularly calm animals. At present draught animals were owned by families, and they were passed on from generation to generation. But temporary exchanges of castrates between hunters could still occur from time to time, and different animals were still being used to access different hunting territories. Hunters with access to grounds in less mountainous areas rode their horses, and increasingly snowmobiles, while those hunting in steep terrain continued to rely on reindeer. During our visit, the names of only 28 hunters had been entered into the 'owner's log' at the reindeer camp. Several others may still have been on their way to camp, but the majority of the remaining 70 hunters or so from the village were using their horses and other means of transportation.

At camp, Nikolai and Sania were taking turns locating and pasturing each other's animals. One morning, after Sania had departed into the hills, Nikolai invited Konstantin and

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82The estimate of 100 active hunters at Alygdzher is based on accounts of local hunters I spoke with in September 2014. A state subsidized helicopter service dispatching hunters to remote taigas was also active. However, even where this service was used, hunters tended to move reindeer, dogs, and supplies to their camps prior to boarding the scheduled flight.
myself to join him on a grazing walk (Rus. *vypas*). We walked over to the hillside where their 
caught castrates had been dozing in the morning sun. After Nikolai had untied the first deer 
from the roots of a nearby tree, we loosed another one and tied his halter rope to the antler base 
of the first. One by one we released all the remaining deer, tying them to each other in alternate 
order (right, left, right). This was also the sequence in which they would travel together over 
longer distances in the winter, with Nikolai leading the way as he held the halter rope of the 
lead reindeer (cf. Pomishin 1971:129). After walking the caravan straight uphill for some 15 
minutes, we found an area with good lichen. With the lead deer tied to a tree, Nikolai began 
untying the caravan; this time starting with the last animal in line. In releasing each animal, 
Nikolai would raise the left front leg, while lowering the animal’s head to wind the halter 
rope around the leg. The remainder of the rope was then tied around the left rear leg with a ‘Tofa’ 
knot. Soon all nine deer were calmly grazing, moving down hill at a relaxed pace for a period 
of about two and a half hours. As the deer satiated, they lay down in soft moss. Once all deer 
had lain down, Nikolai began gathering them again. After we had tied them up as previously, 
we walked the caravan back to camp.

**Evolving Herd Dynamics**

Tofa herding history is marked by many fluctuations in distance between reindeer and people. 
If it had been typical for south Siberian hunter-herders to own herds of 15 to 80 reindeer before 
the revolution (cf. Grøn 2011:79; Turov 2010; Shirokogoroff 1929), then such relatively smaller 
herds would have largely followed their owners’ hunting activities. In fact, Denis (b. ca. 1980) 
was of the conviction that his ancestors had never set up camp in the same place. Even their 
hunting cabins (Rus. *izbushki*) had never been kept for long periods, as they had preferred to

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83 According to Soiot hunters, the dual-track trail pattern that is produced in the soft taiga ground from repeated migrations of caravans tied together in this manner remains visible in historic reindeer grazing areas of alpine and subalpine Oka.

84 According to Nikolai, it did not matter on which side of the deer the tying occurred. In winter the front leg was not included to allow for better scraping, and sides could also be switched periodically to prevent friction.

85 Although we were watching nine deer, the optimal number for one person to oversee— according to Nikolai— is five to eight. Anything beyond that is difficult to keep track of because of the broad radius over which the animals fan out.
build new ones regularly. But with sedentarization into settlements at lower altitude in the late 1920s, and following Tofa collectivization in 1930 (Mel'nikova 1994:222-225), geographic distance between people and reindeer became inevitable. The small herds of hunters who had been moved to Alygdzher were joined into a large state owned herd with the intention to significantly increase their head count, albeit at a distance from the settlement. This distancing increasingly led to an alienation of the common householder from the lives of reindeer in the taiga, and herding itself became the task of a small group of specialists, the majority of whom were men. A similar development took place in neighbouring Tozhu, Dukha, and Soiot kolkhoz herding contexts (Donahoe 2004; Endres 2014; Pavlinskaia 2002), where a breakdown of family involvement with herds resulted. But sedentarization and collectivization also affected herd-size dynamics and new forms of separation within herds.

Although the herd was kept far from the settlement, even during the kolkhoz years reindeer had been a common sight in the village. This was still the case when we visited: In autumn and spring, when hunters departed and returned from the taiga, their teams of 8 to 12 deer would stand tied down by their owners' houses, awaiting supplies to be packed or unpacked. But these points of contact with the settlement were only of brief duration, and they were still dominated by men who were primarily engaged in hunting and trapping activities. Moreover, contact of reindeer with the settlement was purposefully kept short. As Vitka recalled, the elders had claimed that working reindeer were prone to contracting hoof disease while mingling in the village. To prevent the disease from spreading throughout the herd, the animals were divided into reproductive herd (Ru- *matochnaia stada*) and working herd (Rus. *rabochaia stada*). Being kept separately, both herds were near equal in size. Another reason for the separation had been that the working animals were known to lack a sense of protection for little ones when running from wolves. And because of their sheer size they were quick to trample the young ones. But,

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86Only later allowance for an unknown number of privately held reindeer was introduced (Mel'nikova 1994:232, 233)
added Vitka, “this is what the elders thought. Now they all mingle.”

According to Denis and Vitka, reindeer presently moved back and forth between winter and summer camps, following memorized routes. By late June, and all throughout July, they were “moving themselves,” or “following the herder with their young ones,” as they ventured to feeding grounds at higher altitude. The routes by which the herd frequented between winter and summer grounds had been altered periodically over the years to ensure the regrowth of lichen and other foliage. These planned route moves had left a series of abandoned winter, spring, and summer camp sites in the landscape. A few hundred meters upstream from the winter camp we visited were overgrown remains of a former winter camp. What was left consisted of a collapsed corral that, according to the hunters, had been used around the time of the Second World War, or earlier. The summer camp that was in use at the time of our visit had not changed its location in several years. Mel'nikova (1994:66) describes summer pasture fence and corral structures that had been in use at various locations in the 1980s. But none of these
were used at summer or winter camps now. Only the use of salt and urine was common now to attract the animals to the camp site for protection from lynx, wolves, and other predators, and to keep them attuned to human presence.

Although Denis believed that the reproductive rate of the herd had gone down since the working herd had amalgamated with the reproductive herd, he also thought that the herd's poor growth was in part due to wolf predation. There had been an increase in wolves, since the last reserves of wolf poison from the kolkhoz were used up. According to Nikolai, wolves were occasionally trapped in wire snares set up for musk deer, but there was no systematic hunting for them now. Although the herds at Gutara and Alygdzher had been large in the 1990s, their current state was at a long-time low. In fact, 300 head was so small a number that Denis thought it was not worth mentioning that Tofalars were herding reindeer at all. But according to Vitka, the herd was not significantly in decline. In not growing much it had merely reached a kind of level point. He recalled that there had recently been an illness, but no one could figure out what it had been. After all, “the local veterinarian couldn't care less, (Rus. emu vse ravno) he is not payed for reindeer inspections.” The maintenance of a quasi-Soviet model of reindeer herding, coupled with a chronic lack of funds to make it work well, had resulted in a herd that mingled and roamed more liberally than it ever had previously.

Overall, this laissez-faire approach was characterized by a de-emphasis on the use of material constrictions, such as corrals, fences, and tie-downs, and a greater emphasis on invitational measures, such as salt feedings, smudge fires, and sun shades. The latter were roof structures set up at summer camp to provide shelter from the beating sun. Smudges were positioned in relation to changing wind direction. Vitka explained how summer morning winds blew from the bottom of valleys to the top of mountains, continuing thus for most of the day. By evening the wind direction would usually reverse, blowing from the top of mountains into

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87Vitka recalled that in the 1970s the herd had shrunk to 500 head because of hoof disease. By 1980 it had grown to 1000 head again. Then in the 1990s the number fell in response to privatization, but grew again by the late 1990s.
valleys. And whenever weather was changing, the wind direction would fluctuate continuously. To make a good smudge, Vitka would set alight a pile of dry wood, upon which he tossed moss, fresh cedar, or rotten wood. Thick smoke would then rise into the prevailing wind, protecting the deer from insects - particularly the much dreaded 'deer horsefly' (Rus. *paut*, or *olenii slepen*'). At camp herders would pet the newborn reindeer to accustom them to human scent, and by mid-August the herd would begin to descend in the direction of winter camp.

According to Vitka, up until ten years ago, the reindeer had been kept at winter camp much later. Depending on snow fall, they had been released to graze freely beginning only in October or November. Snow was needed to track them more easily throughout the winter. Today no one tracked herd animals over the winter. Then and now, the herd would move between the upper reaches of two or three creeks during the early winter, and it was best to leave them to themselves, abstaining from any kind of intensive herding during this time. If they were moved around too much they would become nervous. Yet there were always some reindeer who preferred proximity to the camp, even during the winter. “We call them *tabornyye,*” ('camp buddies'), said Vitka. Usually these were animals who had lost their mothers early on, or young ones who had grown up alongside orphaned mothers. Such animals remained closely attuned to the camp by way of their mothers' ties. In the past, more than now, deer had been lured or driven to camp periodically throughout the free grazing period following the October release, while the *tabornyye* animals would just stay nearby. Head counts of reproductive units (Rus. *tabuny*) had been performed inside a corral. At present no one was available to do this job and thus there was no corral.

**Domestic Reindeer in Sorok Somon**

One afternoon, not too long after my arrival in the field, I was sitting in the kitchen of Borzhon's winter home in Uro. His daughter in law, Norzhima, had handed me a family photo album to look at. Leafing through pictures of past hay harvests, a photograph of grazing reindeer showed up. They were grazing among Mongolian cows and yaks in Uro. I had to look twice to make
sure it really was Uro. In the picture the deer had spread out among the winter residences of the valley, and in another picture a young deer was vigorously licking the glass of the kitchen window behind which I was sitting. Its bulging eyes were staring at the old wooden table on which lay the photographs I was mustering. I turned my head to look out the window – there were no deer now. Where had they gone? Many more pictures followed. In one of them, members of an Uro household were saddling a deer in preparation of a multi-day hunt. Each image, as I held it in my hands, triggered cherished memories for Borzhon’s adoptive son, Regbi, his wife, Norzhima, and their older son, Buian – all of whom were now flocking around me, commenting on the photos. I had never seen a living reindeer at Uro.

Rumours of a reindeer herders’ journal had reached me early on in the field.88 The jottings were said to have been made by a group of herders, charged with looking after a newly introduced domestic herd from Tofalariia in the mid 1990s.89 No one had herded reindeer in thirty years, and the sight of domestic reindeer in Oka had been a cause for celebration. After searching for months, a tattered notebook of handwritten notes emerged from the home of an elder in the village of Sorok: It was the sought-after reindeer herders’ journal. After working through reams of Soviet agricultural records in the archives, in the attempt to learn about people and reindeer since the 1920s, these deeply personal and often humorous notes from the 1990s were more than refreshing. Although written in Russian and not in Buriat, it seemed that they had been made for personal recollection.90 From an anthropological perspective, the text is of interest because it is a witness to the laborious process of relearning an affordance-perspective – a view of the landscape that had had deep roots in the families of several of its young authors.

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88Parts of this section of the chapter were submitted for publication to the 2014 Samaev Readings conference (Ulan-Ude, 17-18 July) as a chapter entitled, “‘Soiots should probably have some reindeer’: The Oka-Soiot herders’ diaries, 1995-1997.”
89In 1994 the Soiot Village Advisory (Rus. Soiotskii sel’soviet) and its kolkhoz, “50 let Oktiabria,” purchased 60 head of reindeer from the Buriat District Directory “Baikal” (Rus. BRO “Baikal”), representing the Tofa koopzverpromkhоз at Nizhniudinsk in Irkutsk oblast (АМО 38-1-176: 2). The transaction occurred as part of the “Oka project for protecting the genetic base of disappearing animals,” and it involved the movement of 45 does, 7 males, and 8 trained riding reindeer (АМО 38-1-176: 5).
90When I asked the wife of the hunter, who had been keeping the hunting notes of which the reindeer herding diary was a part, whether they had been written in Russian, she replied, “Of course they are! What other language would he have used? Russian is what he learned in school.”
Following collectivization of the 1930s, the new kolkhoz system had maintained several reindeer herds as a means of transportation for their autumn and winter hunting brigades, much like the kolkhozes in Tofalarriia. Archival records show that only 16 years after Petri’s expedition (in 1942), nine kolkhozes in Oka were herding as many as 543 reindeer (AAMO 11-1-149: 1-3; AAMO 11-1-305: 1), a number that far exceeds the 124 reindeer Petri had recorded in 1926. But after a final peak in 1952, these herds were in gradual decline, and following an official directive from Ulan-Ude, the last two surviving herds were slaughtered for meat in 1963 (cf. Rassadin 1999:17-19; Pavlinskaia 2002:98). Elder Volodia, a distant relative of Iumzhap's clan, who had learned reindeer herding from the chief herder at kolkhoz KIM (Kommunisticheskii internatsional molodezhi) near Shasnur, remembered watching the killings as a teenager:

Standing on the side of the gun fire, he saw vast numbers of reindeer antlers rushing toward him. Bullets were being fired into the herd until the last animal had been killed. Several of my Soiot friends recalled the day several of their now passed elder acquaintances had been called to assist in this liquidation. My friends looked back to these events with great disapproval.

**Reindeer as Recurring Soiot Symbol**

The reintroduction of domestic reindeer to Oka must be understood in the wider context of a movement of national revitalization among Soiot descendants, which was gaining momentum toward the turn of the millennium (cf. Pavlinskaia 2002:65, 98). In 1993, as described in the introduction, a group of Soiots had formed their own association, numbering 812 members. And in the following year the village of Sorok was made regional centre for the newly recognized “Soiot National Somon” – a Soiot traditional land use area within the larger Oka

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91 As late as 1956, the Oka Aimsoviet instructed the regional “Zagotkontora” (hunting department) to “commit the direction of Ulan-Mal'chin and the Komintern kolkhozes to enlarge the number of [their] reindeer, and to increase the income made from reindeer herding by providing transportation services to hunters of other kolkhozes.” These two collective farms were the last to have any reindeer (334, combined) (AAMO 1935-1956 11-1-149; AAMO 1953-1960 11-1-305). It follows that while reindeer were being killed in some kolkhozes, other kolkhozes were encouraged to increase their numbers until 1963, when all herding activities were suspended.

92 Volodia also recalled: “Later, in 1963 or so, helicopters were used to hunt wild reindeer.” He remembered there being a great number of wild reindeer in those days, and Kooopzverpromkhoz had decided to slaughter them also, resulting in two largely contemporaneous but distinct efforts of reducing or eliminating reindeer in Oka.
region. In 1995 census data showed that 1,973 individuals had chosen to identify as Soiot, and by the year 2000 Soiots achieved status as a Small Numbered People of the Russian Federation (Pavlinskaia 2002:65). These developments were paralleled by the desire to reestablish two of the most enduring symbols of the Soiot way of life: hunting and reindeer herding, and speaking the ancestral Soiot language (Rassadin 2010:9). The language was not offered in primary school until 2005, but in 1994 the administration in Orlik purchased a herd of 60 reindeer from Tofalariia on behalf of the Sorok kolkhoz (AAMO 1994 38-1-304).

The desire for official recognition as a distinct indigenous people has long stood in connection with attempts of maintaining reindeer herding as a subsistence practice. In 1930, an Oka-Soiot delegation was sent to Irkutsk to complain about having been prevented from purchasing and transferring a herd of reindeer from Tozhu herders to Oka (Pavlinskaia 2002:61-62). The purchase had likely been intended to relieve the recent demise of their herds (Petri 1927:16-17). Judging from archival materials, Soiots had considered it a basic right to decide about their own economic future, especially after receiving initial recognition as a “Small Numbered People of the North” by the Northern Committee (Pavlinskaia 2002:61-62). The 1994 purchase of reindeer from Tofalariia is symbolic in more than one way: The arrival of a Tofa herd not only strengthened a newfound sense of Soiot identity; it also marked the triumph of a long-sought affirmation of economic self-reliance. The new herd had brought full circle a previous attempt - one that had been on hold for 64 years. Although the attempted purchase in 1930 had likely been aimed at maintaining an important Soiot subsistence strategy, the 1994 purchase primarily served a symbolic statement of indigenous independence, whether or not reindeer herding was ever to be revived as a way of life.93


Grandfather, Dondokov Tsyren-Dorzho (b. 1947), one of my key interlocutors, had joined the

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93 The purchase was officially conducted under the auspices of the “Oka Project for the Preservation of the Gene Pool of Endangered Animals” (Ru- Okinskii proekt sokhrnenii genofonda izchezaiushikh zhivotnykh) (AAMO 38-1-176:5), while unofficially it was a matter of affirming cultural distinction among Buriats.
Oka delegation to Tofalaria, and he vividly recalled how together they had driven the acquired herd from Alygder (and initially Alkhadyr mountain) to Saiany in October of 1994. The team had arrived at Saiany on 1. November, where they loaded the animals onto two Ural trucks. From here they were transported to Sorok, and then they were driven on foot to the winter pasture at Uro. The herders at Uro established a camp on Iakhoshop, which served as their base for the next three years. In the first summer the herd moved to a camp on Khonchin river, but the reindeer refused to stay and returned to their winter camp on Iakhoshop. The following two years the herders kept the animals at the Iakhoshop in winter and summer. Iumzhap (b. 1974), who was herding in those days, remembered how in spite of losses to wolves, the herd had grown from 60 to over 80 head. His elder brother, Baatar (b. 1970), recalled how in those days the herd was owned by a stock company (Ru-aktionernoe obschestvo) that had been established at Orlik. An archival document (AAMO 1995 38-1-176:7) attests to the early brigade’s expenses, which included salt, hay, fuel, and building supplies for the hut on the Iakhoshop.

In spite of the herders' intimate knowledge of the terrain, places they had hunted in since their youth, they had to learn to look at it from the viewpoint of domestic reindeer. As in von Uexküll's (1957[1934]) *Umwelten*, which describe the world of an organism in relation to its perceptive capacity, the familiar taiga of Soiot yak herders had become to an extent a new kind of *Umwelt* with the arrival of reindeer. Although the herders were deeply familiar with the preferences of domestic livestock in similar terrain, they had to realize that reindeer possessed their own way of moving here. This way was much closer to the wild reindeer whom several of the herders had been hunting in these regions. Describing a particularly frustrating time during the first summer, one entry in the journal reads: “It took three days to drive the herd from the peaks [...]. In hot weather reindeer turn out to be restless animals. They need to go to the very peak” (RHJ 4 Aug 1995). “Restlessness,” and needing to “go to the very peak” were indicators of otherness, characteristics that set these animals apart from more familiar stock. Yak, who also seek the cool of higher altitude in summer, rarely insist on climbing to the peaks. But the reindeer were straining for grassless lichen-covered rocky patches forming exposed plateaus high above the valleys.

Perhaps the most significant difference between reindeer and more familiar domestic animals was the herd's habit of straying much further from human encampment than did cattle. Iumzhap, who had been among the first reindeer herders from Uro in the 1990s (b. 1974) recalled: “It’s not like keeping cows. [Reindeer] are quite the beasts (Rus. *zveri*) after all. You had to get them back from the mountains, and often you’d spend the whole day walking after them.” In relation to this memory, he referred to reindeer as 'semi-wild' (Rus. *polu-dikie*). While many Soiot households would drive their livestock from winter camp to summer camp in early June, and back again in late August, reindeer would decide for themselves when, where, and for how long to be in a place, upsetting migratory plans laid out for them by their herders. It was therefore inherently troublesome to plan routes that would intersect predictably with those of cattle for the purpose of distributing labour to the various herds that were being held
simultaneously. With only a small number of cows and no yak herds at all, this challenge did not exist for neighbouring Tofa herders.

Another likely reason for initial difficulties experienced by the brigade was that the herd had not yet been habituated to annual migration routes. There was no memory of grooved routes to draw on for lead animals. Entered into a new place with herders, several of whom had never herded reindeer, the deer needed time to orient themselves within the landscape, as much as their herders had to learn to read the hills for vegetation inviting to reindeer. In their 1995-2005 Plan for Reindeer Herding (AAMO 1995, 38-1-183: 3-4), head of agricultural department of Oka, Nakhantsakov, and kolkhoz representative, Putunkeev refer to this process as 'acclimatization' – however, only in reference to the deer, a process the duration of which they found difficult to estimate. The herders' journal attests to this acclimatization challenge: Attempting to draw the herd back to camp by lighting fires at night to provide safety against wolves (RHJ 11 Mar 1995), it took two whole days before reindeer bells were heard again, this time amidst constant barking of the camp dogs [signaling the presence of wolves]. Shots were fired to scare off the wolves (RHJ 13 Mar 1995), and when the herd finally did return, the men decided to drive them to Doshpok river. But upon arrival they found poor feeding conditions, and the herd refused to stay. In the middle of the night the animals left camp and returned to the previous location (RHJ 14 Apr 1995). The herd had rejected the herder's route and new location.

A related challenge was the growing size of the herd. With an increase of at least 17 head since their arrival, they had reached the limit of what Tozhu neighbours would have considered 'manageable' (cf. Stepanoff 2012:306). In early September of 1995, the brigade tried to drive the herd to a former winter camp near Belaia river. By 4 October so many reindeer had returned to the previous location on the Daialok that, after a month of coaxing, the herders gave up and set up winter camp on the Iakhshop once again, and it seemed the herd had developed some familiarity with this location from the previous year (RHJ 9 Sep 1995). This struggle of intentions between herders and herd speaks to the learning curve in becoming attuned to the
ways in which reindeer recognize affordances. But at the same time it also attests to the ability of reindeer to resist human intentions and to follow their own leaders. Presumably, the skill of working with lead animals had yet to be honed. Yet, even in a place where such expertise is still practiced, Denis our Tofa guide from Alygdzher once said to me: “Reindeer are the dumbest animals I have ever seen. They get it into their heads to graze in a particular place, and that is where they will go, no matter what.” In either case, at 80 head, it was a challenge for men and deer to become acclimatized to each other and to new land.

**The Saiany Demise and a New Start on the Onot (1999-2013)**

Because of concerns about the slow growth rate of the herd, its frequent illnesses, and heavy wolf predation on the Iakhoshop, it was decided for the herd to be transferred to the care of Dasha Dorzhievich Dambaev (b. 1952) near the settlement of Saiany. In 1999 Russian anthropologist L. Pavlinskaia visited the herd at Saiany, and looking back to the first five years of herding, she offers several criticisms based on the general loss of traditional knowledge she had observed (2002:98-99). The herd had grown by only 16 head since its arrival in Oka, although it had produced 30 to 40 offspring every year (Pavlinskaia 2002:98-99), although Iumzhap remembered it to have 20 head. For Pavlinskaia this was evidence that the herders had been ill prepared for predators and disease. She found that they did not apply the same care for reindeer as they did for other livestock, and that they did not understand the need for reindeer to be tamed and attuned to their owners and winter camps. She notes that herders were not providing protective structures, such as sun roofs, fences, and smudges. Although these criticisms may have rung true for the state of affairs at Saiany, the journal – as we have seen – contains evidence to the contrary. Although Pavlinskaia expressed hope for the herd to finally flourish at Saiany, my interlocutors remembered that only 12 animals survived there by 2001 – one year after Pavlinskaia's visit.94

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94Anonymous former herders expressed suspicion that at Saiany reindeer had not only fallen prey to wolves, but that because of a lack of management, they had mingled extensively with wild reindeer. They were also suspecting that several animals had been sold for meat.
The survivors, including a single bull, were brought back to Uro in hopes that under new stewardship it would be possible to rebuild a herd once more in Sorok somon. During the first year Iumzhap and his wife Tserigma took the deer to their summer pasture on upper Sorok river. And from 2002 to 2003 brothers Baatar, Iumzhap, and Tsydyp (my host) and their families began rotating herding responsibilities at a dedicated summer camp they had built specifically for the herd on upper Urda-Uro creek, a two hour hike east of Uro. Every night the deer would return from the Iakhoshpskie Gol'tsy – a range well familiar to them from the 1990s - to their fenced encampment in the valley. But in spite of these precautions, cattle borne disease and wolf attacks were ravaging the herd, reducing it to a size of 20 head. In 2004 Iumzhap's older brother, Baatar, decided to move the now 32-head strong herd back and forth between Urda-Uro (summers) and Onot river valley (winters) - an annual trek of approximately 360 kilometers. The snow on the Onot would at least protect them from wolves.

Between 2001 and 2010, as my friend Iumzhap recalled, herders and reindeer had no dedicated winter camp. For several years he and his older brother Baatar would follow the herd
through the taiga each winter. On occasion they would come by their winter residences at Uro before the deer would head into the eastern side of the Sorokskii Khrebet. The brothers had to hunt on foot and sometimes on horseback, because all riding reindeer had been lost at Saiany. Then in 2004, Baatar and his helpers were finally able to break in the first 3-year-old castrates, which had been born on Urda-Uro creek in 2001. These newly trained deer made it possible for Baatar to begin migrating the herd annually. During this time (in 2005) the herd grew to 41 head, and it was decided to sell 19 of them for meat to Irkutsk. Again the brothers were working with only 22 reindeer.

Two years later (2007 and 2008), the most difficult period in recent herding ensued: Newborn and mature reindeer alike were dying from wolf attacks, and from what seemed to Baatar to be an infectious disease (e.g. Bacilær hemoglobinuri) contracted during summers spent among cattle and sheep at Uro. To avoid contact with Uro cattle, he moved the herd near his own summer pasture on Tustuk river in 2009. And when the herd was transferred to the ownership of the Sorok village council in the following year, Baatar decided to keep the herd on the Onot river year round. Since 2010 there has been no illness, and thanks to the high alpine environment, the reindeer benefitted from deeper snow levels, greatly reducing wolf predation.

Loss and Reacquisition of Herding Knowledge
The argument that Soiot herding knowledge was lost in much the same way as, and perhaps in connection with, ancestral language is plausible but not incontestable. In 1926 Petri encountered elders with a living knowledge of the Soiot language (1927:19), and as late as 1953 there circulated reports of passive knowledge among several elders (Rassadin 2012:3). Gathering data in the 1970s for his dictionary (2003) and grammar (2012), linguist V. I. Rassadin collected material from elders born before 1917 (2012:9) to record terms relating to a past way of life. Although taught in school since 2005 (V.I. Rassadin 2010:9), Soiot is no longer spoken in the home, and the long absence of reindeer from Oka (1963-1994) does suggest a break in intergenerational knowledge transfer (e.g., Pavlinskaia 2002:98). Nonetheless, historian Igor V.
Rassadin (2012:217) was able to reconstruct traditional Soiot herding practices from interviews with former reindeer herders and their descendants, finding close resemblance with Tozhu, Tofa, Dukha, and Darkhad herding practices. In spite of the linguistic break and long absence of reindeer, not all herding knowledge had been lost. Several elders I spoke with had vivid childhood memories of women milking reindeer. In the mid-1990s Maria Manzaraksheevna Sharaeva (b. 1937), for instance, taught her young adult sons the herding skills she had gleaned from her father who had herded kolkhoz-owned reindeer near the settlement of Saiany when she was a schoolgirl.

One of the chief reasons for the failure of a broader adoption of reindeer herding among Soiots of the 21st century may have been the difficulty involved in switching back and forth between reindeer and yak/cattle affordance niches. Accommodating each species' habituated migratory pattern, seasonal elevation preference, and type and speed of movement across the landscape, had been the initial cause for Soiot households to become specialized around the turn of the century (Petri 1927). With special herding brigades formed under the kolkhoz, it was possible to perpetuate—even intensify—a simplified form of reindeer herding, focused on the transportation of hunting brigades, as well as servicing local geological expeditions. I. V. Rassadin (2000:139) reports a similar simplification in reindeer herding techniques in Tofa kolkhozes: Remodeling traditional herds into purely transportation-oriented herds resulted in the decline of traditional meat and milk production, primarily as the result of a reduction in the size of brood stock herds. But after privatization, former Kolkhoz stock became the property of individual households, and reintroducing reindeer to households whose work force was now invested in privately held yak and other cattle, inevitably called for the redistribution of an already limited labour capacity, and therefore in a shortage of working hands, especially during cattle migration and hay harvesting times - just as had been the case prior to Soviet collectivization.95

95Quite another problem may have been the fact that brigade members did not hold personal stock in the herd, a
Conclusion
The literature on the Saians has had an emphasis on reindeer herding, while lacking in appropriate focus on other species within or near the household (cf. Rassadin 2000:35). To contrast this trend, the observations made in this chapter sought to present Soiots and Tofa households in light of the multiplicity of species found in them, and in which the importance of reindeer has fluctuated over time. The flux of a species’ importance stood in relation to herding and equine practices that have influenced local alpine and subalpine animal husbandry for centuries. Thus, the reindeer-yak transition experienced by Soiots of the early 20th century was presented not as a unique development, but rather as in line with previous shifts in species-emphasis in the occupation of humans and animals in southern Siberia. To this day, material implements developed in connection to one species could be applied to another as emphases shifted. In the case of Tofas this was evident in the continued use of Oka-style horse saddles for reindeer (Rassadin 2000:60). But this chapter was also concerned with some of the limitations of transferring practices and skills between species. Soiots of the 1990s had to relearn a reindeer perspective of the landscape. The divergence in perspectives between species had made it difficult for Soiots to integrate reindeer with dairy cattle, yak, horses, and other species. Yak herders had little patience for locating reindeer in the landscape, and for the relative unpredictability of their herd movement. Herds that had not yet settled on annual migration routes would frustrate the plans of herders who had to divide their time between reindeer at higher altitude, cattle at intermediate altitude, and an inflexible yearly hay harvest at valley floor level.

Where herders were skilled, and reindeer well attuned to human demands and annual routes, the ways in which each related to the other fluctuated with changes in herding style. The recent transition in Tofalariia from a more constrictive to a more invitational style of herding has arguably resulted in greater reindeer autonomy. Meanwhile, present-day Soiot herding problem that was common also during Soviet times in eastern Tyva and Tofalariia (e.g., Donahoe 2003).
maintained a more constrictive style involving corrals, tie downs, and since 2004 a confined valley range. While the 300-head strong Tofa herd seemed to have evolved into a loosely organized community enterprise—albeit one serving the pivotal annual purpose of transporting hunters to their taigas—the Soiot herd was a village council-owned and family-run affair of no more than 80 animals used as a non-essential means of transportation for the hunt in non-inherited and far removed taigas. Although both Tofa and Soiot herds served symbolic purposes, only Tofa truly depended on their deer. Looking back to history, it seems that the importance of reindeer has fluctuated as much as have the cultural influences within the region. In the words of Tofa hunter Denis from Alygdzher: “They say, ’as long as the reindeer live, Tofa[lars] are alive,’ but I think that pretty soon Russians are going to run the herd.” Not so because Russians have suddenly developed an interest in reindeer, but because, “Tofa blood does not fight with Russian blood. When there is an intermarriage, the kids always look Russian.” Denis thought of himself as a “russified” (Rus. obrusilsia) Tofa, or, as he would like to say: “We are all Metis” (Rus. my vse metisy). Coming from a tradition that values selective breeding for particular attributes in reindeer, such as the famed height of the Karagass breed, Denis was drawing a parallel between the deer and his people. He seemed to indicate that some form of reindeer herding would always persist, even if the outward appearance of the people herding the deer, and the practices involved, were changing over time.
PART III MATERIALITY: IMPLEMENTS AND STRUCTURES

AS COMMUNICATIVE DEVICES
Chapter Seven: Horses

Introduction: A Perfect Horse for the Saian

17 September 2014. We packed our bags early in the morning, balancing them on our two pack horses. Denis and Alesha, our guides, saddled our six riding horses, and after each of us mounted our own horse, we quietly rode off into the taiga. Denis led our caravan, and Alesha rode behind. The sun was rising bright and clear, and its warm rays were sparkling through a thick canopy of golden leaves lining the winding shores of Uda river. Riding behind Denis, I could hear the even pace of our horses. Their hooves were treading sandy forest floor, then loose rocks, swamp, rushing waters, and sandy floor again. Every now and then I had to glance over my shoulder to check on our caravan, making sure all were there, the chainsaw was still in place, and no bags had come loose. Unlike any hunter I have ever met, Denis talked ceaselessly all day. Only when the wind and rushing waters were drowning out his speech, would he switch to singing. Singing and riding in the taiga went hand in hand for him. His uncle had forced him to sing as a child, a traumatic memory for Denis, because as a child he tired of it. But he had to thank his uncle for teaching him to be a hunter, and now that he was an adult with his own wife and children, Denis could sing for as long as he could talk. Knowing that I had lived with Soiots of Oka, he though to ask me about their horses. How did they compare to Tofa horses? Did they handle as well as his in this mountainous terrain? And how many horses did they keep on hand in summer? He had many questions. But as time passed, I realized that most of his inquiries were merely rhetorical. Denis's mind was made up on horses: no horse came close in skill or build to a Tofa horse.

Denis was not happy when he found out that my Soiot friends were convinced their horses were superior to the Tofa breed. How could I have been misled to believe them? Compelled to convert me, Denis took every opportunity to point out how well his horses were handling the terrain. Each time we tackled a river crossing, a steep wooded incline, or a deep frost covered bog, he would ask me to compare his horses with the ones I had ridden in Oka.
There was little use in trying to explain to him that I had not meant to offend him, and that I was not trying to establish who had the better horses. In Oka most horses had already been let go for the winter. Denis had kept his horses near the house for our visit, and for a final move of cargo to his hunting camp later in the month. Once these tasks were accomplished, he would release his horses too. I told Denis how in summer Soiot herders used their horses to wrangle yak and cows, and how in autumn they would take them hunting in less demanding terrain, only to release them later for the winter. In Tofalarriia, he told me, people still relied on a good winter's hunt in steep terrain. Only reindeer could navigate these locations. Now was the time people were transitioning from their horses to their reindeer. I was here to witness this seasonal switch. But with near equal periods of time left to themselves, how distinct were human-horse relations from human-reindeer relations? And did their interchangeability lead to any conclusions regarding their 'wildness' or their 'tameness'? In either case, Denis felt strongly about his horses. They were not an afterthought introduced merely to bridge the time while reindeer were unavailable.
This chapter focuses on material implements as communicative devices between horses and humans. It illustrates how the meaning of lassos, ropes, and hobbles changes over the course of a horse's life by describing an annual round-up, horse roping techniques, and re-shoeing of a mature gelding. In so doing, this chapter touches on two other related subjects: Firstly, I attempt to show that the role of the horse in the domus of the Eastern Saians must be understood in the context of a shared history with hunting and with reindeer herding. While horses and reindeer are recognized for their divergent qualities, they have both been used extensively for transportation purposes, albeit at different times of year and for different kinds of terrain. In the Saians, where the Karagass breed of reindeer reaches exceptional shoulder height, horse and reindeer saddles are somewhat interchangeable. This sharing of material implements between species is indicative of an overlap of cultural traditions that has increased hunters' flexibility in the landscape. Secondly, I argue that features associated with 'wildness' in animals, and which are conventionally sought to be bred out of 'domesticates,' can also be seen as desirable features. In the case of stallions, for instance, this occurrence inverts the notion of tameness as a foundational feature for domestication. Consequently, 'domestic' traits are not always a matter of wild or tame. Instead, domestication must be understood in terms of a negotiation or management of human and animal intentions some of which must remain unruly. However, as familiarity grows between owners and their horses, the implements that bring them together become ever more nuanced communicative devices.

The 'Wildness' of 'Domestic' Horses
As discussed in the previous chapter, reindeer of the spirit-mastered household and reindeer of the human-mastered household move in the same landscape. Although no longer the case today, a similar scenario would once have applied to horses of central and northern Mongolia, and possibly southern Siberia. Natasha Fijn (2015) has written about the reintroduced takhi, or Przewalski wild horse, as it can be seen roaming Khustai Nuruu National Park in Mongolia.
Fijn contrasts the takhi with contemporary Mongolian domesticated horses, citing recent genetic research (Myka et al., 2003; Vila et al., 2001) which suggests “substantial overlap in terms of their mitochondrial DNA, or the maternal line” between the two (Fijn 2015:292). This overlap indicates that ancestors of Mongolian domestic horses interbred with takhi which lived in the same area. For Fijn this is one way of explaining the great genetic diversity found in contemporary Mongolian horses (2015:292). Although we may not be certain to what extent householders encouraged or discouraged such interbreeding, we may assume that its consequences were evident in the physical composition of domestic horses, as well as in their demeanor. Tofa and Soiot reindeer herders, like all reindeer herders, were apprehensive about domestic reindeer mingling and interbreeding with their cousins in the wild. If such mingling did not result in the loss of mature does to wild herds, then at least it resulted in unruly offspring. It remains open to what extent the same would have been true of horses and their human owners.

In Oka and in Tofalaria, people recognized and utilized the hierarchies by which horses lived within their groups. Rank was expected to play on an animals' demeanor, and a good householder knew to accommodate it. Although groups of horses could be seen grazing near the homes of people, they were expected to move freely and on their own volition. In contrast to animals of the forest, horses formed part of the human-mastered household, even if only a small number of them were ever bound to a Serge, the traditional tethering post symbolizing the centre of the domus. The behavior of horses in the household stood therefore in relation to their extensive periods spent away from it. During the short summer months, when horses were drawn to be with or near humans, their interactions were still marked by experiences outside the human compound. Such experiences could range from recent predator interactions leaving deep bite marks in their bodies and affecting their social behavior, to changes in intra-group relations staked out in the taiga. Many of these social dynamics taking place away from human abode resemble the descriptions of ethologists for free roaming wild and feral equids (e.g., St-Louis & Côté 2012; Ransom & Cade 2009), suggesting that horses in Oka have to be understood.
in terms of an intersection of the ways of the taiga with the ways of the household.

At Uro, time spent away from direct human presence seemed to afford horses many of the features commonly associated in the West with wild or feral horses: They were highly independent in their search for forage, they fought off predators, they endured extreme cold weather in winter, and they established amongst themselves enduring hierarchies which affected the ways in which they moved about the landscape. All of these features extended back to their belonging to the household. At the same time, they differed from wild horses (in the takhi sense) in that their sociality had been co-shaped by deliberate household interventions. No matter how far horses were ranging from their human owners' residences, their sociality in the taiga was always also co-shaped by their relationship with the household. This relationship was expressed in different ways for different members of a group of horses, but it could entail one or more of the seasonal practices of a horse-owning household, including rounding-up, corralling, inoculating, hobbling, shoeing, grooming, castrating, training, and slaughtering. However, several of these aspects of close physical contact with human members of the household, affected only a small number of horses. Usually these were the ones selected for riding purposes. The remainder of a household's herds had much less contact with the household, which resulted in a vast spectrum in terms of tameness among 'domestic' horses.

My Soiot friends would often refer to their reindeer as “half-wild” or “semi-domestic” (Rus. polu-dikie) animals96, beings with a high degree of human-independent will power. Although people did not generally refer to their horses as 'wild' or 'semi-domestic,' horses too were considered to have a strong sense of independence. It was understood that human care was not essential to their survival, which in this sense put horses in the same category as yak or reindeer. Much like feral horses of North America, who “because of their highly adaptive nature were able to thrive in a multitude of environments” (Ransom & Cade 2009:1), Soiot horses

96Brian Donahoe (2003:113) writes about contemporary Tozhu: “reindeer are described as angsyg (wild animal-like); they have a special status that lies somewhere between wild animals and domesticated livestock, and are accorded respect similar to wild animals.
were understood to be self-reliant. Yet they possessed a degree of familiarity with their human owners, and over 25 to 30 years of a horse's life span human and horse intentions could come to align in remarkable ways. Perhaps the strongest confrontation of opposed human and horse intentions occurred every spring when householders would round-up their herds for the first time after a long and independent winter. My Soiot friends referred to this process simply as 'catching' (Rus. *lovit*, Bur. *barikha*), although views differed on how easy or difficult such 'catching' was. In either case, everyone understood that initial contact with a horse required actions and materials that could draw the animal into a space within which intentions could be negotiated, and where horses and humans had the opportunity to (re-)establish their relations.

**Of Tie and of Range**
The main reason for letting horses go for the winter was the limited availability of harvestable fodder. Residents at Uro maximized their hay harvesting surfaces, and the carrying capacity of their hereditary hay patches was directly expressed in the number of cows and sheep each household could hold in a given year. In fact, the number of stock was adjusted in relation to fluctuation in annual hay harvests. A poor hay harvest could call for greater stock slaughter in autumn and winter. Yak, reindeer, and horses, on the other hand, were able to forage for themselves in winter because they grazed over larger distances and far beyond human harvesting ranges. The fact that yaks fend for themselves contributes to the idea that they are not actually considered fully domesticated, and that they may better be referred to as semi-domestic, as my host’s wife suggested while talking about the different terms used for “wild” and “domestic” in the Buriat language. Surprisingly, I have never overheard similar reference to horses, although they spend a near equal amount of time fending for themselves. The ability to locate fodder away from human settlement was highly valued, because it diversified the use of the landscape and maximized natural meat and milk yields without the need for outside fodder supplementation, as was the case with such domestic breeds as sheep, goats, and cows. In this sense, horses were affordable and sustainable means of transportation, and a highly
valued asset. Much like reindeer, their existence was entirely secured through year-round 'underfoot' forage (Rus. *kruglogodnyi podnozhyi korm*), a fact that further informed how human and horse autonomy were played out in and around Uro.

It was mid-October, and the temperature was dropping quickly. All my neighbours’ horses had long left the valley for the winter, and it was good to visit with uncle Borzhon and aunty Ranzhur in their warm kitchen. Orange light was flickering from aunty Ranzhur’s hearth, and the large tea kettle on top of the cast iron plate was nearing the boil. I used the opportunity to ask Borzhon about his horses. I wanted to know how he thought about his horses. Were they wild or were they domestic animals? B’eligt’e, Baianbata’s wife, had told me earlier that in Buriat these terms were not generally used. *Emnig* referred to a non-domestic horse, but wild animals in general were known as *z’erlig anguud*. The home or house was the *ger*, and domestic animals were those who lived near the home or house: *gerey, ger bayryn, ger bulyn, ger sookhi*. Rather than stating that an animal was either ‘domestic’ or ‘wild,’ people would refer to a particular species, the status of which was well known to all. But in Russian Borzhon referred to his horses as ‘domestic’ (Rus. *domashnye*). I countered him, noting that for the larger part of the year his horses, like all other horses in the valley, were out on their own. Why did he consider them ‘domestic?’ He agreed, but then pointed out that even in winter, when he did not bring in any of his horses for riding, they would periodically come back to the house in their groups to lick the salt he had set out for them. In this sense, he suggested, they were very ‘domestic.’ But Borzhon went on to explain that, in fact, his horses were left to themselves not only in winter. Really they were more or less on their own all the year round.

Even in summer Borzhon would keep only three or four riding horses near the house, their legs hobbled to prevent them from wandering off. The remainder of his 50 head-strong herd would wander freely in the valleys and hills within reach of his summer camp. Clearly I needed to gain a better understanding of what Borzhon meant when he used the term ‘domestic,’ and the key seemed to lie in his understanding of nearness or accessibility. Borzhon was
generally able to locate his horses within the course of a single day. In summer he or one of his
sons would saddle a riding horse and head out into the hills to perform routine counts. Because
the men knew where their horses’ favorite grazing areas were, finding them was relatively easy.
But there were exceptions to these predictable grazing ranges. While out on an autumn hunt
with Borzhon and another hunter, our group noticed a man riding in the hills. A large group of
horses had gathered behind him. As we approached the rider, Borzhon recognized him as
Munko of Sorok. Munko had come to check on his horses, and he had found them in the sand
dunes north of grandfather Tseren-Dorzho's summer camp. While the hunter and I waited at a
distance, Borzhon and Munko stood in the wind, smoking cigarettes, exchanging news. Munko
had a group of horses who were roaming west of Oka river, and among them he had recently
found a horse that did not belong to him. Judging from Munko's description, Borzhon knew this
was a horse he had lost almost two years ago. Borzhon was glad of the news, and I was glad
that now I had a sense of Borzhon's home range: The lost horse had left it when it joined another
herd. Several days later I saw Munko walking it to Borzhon's home at Uro97.

It did happen, that horses would not return to their households at all. They could slip on
ice in winter, or fall prey to wolves. They perished while out on their own. And in some cases
they did not return because of age. One year, an old horse of Borzhon’s appeared at his residence
to lick salt in the depth of winter. It had come alone, which was unusual. Normally horses would
come to lick salt in large groups over a period of one or more days. After the single horse had
paid its visit, it slowly walked back into the hills, never to be seen again. Not even its bones
were ever located. Borzhon was quite touched by this final appearance: “It almost seemed like
it had come to say goodbye one last time.” Borzhon had told me the story, presumably, for at
least two reasons: Firstly, to illustrate how strong was the tie between him and his horses, and
secondly, to elaborate that his horses were truly domestic. A 'wild' horse would never have come

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97 Munko's transferral of Borzhon's horse is an example of the dynamics that exist between the masters of households described in chapter four. Both human and spirit masters are in communication with each other about the members of their respective households, and where a member of one household enters the realm of another, the master can relay information about such a member.
to bid farewell to him – and certainly not near his winter residence. While there could be long weeks during which there was no sign of a horse anywhere near Uro, Borzhon would have a rough idea as to the whereabouts of his equines. Moreover, they held a bond with him and with his ger. Even if they were not near, they were within range of his domus—they were ‘domestic.’ But horses were not always described to me on such clear terms.

On another visit to Borzhon's house, his daughter in-law Norzhima (b. ca. 1986) was recalling a trip she had taken to the city around New Year's Eve, the year before. She had been traveling with other passengers on a small mini-bus service through the snow covered Tunka Valley, when suddenly a group of “wild horses” (Rus. dikie loshadi) came running into the road. The driver slammed on the brakes, and steered the swerving vehicle through the group, barely avoiding collision. Confused by her choice of words, and thinking that there had been no masterless or feral horses in Oka or Tunka for many years, I asked Norzhima what she meant by “wild horses.” She explained that she had meant a group of horses, a tabun that had belonged to someone, but which had been running free all winter according to custom. These horses had not been 'wild' in the Przewalski or takhi sense of the word. But at this time of year, and given they were not within immediate reach of their human owners, Norzhima had chosen to describe them as wild. Of course, these horses were no different from those of her father-in-law's, although he had described his horses to me as 'domestic.' Norzhima knew that these 'wild' horses had an owner who would come looking for them in spring. They were not 'wild' in their genetic makeup. Rather, she had referred to them as wild in terms of their momentary (winterly) disposition, manner, and placement within the landscape. Rounding-up this domestic herd would pose an encounter with 'wildness' within the household.

**Spring Time Round-up**

My friend Regdel (b. ca. 1978) lived on the low lying Sorok river bank, together with his parents. He was an experienced husbandman, known to have a good way with his parents' stock. As a family they were keeping a yak herd, several Mongolian dairy cows, a number of sheep, two
dogs, some chickens, and a group of horses. One day Regdel told me how their horses were quite difficult to round-up in spring. Having spent all winter on their own, they preferred to be left alone: “They have their places...”, but 'come spring they will run and hide from humans.' Often it was impossible to catch them on foot. In winter Regdel and his parents would keep one horse near the residence, or they would share the cost of keeping one with a neighbouring household. Such a winter horse was fed hay daily, and come spring it was ridden in pursuit of the other horses. Regdel's neighbours, Burged and Inna's household, also kept a horse over the winter months. In lieu of a motorized vehicle, they had called this black horse “taxi.” According to Regdel, horses preferred to be left alone in their own habitat, but over the course of the summer months they became re-acquainted to their household duties. And following the initial round-up in spring, the subsequent bringing in of horses became easier.

Inna's younger brother Alesha, who stayed up stream from Regdel's place, liked to compare horses to yak. For Alesha there was great resemblance between the challenges of 'catching' both: Bringing in lean yaks was easier than rounding-up well fattened ones, and the same could be said of horses. Like horses, yaks were let go for the entire winter. Scraping snow and ice with their hooves to reach the sparse edible foliage beneath, yaks necessarily lost much of their weight over the cold season. In spring, when they were driven back to the general area of their owners' winter residence, a single person could direct the massive body of a yak by holding on to its fur with his or her bare hands. But as soon as a yak had regained its strength from eating fresh grass, single-person maneuvering of this sort became unthinkable, even dangerous. If horses or yak were worked too hard in the fall, they would enter winter with insufficient fat, which could lead to their death in the cold. According to Alesha, it was advisable, therefore, to pace the exertion of horses and of yak prior to the winter season. In the same way, horses were not to be too lean entering winter, but preferably they were also not too strong come spring. While Regdel and Alesha had their tricks for tackling the challenges they found with rounding-up horses and yak in spring, others in the valley refused to consider the
round-up of their animals a “challenge.” To them it was not a “difficult” task – either because they did not want to come across as inexperienced, or because they wanted to emphasize how ‘domestic’ their animals really were.

On a visit to aunty Vera’s house in late April, I found her son, my friend Tseden (b. 1986), resting on the couch. He had just come inside from chopping new wood for several hours. Later in the week, when the wood job was done, he was set on taking his brother Dagba (b. 1984-†2014) to try to round-up their horses for the summer. We were talking about reproductive *tabuny*, and I asked Tseden about his experience of bringing them in after the winter. He said his horses did not go far in winter. They were always on the east side of the valley, somewhere in the upper reaches of Urda-Uro creek. When I told him of the difficulties of ‘catching’ horses I had heard about, Tseden only smiled, saying that there was no such thing as ‘difficulty’ in rounding-up horses. Given the nearness of their winter grazing grounds, it was no major task to bring them in. But his mother begged to differ: ‘Horses always need time to get used to people – year after year.’ By the end of our conversation, it seemed as if multiple ways of perceiving the coming and going of horses coexisted in their household. Some emphasized the struggle involved with rounding up horses for the first time each year, while others preferred to stress the fact that their horses' range was predictable, and that therefore it was easy to bring them in. When Tseden and his brother finally found the time to ride out in search of their horses, it took both of them several attempts to locate and bring them in that spring.

In mid-May, Tseden and I were sitting at his kitchen window, sipping tea, as we quietly watched the hills. Aunty Vera was bending over a bucket on the kitchen floor, making cottage cheese for her chickens. She had promised to give some to me for my chickens, when Tseden suddenly motioned to look out the window. He had spotted movement on the far side of the valley, and quickly grabbed his binoculars. Scanning the bare hillsides of Urda Uro, several persons on horseback had come into sight. They were trying to cajole a group of horses to turn in the direction of our valley. It looked as if the horses were resisting movement in our direction.
Moving with utter care, the riders were halting regularly, as they observed the group's responses to their approaches. Some nineteen untacked horses were in the group, and to keep them calm and moving in one direction the riders were cradling them by riding loop formations to draw in stragglers and those attempting to sway the group the other way. Whenever the riders halted, the group would stand still. Then they would resume, while the riders moved in such a way as to cut off the group's path back into the hills. From where I was standing, this interaction between the riders and the group resembled a choreography of resistance, a negotiation between horses and people, both of whom clearly sought to evade any direct physical confrontation.

After some time, the riders had succeeded in driving the whole group into our valley. On their way down, the riders had split into two groups, dividing up the horses. The two riders I had been following most closely turned out to be Borzhon and his wife Ranzhur. Together they had separated nine of their castrates from the group so as to arrive ahead of the others. Meanwhile Tseden had left the kitchen to prepare one of his corrals for their arrival. His corrals were better positioned to receive horses coming in from the east and thus both groups were going to use them. When I joined Tsden outside, he had already opened the gate and was knocking on an empty bucket to signal to the approaching horses that he had salt for them. By now other household members had come out to position themselves in a funnel shape, leaving the corral gate as the only possible route for incoming horses. Walking very slowly, and stopping periodically, the group of rounded-up horses seemed reluctant in every way. From the front they were lured with salt, on their sides they were being prevented from veering by household members, and from the rear they were driven by the riders. Thus the first group eventually trotted into the corral.

Minutes later, Iumzhap came in on his horse. He had been among the other riders on the hillside, and taking advantage of Tseden and Vera's extensive corral structures, he proceeded to drive his bachelor band of geldings and colts into Tsden's second corral. One of the horses had a piece of rope, some five meters in length, loosely tied around his neck. Apparently the men
had tried to separate him from the rest of the herd by lassoing him earlier. Now the horse was trailing the rope behind, and every time another horse stepped on the rope, he bucked furiously. Once the second group was enclosed, Borzhon and Tseden climbed into the corral, jointly holding on to the rope of the bucking horse. All horses, including the roped one, were wildly running in the corral, counter clockwise. With every round the men would shorten the length of the rope, drawing the horse to the centre of the corral and preventing him from running with his companions. Flinging his head up in the air, the bucking horse was now lacking space to rebound, and so he fell and rolled on his back. Jumping into the turbulent corral, two other men cautiously held his head to the ground, while a third person released the aggravated horses from the corral. I was later told that this was the only effective way of isolating a horse from the remainder of its group.

What I had observed from the comfort of Tseden's kitchen window, and later from the side of one of his corrals, had been the gradual transition of a group of freely roaming horses from the domain of their winterly movement to that of their summerly duties. In this transition, the proximity between humans and horses gradually increased to the point of using ropes and applying physical pressure. However, all of this happened quite gradually, and the horses could not be said to have been physically forced into this final, if temporary captivity. While displaying every sign of reluctance, these horses had walked themselves into the corral, if guided ever so closely by the riders. The tension that had existed between horses and riders had been managed well enough to prevent any outbreaks, and subsequent encounters, according to my interlocutors, were going to be smoother from here on. Clearly these horses were familiar with the corrals, the sign of the bucket's clang, even the lasso. They were returning to something, the familiarity of which had never left them while in the taiga. Although they may not have chosen to descend into the valley on their own accord, these horses had refrained from utilizing their strength to resist the encouragement of their owners. Their allegiance to the household had been re-solicited.
Tabun Dynamics

As a novice to equestrian practice, I was repeatedly struck by the remarkable memory each of my neighbours had of their various roaming horse herds. Even individuals who owned 50 or more horses always seemed to remember which ones had been gelded or broken to ride at what time, when, and by whom, and what each of their horses' character qualities were. In like manner, there seemed to be little confusion in identifying ownership – even at a distance, when branding could not be seen. Nor did it take long to separate herds belonging to different owners, which had mingled while roaming in the hills. No records were kept of horses, other than the mental notes taken by each owner throughout the year, and particularly during the summer. By spring time a household's horse groups generally consisted of several mixed-sex herds, or harems, comprising mares (Rus. samki), their one and two-year-old colts and fillies, foals, and one senior stallion (Rus. proizvoditel'). When colts and fillies were driven out from the herd by their senior stallion, they would adjoin themselves to bachelor bands (Rus. kassaki) or other groups generally referred to as tabuny (Bur. hureg aduun). Bachelor herds consisted of not yet broken to ride geldings, trained riding horses, and colts awaiting either castration, or formation of a new herd.

A tabun usually consisted of 10 to 15 mares, but it could consist of as many as 20 or 25. At the age of two or three, male offspring would undergo castration. Select males, usually no more than one, could be retained as a future stallion to form a new harem. Upon maturation, this reproductive male would impregnate all the mares of his harem over a period of up to ten years. During this time, a good stallion would aggressively fend off any male horses that might approach his harem. In order to 'keep the blood of one's herds “fresh”' (i.e. to maintain genetic diversity and prevent inbreeding), every so often several mares from a harem were taken to be paired with stallions brought in from afar. Such a male would usually be traded for in kind, or

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98 All horses, without exception, were branded at one year of age. Borzhon would place his brand mark (Rus. kleimo; tavro) on the left rear thigh. Other tabun owners would place theirs on the front thigh, or even on the right side of the animal.
it could be purchased on occasion. The invited stallion would then stay with his new mares, thus creating a new *tabun* for his new owner. With limited grazing capacity, and many horse owners spread throughout the hills, many herders maintained no more than one or two harems and several riding horses. Borzhon, for instance, had ten riding horses at the time, three or four of which he would keep near the house during the summer. The remaining six or seven riding horses were left grazing freely in the hills. Borzhon would then switch out the riding contingent every four weeks to ensure that no riding horse was ever ridden for longer than a month at a time. For this to be possible, groups of horses had to frequent within range.

Unlike riding horses, harems did not usually have to be driven back to the winter residence in spring. Over the month of May, these *tabuny* would come to the pastures surrounding their human owners' abode of their own accord. Several mares would already have given birth at this time, arriving in the valley together with their foals, while others were still carrying. For the latter, birthing would take place near the human residence at winter pasture, just prior to departure for the summer pastures. Closer proximity to human residence warranted greater protection of feeble offspring against predators, but it could also mean more frequent encounters between stallions and other incoming males. Broken to ride, not yet broken to ride, and not yet castrated males would on occasion collide with stallions at these intersection points, leading to injury, usually inflicted by highly protective stallions on curious or impulsive outside males. One morning I was watching Borzhon's nephew and niece (aged 10 and 14) driving a *tabun* on horse back in direction of their uncle's stables near the house, when the stallion got nervous at the sight of another male emerging from a corral on the other side of the house. Each time the outside male would approach the harem, the stallion forcefully chased it back in direction of the corral. Turning against the perceived intruder, the stallion struck out at him, both horses repeatedly galloping by us at full speed. Behaviour like this could have crippling effects. Several days before our departure to a reindeer camp in Tofalariia, one of our riding horses at Alygdzher had come too close to the stallion of a harem. The stallion had struck our
horse just above his left eye. Splitting the brow, the stallion had left our horse with a cut so deep, that it led to an inflammation affecting his vision and jeopardizing his transporting and navigating capacity.

However, castrates did not usually mix with any of the other horses. Instead, many of the riding horses stayed together in the taiga, even if they belonged to different owners. They would pool together during winters and summers, roaming the landscape together. Harems, in contrast, did not mix across owners unless they had been moved for the summer to the wranglers' camp (Rus. tabor tabunchikov). Located approximately half way up Iakhshop river, this camp – much like a reindeer camp – was seasonally maintained by designated tabunchiki, or horse wranglers. It had been established during the Soviet period as a remote seasonal outpost of the Sorok kolkhoz. My friend Ilia, who knew a lot about horses and had experimented extensively with breeding techniques, had spent most of his summers out here as a younger man, looking after the kolkhoz's horse herds. During my stay several wranglers periodically checked on a large number of harems belonging to households who had migrated to their summer pastures along Tustuk river. By sending their harems to the wranglers' camp, herders were able secure feed for their stock at the summer pasture while preventing undue encounters between their castrates and harem stallions. In a way, the wranglers' camp also resembled earlier Soviet reindeer camps, which had freed herders to look after their cattle as during B. E. Petri's expedition in 1926.

**Selecting Horses**

One of the tasks of the household head was the reproductive management of horse herds. The whole point of large herds was, after all, to maintain a pool of strong and healthy animals from which to select the best for riding and the least suitable for meat. Such selections often involved several members of an extended family, because relatives who lived in the village would join their horses to larger herds in the backcountry. In April my neighbour and teacher, Uncle Borzhon, was waiting to hear back from his brother Badma who was to come and castrate their
Badma had served the Sorok kolkhoz as a veterinary worker for 15 years, and although he now lived between homes in Sorok and Orlik, he still conducted a good number of veterinary chores for his own relatives in the hill country. In most situations colts were castrated to become geldings, except when a reproductive male was required by a distant relation, or if a herder desired to start a new harem, in which case the horse would graduate to become a stallion. Young males that had come from one's various *tabuny* stayed together in bachelor bands, the size of which usually ranged from 10 to 15 head. From these bands a herder would select animals either for training, for further breeding, or for food. Borzhon and Badma had selected six of their colts for castration that spring.

Castration did not mean that a horse would not end up being selected for meat. Rather, it reduced the level of tension in a group, and it allowed owners to observe their character before deciding whether or not they were suitable for training. In either case, these new castrates had been excluded from ever fathering a harem, and in seven months time any one of them could be chosen to provide food for the winter. At the end of November – a month before the annual yak winter slaughter – one horse would be selected for slaughter from the bachelor group. Usually this would mean one horse per extended family. In the case of my host's household, two families came together to share a horse each year. Because their families were too small to consume a whole horse, they took turns in providing a bachelor each year. During my stay it was Baianbata's turn to provide a young male. Candidates for meat production were selected based on their behavior. An unsettled castrate (Rus. *nespokoinyi*), or one refusing to enter a fenced area or a corral, would be singled out for slaughter. Led to the side, such a horse was killed and dissected in much the same way as stock or game. But unlike sheep, cows, or yak, a horse's head was first covered with a jute sack or similar item to cover its sight. Then, because of its comparatively thin skull, it took merely a well balanced strike of a hammer to the forehead to kill it, as opposed to the blunt side of an ax used on cows and yak.

In spring, Borzhon selected training candidates from his bachelor band. Castrates chosen
to be trained for riding were evaluated on the basis of their character, which would be grouped into categories ranging from 'race worthy bloodstock' (Rus. *rysaki*) to 'ones of beautiful gait' (Rus. *inokhody*), or 'big ones' (Rus. *zdorovkykh*), and from 'strong ones' (Rus. *moshnykh*) to 'solid ones' (Rus. *plotnykh*). “Such ones [could] be chosen” for training, according to Borzhon. His younger brother, Baianbata, who was always on the lookout for horses suitable for yak herding, put particular emphasis on gait. Theoretically, gait was best determined in the pasture. But practically, according to Tseden, it was quite difficult to make detailed observations of one's horses in the hills. Tseden knew this well, as he had trained many horses in his lifetime. He had made it a practice to unhesitatingly castrate any male that kicked, or that was in the least habit of “biting like a dog.” Such unmannered traits were unacceptable in horses, unless they were found in the right combination with other features, in which case such characteristics could be desirable, especially for a stallion who was to defend a harem, while passing on his favorable physical features. In this case, tameness on its own could hardly be referred to as a defining characteristic for domesticity. Rather, a good stallion could be unruly in some ways, while optimally shaped in others, to produce offspring from which self reliant and enduring horses could be selected. If self-initiative and fearlessness made a dog a better hunter for the household, then behavior such as 'biting like a dog,' which for a gelding was considered unmannerly, could in the case of a stallion secure cohesion in the harem.

In the past, coat colour had played an important role in selective breeding. But for herdsmen like Tseden the colour of a horse was no longer a primary concern, for which reason he also could not recall the varied terms that existed in Buriat for each hue. For Tseden it was sufficient that a horse be good for maneuvering stock and for longer excursions into the hills country. But coat colour had been of importance not only in terms of prestige. According to Borzhon, Soiots used to utilize their horses' coat colour strategically in the hunt: '[They] would hunt reindeer during the rut by hiding behind a white horse.' The reindeer, “whose eyesight is poor,” will mistake the white horse for its own kind. When this happened, the hunter would
shoot from behind his horse. The horse thus served the hunter as a lure while at a distance, and once he had come into close range of the deer, the horse would serve him also as a mask. In this way a hunter did not have to dress in reindeer skins, hold on to antlers, or mimic a reindeer in other ways, which made more spontaneous hunting possible. Although the practice was still known at Uro, neither Burzhon nor any of the other hunters I came to know practiced this method at present. Borzhon had not offered this detail, but it is to be assumed that these reindeer hunters had been using bow and arrow instead of firearms, which would help explain why their horses were not spooked.

**Laying Down a Colt for the First Time**

On a wet and cold morning in May, Borzhon, and his youngest son Bator (b. 1990), walked over to their corrals to collect a young colt. Bator led the horse by his halter to the front of his father's house where he maneuvered him to an open space of well-packed sandy soil and patches of short grass. Five meters away, three other horses stood hitched to the family's serge. Bator calmly positioned the colt to face the house in preparation for following a technique used in laying down horses for hoof work. This morning it was not shoes that had to be attached or removed. Borzhon's brother Badma had finally arrived a couple of days ago to castrate their colts. This was the only one that had not undergone the procedure yet. Although Bator was moving his own body calmly in the presence of the agitated colt, the horse would shake himself free from his every attempt to wind a rope around his front legs. What set out as a delicate dance, in which Bator and the horse slowly went round and round – the one to bind, the other to remain free – eventually grew into a dense encounter more resembling a controlled wrestling match.
Illustration 22: Laying down a horse in ten steps. © 2014, Author
Standing face to face with the horse, Bator was holding on to a rope one end of which was connected to the colt's halter (a). The animal’s left front and rear legs had already been hobbled by a rope contraption with toggle fasteners (Rus. *trenog*). The hobble ensured that the horse did not gallop away. Then Baianbata, Bator's uncle, handed Bator a second rope. Holding the halter rope and one end of the second rope in his left hand, and standing on the left side of the horse, Bator carefully ran the other end of the second rope across the horse’s back (b). When the rope touched the ground, he reached between the horse's legs for its end. Now holding both ends of the second rope in his right hand, and the halter rope in his left, the horse is tethered to Bator both at its muzzle and from withers to brisket. (c). Tying one end of the second rope to itself, forming a large noose with a flexible knot, Bator skillfully pulled the noose over the horse’s head, gradually tightening it at the horse’s upper forearms (d). Holding halter and the rope end of the tightened noose in his left hand just below the horse's muzzle, Bator now carefully lowered to his feet (e). From here he secured the hobble to include both front pasterns with the rear left pastern, after which he released the noose from the forearms. The colt was now fully hobbled.

Now tying the middle of the second rope to the halter, Bator ran one end of it under the hobble, around the left rear pastern, and from there back through the halter tie ring, forming a triangle that could be tightened, and which brought the cannon of the rear toward the forearm (f). At the same time, this mechanism also lowered the head, preparing the animal for a smooth rolling transition to the ground. But when the horse still refused to lay, Bator released the lasso, and Borzhon came in. Tying a wider piece of webbing around the horse’s neck, Borzhon now took the lasso from Bator and quickly formed a self tightening loop, which he ran under the neck's webbing. With the horse's left rear leg raised to the forearm once more, the animal was now standing on three legs only (g). Borzhon's involvement had signalled a transition in this

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99This triangular roping techniques in some ways resembles the method used to slow down grazing reindeer in Tofalaria.
horse-human contact: Bator's earlier dance-like motions were being replaced by a tactile assertiveness more akin to a form of wrestling (h). Not only was Borzhon getting tired of the game, he did not want the other horses to be alarmed by the tenseness of the situation. They were, in fact, already beginning to move back and forth nervously. Still moving in circles, but ever more abruptly, Borzhon finally gave the horse's tail a powerful jerk (i). With the hooves in the air, the horse had finally been sent onto his left side, in which position Borzhon drew his tail through the groin to keep him on the ground, while Bator prepared to hold his head down (j).

Bator and Borzhon were gradually introducing the colt to a procedure that in future would require less time, involve little resistance, and require fewer implements. This being the colt's first time to lay down for his owners, he could not know what was expected of him in this communicative encounter. The gentle tugging of Bator's ropes did not yet resonate with him. Their meaning was yet empty. There was no memory of previous similar encounters on which he could draw to interpret these movements. And given his agitated state, which might upset nearby horses, Borzhon had no desire to draw out this learning process. Instead, the horse needed to be calmly and firmly guided into the final position of these movements. He had to be put on his side; aided in overcoming his own anxiety. While Borzhon's final jerk on the tail may be read as a kind of power assertion over the horse, it can also be seen to stand in line with Bator's sensitive roping technique. What began as a delicate dance with Bator had culminated in a series of denser but no less controlled movements with Borzhon. Throughout, the horse was learning the meaning of these ropes, and the purpose of this exercise. Were he to be selected for training in future, these movements would eventually become second nature.
Illustration 23: Castrating a colt. © 2014, Author
With the colt still on his side, Borzhon and Badma tied his right and left front and rear fetlocks together, removing the hobble (k). It was time to castrate\(^{100}\) the colt. The men rolled the horse onto his back (l) and washed his groin with soap and warm water. Three men held the colt in position, using ropes (m), while Badma dried the area with a clean towel (n). Then Badma held the right testicle in his left hand and rubbed a disinfectant on the outside of the scrotum (o). By squeezing the scrotum from under the testis, its outer skin was tensed, and Badma quickly made a two inch top to bottom incision with a scalpel handed to him by Borzhon (p). With pressure from the left hand, Badma squeezed out one of the testis and passed it to Borzhon, who held it up with his right hand, while pulling down the vas deferens with his left. Meanwhile, Badma reached for a prepared string, and tied off the vas deferens well below the testis by making a series of knots to cut circulation to the testis (q). With the scalpel Badma separated the testis from the vas deferens just above the tie off. Then he put more disinfectant on the wound (r). After repeating the same procedure for the left testis, Badma used both hands to scoop excess blood from the groin area and open scrotum (s). With the incisions tinctured one last time, the horse's fetlocks were carefully untied, and held in place by the halter leash. The new gelding was now allowed to stand (t).

**Training Horses and Reindeer**

Once castration had been completed at the hands of an experienced veterinary worker, the owner would select individual geldings to be trained for riding. This process often began at the winter pasture after horses had been rounded up for the summer, and it would carry on from the summer pasture, after a household had migrated to higher elevation. Shortly before my household was going to trek to summer pasture, Tseden told me how prior to getting married to Dagzama, he had been training horses semi-professionally. It had been a good source of income for him, as he seemed to have been especially apt at the task, and friends had been sending their horses to

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\(^{100}\) Horse castration as it is practiced today is an example of a veterinary procedure introduced as part of Kolkhoz training. Older castration techniques, particularly for reindeer, were remembered by some elders in Oka and Tofalarria, but at present none of these were in use.
him, paying him with a tank of gas or a bottle of vodka per day of training. On average he had a horse broken within three to five days. Although some of the work had been conducted with the aid of his corral, the majority of training had taken place out in the taiga. Until 2005 Tseden had also been herding reindeer, and I was especially interested in how his experience of training reindeer compared with his horse training.

Training reindeer had been much easier, according to Tseden. His older brother and current reindeer herder, Iumzhap, was still actively training reindeer at his camp on Onot river, and he was doing the same with his horses at his summer camp on Tustuk river. Training horses and reindeer in tandem was thus an ongoing practice in this family, as much as it was for my Tofalar friends from Alygdzher. According to Tseden, reindeer were smaller and therefore easier to mount and steer, and they listened to the signal of reins as carefully as horses. But unlike horses, reindeer were more compliant with the rider. As a disciplinary measure, a rider could gently tap an antler with a stick, a sensation 'reindeer dislike very much.' And reindeer who were uncertain about a rider's intended direction would merely walk in tight circles, quite unlike half broken horses who could bolt under similar circumstances, even if the terrain was rugged or steep. In these regards, reindeer were clearly easier to train and ride.

Illustration 24: Left: Borzhon on his horse with a basic saddle configuration. © 2013, Author. Right: One of Iumzhap’s helper-apprentices on a reindeer with lightened horse saddle. Photo 2014, Iumzhap
Although several people still owned older style wooden reindeer saddles, in more recent years lightened horse saddles had been used, usually trimmed down to their wooden bars and steel cantle and fork, and covered with bear or some other hide to soften the ride. In some models cantle and fork were still wooden. These saddles were more comfortable for the rider of a reindeer on longer treks through mountainous terrain, and they were lighter than full horse saddles, which is an asset when riding an animal with an average carrying capacity of around 70kg (e.g., Zhigunov 1961). Unlike other Siberian regions (cf. Vainshtein 1980:131), where reindeer breeds are on average smaller and ridden over the upper Thoracic vertebrae, the Karagas breed of the Eastern Saians is strong enough to be ridden from the center of the back (between Thoracic and Lumbar vertebrae), much like a horse. Nonetheless, great care is taken not to fracture the fragile spine, even in Karagas reindeer. The relatively small size of the Buriat-Mongolian horse breed used in Oka, and the comparatively large size of Karagas reindeer, reduces size discrepancy between the two species as compared to other regions. This relative similarity in size further helps explain the ease with which some saddle designs have been transferred from one species to another, calling only for minor adjustment.

This parallel existence of horses with reindeer, and the experience of training both for riding and packing purposes is not unique to the Eastern Saians. Drawing on an archived report by Wenkel (1916), and writing about Tozhu reindeer hunter-herders, Vainshtein (1980:129) reiterates that, “… a large proportion of deer-herding households had horses.” In fact, “40 per cent of households had one or two horses, but only a small number of bais [well to do householders] had more than ten. In the households which he surveyed, Wenkel found 5.2 percent of the total number of livestock were horses as against deer.” Vainshtein goes on to explain in great detail the sourcing and designs of horse and reindeer saddles in an attempt to trace the origins of the domestication of reindeer. It is unclear what Wenkel means when he

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101 The historic proximity between horses and reindeer in Altai-Saiian households has been confirmed extensively in ethnographic and archaeological literature. Perhaps some of the most intriguing prehistoric intersections between equestrian and reindeer herding practices in the region stem from the Eastern Altai burial site of Pazyryk, exemplified in a mask designed for horses, resembling deer antlers (e.g. Rudenko 1970).
cites the ownership of “one or two horses.” Presumably he is referring to trained horses, used for riding and/or cargo transportation, which may suggest either that such an owner would have had a roaming harem to select offspring from, or that he traded for colts or geldings. Although neither sources are clear on this point, it emerges that horses and reindeer have been held in conjunction for a long time, and that residents of the larger Altai-Saian region have long relied on both of these species.

Rather than taking off time to train a horse, most horse work in Oka was conducted as part of activities that had to be done anyway, such as commuting between village and camp, or traveling between more distant camps. According to Borzhon, the best way to train a gelding was to round-up, tack, and begin riding him more or less straight away. However, not all geldings were broken to ride right after they had been castrated. In some cases several years would pass before a horse received training. Once an animal had been selected, Borzhon would ride the horse for most of the day – the main goal being to tire him out. Like other herders, he found that an exhausted horse was much more pliable and willing to learn. Come rest time, he would hobble the horse to prevent him from running off as soon as he had rested up. Throughout each riding exercise, Borzhon would use his hands to show the horse in which direction to move. But Borzhon would also rely on the reigns as a way of signalling, which horses seemed to 'understand from the get go.' He would never use any sounds or commands to communicate with his horse verbally, other than “trrrr” (equivalent of English 'whoa'), which meant to slow the horse, bringing it to a halt.

During the summer I witnessed this method in action: Danzan, a younger brother of my host's wife, told me one morning that he was going to ride to Khan-Modon, a remote homestead north of our camp. He was planning to help his friend Sasha look after his yak herd. I had been observing Danzan train a difficult new gelding for several days. He had tacked him repeatedly to establish a predictable pattern for the horse, and then he had tethered him to the family's serge. Then he would release him from the serge and walk him slowly in extensive circles through a
pasture before tethering him to the Serge again. In the morning, having put on bridle and hobble the night before, Danzan finally saddled and mounted the gelding. After a cautious round through the back of our pasture, the two forded Iakhoshop river, and rode off to Khan-Modon. Danzan knew the trail well. He had estimated the trip to take roughly four hours, and he was going to follow the river up stream and uphill without taking any major breaks so as to purposefully tire the horse. Ten days later Danzan returned from Khan-Modon. Neither horse nor rider had taken injury, and the family were well on their way to yet another riding horse.

But not only geldings were trained for riding. In fact, Borzhon had a preference for mares when it came to riding. If a young mare had rejected her offspring in the first year of bearing, Borzhon liked to train her for riding instead of mothering. The following year, when she would produce offspring again, it was more likely that she would take to mothering it. Thus, training a mare for transportation was a way to prepare the animal to become a good mother in her harem. But Borzhon's preference for mares had to do with the fact that they rode 'much smoother than most geldings.' Riding a mare, "You don't know if you're sitting in a car, on a sofa, or in a boat," he told me jokingly.

It was not uncommon for an Oka horse to live to its 30th birthday, although a trained horse would generally not serve its owner beyond the age of 25. As working horses aged, their eyesight grew weak and they began to stumble in difficult terrain. With impaired vision and hearing, horses were also more easily spooked. Emergence of such signs would mark the end of their careers. This often resulted in their slaughter and consumption. But in the experience of one female informant (b. ca. 1955), the slaughter of a retired horse could be an exceedingly difficult task for the owner's family, because members of the household had become emotionally attached to the animal over the years. It is possible therefore, that in some cases a retired work horse would be allowed to die a natural death. This was certainly the case among Tofalars, in regard to retired working reindeer: Out of respect (Rus. iz za uvazhenia) for their faithful service over many years, such animals were often released rather than slaughtered. Tofalar hunter-
herder Nikolai Semenovich Kangaraev, for instance, never slaughtered any of his retired castrates after they had served him faithfully for so many years. But what was considered an appropriate and dignified end for a faithful animal varied from household to household.

**Anticipating New Shoes**

I had left my cabin in the morning to walk over to Borzhon's. He had been sitting in his kitchen, sipping tea with Grandfather Dorzho. They were going to switch the summer shoes on grandfather's gelding to winter shoes for the autumn hunt. I was invited to join in the procedure. Shoeing required at least three people – one to hold the head, another to keep the body down, and a third to perform the hoof work. Grandfather took a last sip, set down his empty cup, and slipped into his boots. Then he rode over to Tseden's house to call for more hands. Borzhon and I fired up the old outdoor steel hearth in front of his house. The fire was hot as we consistently fed it with dry wood. We heated up two pairs of newly smithed shoes, which Grandfather and I had prepared in his shop sometime earlier. Then Tseden and his wife Dagzama arrived on their old Belorussian motorcycle. Dagzama went inside to visit with the women of Borzhon’s household, while the men readied their tools outside: an empty oil barrel, two eight foot long boards, a blanket, an array of webbing, various nippers, pliers, an aluminum pan filled with horse shoe nails, a hammer, an axe, and a sheathed knife.

Following the procedure for laying down horses, albeit with much greater ease than with a new horse, Borzhon, Tseden, and Grandfather managed to bring the gelding to his knees, from where he was rolled onto his back, and then onto his left side. After the pasterns were released from the hobble, Borzhon reached across the horse's spine and flank, to draw together and cross his right front and rear cannons. Then grandfather tied them together with heavy webbing. Next grandfather brought two blankets, one to lay over the horse's exposed flank, on which he sat with his legs held between girth and hooves. The second blanket he lay over his own knees. Onto these he drew the horse's tied right front and rear legs. This position provided controlled access to the soles, which Borzhon had previously cleaned with a small hammer. Running back
and forth between the hearth and grandfather's set-up, Borzhon kept the first of four horseshoes aglow with the aid of a pair of cast iron nippers. He would repeatedly press the hot iron to the inner wall of the hoof, using his nippers and hammer. This method eliminated the use of a rasp, but it sent a column of beige smoke into the wind each time the materials touched. Once the wall had melted down sufficiently, the new shoe fit like a glove. Tseden had been kneeling over the animal’s neck, gently pressing the maxilla onto a third blanket. Unlike the young colt described previously, this seasoned gelding was not actively resisting. Instead he was breathing heavily, making very audible, incessant, groaning noises.

With the wall of the hoof melted into shape, the horse shoe was taken off again and set in a snow patch to cool. Meanwhile the next horseshoe was held in place to shape the second hoof. Grandfather now placed his feet on the left cannons near the ground and lifted the right cannons onto his knees, thereby creating the space required to work safely on the lower left hooves. Once all four hoof walls were perfectly shaped for their corresponding shoes, Borzhon brought in the eight-foot long boards and lay them down at a ninety degree angle to the horse body. He placed a blanket on the section that would hold up the horse's right front and rear legs, and pushed one end of the doubled boards under the tied cannons and onto the blanket covered flank. To further raise the upper hooves, he lifted the other end of the boards and rolled the empty oil barrel under it. As grandfather held up the shoe, Borzhon drove nails, alternating between right and left branches of the shoe. With each strike (six nails per rear shoe, eight nails per front shoe), he used pliers to guide each nail in such a way as to curve it through the outer hoof wall. Then he twisted off the extruding tip of the nail with his pliers. Shoes attached, Borzhon trimmed the hoof wall edge, the part that now protruded beyond the edge of the shoe, using knife and hammer. Finally he tightened the shoes by bending the clipped nail endings, driving them face down into the outer wall of the hoof. With one side complete, the men flipped the horse onto the other side and attached the remaining two shoes.

The job was done. Cigarettes were lit and all eyes rested on the horizon. The freshly
shoed gelding was grazing calmly in the pasture ahead of us. Borzhon pointed out the ease with which the old horse had slipped into his new shoes. It had been the tenth time for grandfather’s horse to transition into winter shoes, and he seemed to be treading with great confidence. This could not be said of new geldings who needed time to become accustomed to the feel of walking on sharp toes and heels. Borzhon contemplated aloud how grandfather's horse must have been wondering all this time: “When are they finally going to put winter shoes on my hooves? Snow and ice have been on the ground for a while now.” Although a hint of humour seemed to ring in Borzhon's voice, as he gave us his take on the gelding's mind, the statement was consistent with an overall tendency I had observed at Uro: Animal-human encounters were often interpreted as taking place in answer to an anticipation arising with the animal, not with the human. This applied not only to horses who, over the course of their lives, had become increasingly attuned to their households. It also applied to game in the forest. Grandfather's gelding had willed himself into Borzhon's ropes. He had anticipated the surefooted gait that always followed the arrival of snow and ice. And the men were confident that in spite of his audible moaning, the horse was not actually resisting. Like game animals who run and hide and yet are understood to wilfully render themselves to the hunter, so the groaning gelding in all his wiggling was seen to willfully endure the procedure. In fact, he was said to have anticipated the routine before his human owner got around to it.

**Conclusion**

This chapter started out by stressing the contemporary importance of horses in the household of the Eastern Saians, suggesting that tameness alone is not sufficient as a marker of domesticity in horses. While Oka horses no longer interbreed with their free running cousins, such as may once have been the *takhi*, they did exhibit traits considered in North America as characteristic of wild or feral populations. The chapter argued that several of these traits increase the horses' suitability to the Soiot household because it allows them to remain self-reliant in an environment where people cannot subsidize their feed year round. In fact, there were situations in which
unruly behavior, in combination with other characteristics, was a desired quality in breeding stallions, inverting the notion of ‘tameness’ as a foundational feature for domestication. To develop an alternative explanation for the local use of terms such as “domestic” and “wildness” in horses, I examined household affiliation in terms of range. Here a horse could willfully leave the range of its domus and venture into that of another. When this happened, however, its ties to the owner had not been severed, and consequently there were no truly wild horses, although they could behave wildly, or winterly. These considerations were followed by an exploration of horse sociality within the household, which showed how bonds and hierarchies established in the taiga were recognized by human members of the household, while a household’s breeding practices co-shaped the sociality of horses in the taiga. The ambiguity of this ‘wildness’ as a constituent of Soiot horse ‘domesticity’ was then illustrated in the cajoling game that is the annual spring round-up.

The second half of the chapter concerned itself more directly with the horse practices and its material implements within the household. For the selection of horses I focused on the various uses of the horse in the household (e.g. reproduction, transportation, meat), as well as on the criteria on which selection is based (e.g. demeanor, gait, coat colour). Particular emphasis was placed here on the similarities that exist between the training and riding of horses and reindeer, which in the Saians has made interchangeable some of the material implements used for each (the saddle in particular). More detailed descriptions of laying down a horse for the first time and castrating it followed. Here the aim was to show how familiarity with ropes and hobbles was built in a horse over time. This familiarity allowed herders to communicate with their animals about procedures and outcomes that were associated with hobbles, lassos, and ropes. Finally, I followed the re-shoeing process of an experienced gelding to illustrate how habituation to material implements could progress from first encounters, as seen in the colt that was castrated, to subsequent encounters in which a horse is understood to act in anticipation of affordances associated with ropes. In this anticipation a parallel emerged with animals of spirit-
mastered households: Horses willed themselves to the ropes of their human-master, much as
deer willed themselves into the dispensation of their spirit-masters. Horses anticipated to be
dressed in new shoes, and to transport their riders in the hunt. Deer anticipated to feed their
hunters and to be dressed in new bodies.
Chapter Eight: Wolves

Introduction: A Tricky Couple
15 October 2013. The weather has been cooling significantly, but the Sorok is still flowing freely. In the morning I walked across the valley to borrow a pair of waders. I crossed the Sorok, changed into my dry boots, and hiked over to Burged's house. When I help him clean out his winter stables or gather dried yak and cow manure in his pasture, he always rewards me with some insightful chat over tea afterwards. Today was no different, and after having worked up a sweat in the compound, we went inside to eat some of Inna's white bread, hardened cream, and sugar. Sitting in their kitchen, Burged told me the story of how a wolf couple had worked together one summer, harassing his stock at summer pasture: The male wolf had approached several Mongolian cows on the far end of the summer pasture, well in sight from the summer cabin where the family were gathered. The wolf was crouching in the tall grass as if ready to attack any one of the large grazing bovines. The wolf's overt posing immediately called for the attention of the householders who left the cabin to rush across the pasture, in hope of chasing away the wolf. Meanwhile, his female partner remained unseen as she walked into the other side of the pasture, the stretch that was now hidden from the householder's sight by their cabin. Here a solitary cow was grazing. After the male wolf had been chased off successfully, the householders slowly returned to their cabin, only to find that the female wolf had killed the cow behind their cabin.

To Burged it was clear that his household had been tricked. The male wolf's crouching had been a performative act intended to captivate the householders' attention, to draw them away from the cabin, to put the cabin as a visual barrier between the staged attack and the real attack. Even if someone had stayed behind at the cabin, their attention would have been drawn to the events at the far end of the pasture, not to what was going on behind their back. That a female was part of the plot only came to light after the fact. The encounter that summer had been humiliating, but it had also been educative. This was, after all, how wolves worked
together. They clearly made effective plans, and people had to be careful not to be misled by their movement. The story was still sinking in, as I was looking out of the rear kitchen window. A steep earthen slope strewn with rocks reached high into the blue sky. Like little dots perched on narrow terraces high above us, Burged and Inna's sheep were calmly grazing. How could they be so calm when wolves had come flying over the top so many times, picking these sheep like apples from a tree? I learned the answer on another visit: Sheep had a three-day memory. After three days they'd be out on the slope again, without a care in the world. They were no match for animals who knew how to use the structures of people against them. They did not tell each other stories of the finesse and trickery of wolves.

As hinted in the vignette above, the intent of this chapter is to provide the reader with a better understanding of how Soiot households negotiated their encounters with wolves. A view to the history of human-wolf relations in the Saians reveals how human attitudes toward wolves have
always been a matter of species composition within the household, as well as the household's degree of mobility within a landscape. Although wolves are highly symbolic animals in the folklore of Turkic peoples (e.g. Drompp 2011), the full extent to which they have been sacralized in the Saians remains somewhat unclear in the literature. My own ethnography recognizes the connection between wolves and spirit-mastered households, but a stronger focus emerges in local recognition of wolves as uniquely intelligent beings in their own right. By seeing wolves in this light, they become competitors not in their ability to deprive households of stock, but in their capacity to learn and to anticipate concealed intentions. If material implements of the household come to serve as communicative devices between humans and horses or reindeer, then landscape modifications, intelligently designed features such as traps, and bodily movement between such features constitute the media of communication between wolves and humans. Whether construed by people or by wolves, structures, devices, and movements become tools of concealment aimed at surprise. In lieu of force, wolves and humans seek to infiltrate each other's social and material worlds under cover of the familiar. At the heart of Soiot human-wolf relations, then, lies the skill to read in another's performance their actual intentions.

**Wolves Among Small Scale and Large Scale Herders**

Riding through northwestern Mongolia in wintery conditions of 1910, John A. Miller, a travel companion to British explorers Douglas A. Carruthers and Morgan P. Price, describes stock-herding nomads south of the Little Altai:

> "The camps of the hardy herdsmen are now clustered in sheltered hollows; their owners' time is largely spent in waging war against the wolf-packs, which nightly harry their sheep-folds, and in interminable tea-drinking, smoking, and chatting round a meagre "tezek" (dung-fed) fire" (1914b:320).

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102 Although not widely in use today, the term 'Little Altai' refers to “a lower terrace of the great Altai ... [marking Siberia's] extreme frontier...” (Malte-Brun 1826:390).
Although this scene is specific to the southwestern corner of Uriankhai, it serves as a starting point in understanding the significance of wolves in the lives of pastoralists of northern Inner Asia. Bernard Charlier's recent work on wolves' "absent presence" (2015:2) in Uvs province of northwestern Mongolia resonates with Miller's account. Charlier's interlocutors were actively guarding against wolves rather than purposefully hunting them. Yet killing a wolf was not exclusively a defensive mechanism, it also increased the herder's hiimor\textsuperscript{103} or understanding, effectiveness, and closeness to the spirit master (Charlier 2012:131). Similarly, Natasha Fijn's work (2011) in Arkhangai and Bulgan provinces of central and north central Mongolia resonates with Miller's account. She describes "a war between respected parties," where "[a] large amount of the herder’s time and energy is spent guarding and protecting the herds against wolf predation" with night time duties involving "men stay[ing] up guarding the animals in their pens" as they verbally respond to wolf calls, attempting to establish their location (2011:210). Miller, Charlier, and Fijn provides us with a consistent picture of human-wolf relations in the steppe lands south of the Saians.

Moving up into far eastern Siberian reindeer country, staying up with herds to wait for the arrival of wolves is a rather foreign concept. Herds are large and far flung, quite unlike the sheep pens of Uvs province. In Sebyan, the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), where herds are kept for meat production, Piers Vitebsky describes how wolves were ruthlessly hunted by reindeer herders with little concern for their souls (2006:271). According to Vitebsky, “the wolf [had] changed from competitor to looter” when reindeer were first domesticated (2006:271). Like other wild animals belonging to Bayanay (spirit master), Eveny herders at Sebyan hunted wolves as part of an original bargain with wild reindeer to enter the domus (2006:27). The act of ruthlessly taking down wolves was thus inextricable from their responsibilities to the herd, even if this pitted them against the spirit master. The taiga herders delineated by Vitebsky, and

\textsuperscript{103}A similar idea existed among Soiots in relation to the bear whose front paws were shaken by a successful hunter who would ask for forgiveness and then receive its power (Ayusheeva 2010:310).
the steppe shepherds described by Miller, Charlier, and Fijn could thus be said to form two
counterpoints on a spectrum of herders’ attitudes toward wolves. The one is guarding against
wolves as carriers of sacral powers, the other is exterminating them as sly thieves in spite of
their sacral ties.

Contemporary Soiot herding and hunting activities are geographically positioned
between Inner Asian pastoralists' and Eurasian reindeer herders' landscapes as described above.
This geographic overlap is reflected also in the species composition of Soiot households, which
have included both reindeer and sheep. It is to be expected then that among Soiots there would
exist a mix of attitudes to wolves. And, indeed, I was able to witness both the ruthlessness
described by Vitebsky for Eveny-wolf relations, as well as the guarding attitudes described by
Charlier. Glowing memories of the systematic eradications of wolves in the 1960s paralleled
the idea that wolves played an important balancing act in the landscape, both from an
ecological-scientific standpoint, and in view of their being emissaries of the spirit master. Total
eradication of any species had to be considered a breach with the equilibrium that kept everyone
alive. And thus, resentment and reverence were curiously mixed when it came to wolves, which
allowed me to witness deliberate wolf hunting at winter pastures, as well as the guarding of
sheep at night from summer pasture pens. This amalgamation of attitudes toward wolves was
also reflected in the regionally diverse approaches to wolves that had historically existed in the
Saians.

**Raiding Wolves, Fleeing Wolves**
How people dealt with wolves in the Saians historically had to do with the kinds of human-
animal engagements in a particular locale, as well as with the type of terrain they moved in. We
know from Polish ethnographer Feliks Kon (1934:95-96[1903]) that transhumant cattle
breeders of the Western Saians had organized wolf raids. Kon provides a detailed account of
Tozhu cattle breeders, whom he calls “Soiots,” at the turn of the century:

“Hunting raids [on wolves] usually occur in response to the suggestion of a well-to-do
Soiot whose stock has been under attack from wolves in the area. Nearby neighbours will join in the hunt. The better-to-do will join on their own horses, while the poor are provided horses by the initiator of the hunt. The group will set out early in the morning, some equipped with fire arms, others with 2-fathom-long lassos (Rus. lasso-ukriuchenami, Soiot uruk) made of willow poles with a spiraled loop-like belt at their ends. To chase the wolves, and for the purpose of self defence—if required—sharpened poles are used. Upon arrival at the site where wolves were reported to prowl, the stock owner, or one of the more experienced hunters, will appoint a position for each hunter to stand in. Hunters are placed in such a way as to leave open a level space in the landscape so that fleeing wolves can be pursued on horse back. Having positioned themselves in such a way, the hunters keep as quiet as they can, gradually creeping up on the wolf pack, in full anticipation of the perfect moment to attack, at which point they begin to shoot. If the wolf pack has noticed the hunters and is alarmed, the hunters’ efforts are directed at blocking the wolves’ way to the mountains and chasing them into wide open space. This is where the pursuit begins. It must be mentioned that Soiots are unable to shoot from their horses’ backs, for which reason they must jump off in order to aim. Such a chase can take all day, until the horses are utterly exhausted.” (Kon 1934:95-96[1903])

Kon's account reflects the relative handicap of herders in steep hill country. Relying on their horses for transportation, they are unable to follow the wolves into the hills. By directing the wolves onto level ground, the herders are able to pit them against the racing pace of their horses. But more importantly, Kon's account illustrates a concerted effort to pursue wolves, which stands in contrast to the way Tofa are said to have responded to wolves.

Although B. E. Petri was able to visit Oka-Soiots in 1925, his most insightful account of wolves comes from observations he made with their Tofa neighbours to the north. Tofas responded to wolf population increases by moving camp. Petri's interlocutors reported that 15
years prior to his visit there had been few wolves, but that their numbers had drastically increased over a period of 12 years, and that at present their appearance had once again decreased (Petri 1927b:19)\(^{104}\). The noted influx had purportedly contributed to the decimation of their reindeer herds (*ibid.*). Petri shows how increases in predation could be tied to decisions about human seasonal camp movement:

“Karagas are highly ineffective in their battle against wolves. They do not use strychnine or traps. As soon as wolves appear and attack reindeer, [they] will vacate such a location and quickly migrate to another. While the wolves are engaged with the fallen reindeer, Karagas will attempt to move under cover of rain or snow in order to conceal their tracks and to prevent wolves from searching for them anew. Often the appearance of wolves will signal the end of summer migrations and usher a quick break up into multiple directions.” (Petri 1927b:19-20)

Of course we cannot not know whether Tofas saw themselves as engaging in a “battle” with wolves, as did the pastoralists of most of Inner Asia, including Kon's “Soiots.” Neither can we be certain Tofas considered their own protective measures as “inefficient.” However, it does make sense that Tofas refrained from the use of steel traps (Rus. *kapkan*) introduced by Russian settlers in their vicinity. The use of such traps had also been a taboo among their Oka-Soiots neighbours (Ayusheeva 2010:309)\(^{105}\) for reasons that may well have exceeded merely the possibility that reindeer could be harmed by them. In a later work, Petri (1928:23) describes the method of moving camp in response to the arrival of wolves as a way of taking ‘flight’ (Rus. *begstvo*). He attributes this running from wolves—rather than running after wolves—to

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\(^{104}\)Compared to Oka, Tofalariia seems to have had much fewer wolves overall. Dyrenkova (AMAE 1940:6) notes that wolves were known to be seen only “sometimes” – unlike other fur bearing animals. Yet prayers were made to the mountain deities to protect reindeer from them (Dyrenkova 2012:154). Even in 2013 Tofalar hunters and herders spoke of occasional wolves only, which can hardly be said for Oka Soiots who reasoned that their wolves were coming from Mongolia.

\(^{105}\)Even during my own fieldwork Soiot interlocutors refrained from using steel traps in any of their hunting. During one instance a Soiot hunter recalled how a Russian visitor had invited him to come set steel traps for sable. The Soiot hunter accepted the invitation out of curiosity. He had never previously used a steel trap. Unsurprisingly, the hunt had been unsuccessful.
underlying ritual motives.

Given the political constraints of his time, Petri had little room to describe the sacral nature of wolves among Tofas. More likely yet, his interlocutors were wise enough to conceal such details from the anthropologists. All Petri was able to record is the claim, shared by Tofa hunters, that “a Karagas [person] does not make his living on harvesting wolves [Rus. Karagas volka ne promyshliaet]” (ibid.). However, the hesitation to confront wolves and to kill them, has been recorded also for the Altai (Potapov 1929:145). Here wolves served as the agents of spirit masters, sent to inflict retribution on herder-hunters who had engaged in unbalanced hunting activities. By sending wolves to kill animals from the domestic herds of human-mastered households, the spirit master was making up for animals that had been stolen from his herds (Broz 2007:299). I encountered this principle also at Uro, where elder Soiot herder-hunter Lundun (b. ca. 1965) explained to me: “As much as you take from the spirit master (Rus. khoziain mestnosti) during the summer [by hunting in excess], that many animals will he take from your herds in winter by way of wolves.” According to Lundun, it was a cycle; a kind of ‘give-and-take. In his view, a respectful hunter who ensured that all things were happening in balance, and who would consequently leave game at rest during the summer, would not suffer wolf attacks in winter. But not all agreed on this. Borzhon later told me that even if a hunter had faithfully performed his hunting rituals to the spirit master, wolves would still come to claim from his stock in winter. Were the wolves really emissaries, or did they act on their own?

Learning Like a Wolf

I asked Grandfather one day: “Who owns the wolves?” “I don't know,” he said. “They walk on their own—their legs feed them” (Rus. Oni khodiat sami po sebe—volka nogi kormiat). Then he continued:

'Each pack (Rus. stai) has its leader (Rus. vozhak), either a male or a female. Females

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106 At another household I was told that the spirits of recently deceased householders could also enlist the aid of wolves or of bog to claim animals.
(Rus. volshitsa, or samka)—leaders or not—are among the smartest of them. A pack consists of up to 10 members, although pack size grows during the rut. At this time the wolves will bite each other, fighting over the female. They can travel between 50 and 60 kilometers in a day, and a single wolf will get to be about 15 years of age.'

Grandfather knew a lot about wolves and he hated them passionately. His hatred was not aimed merely at 'wolf kind'. He had known individuals. A particularly memorable one had followed him to his summer pasture once, where eventually it stole a live lamb from his neighbour. The neighbour had grabbed a rifle and pursued the wolf on her horse. When she had caught up with the wolf she shot it and returned with her lamb. 'One always resists a wolf,' grandfather concluded. And there seemed to be no limit to the cruelty permissible in resisting a wolf. The men at Uro used to mix poison into ground horse meat hamburger (Rus. kotletki) which they would lay out in the woods. A wolf would die within 30 minutes of eating the bait. 'Bleeding from its nostrils and mouth, it would scratch the ground, running from tree to tree, banging its head against the trunks. Eventually it would collapse. They would skin it and burn the flesh.'

Yet grandfather's apparent contempt for wolves was also mixed with admiration. Wolves, perhaps, were not so much enemies as they were competitors. Not competitors for game. There was never a sense of competition over natural resources. The spirit master either gave, or he didn't. Rather, they were competitors in skill, and in the ability to learn quickly. Grandfather admired wolves for their ability to acquire and act upon fresh information. This was what made them dangerous. They acquired knowledge and ability through attentive observation, second to no other non-human predator. Grandfather himself was a man of many skills. He was an accomplished hunter and fisher, a skillful woodworker and birch bark carver. He was a mechanic and an electrician. These skills he had acquired through a sharp sense of observation and by trying them out on his own. He had built a large sawmill from an old moped outside his cabin. Each time he turned a dried log into boards, half a moped was moving along the cut. Ingenious. To receive cellphone signal at his cabin he had placed a hand crafted metal dish at
the top of a hill to extend the cell. His meat was hidden in a bear proof cellar filled with ice in
the slope of a river bend, and in his spare time he would contemplate new trap designs. Most of
his inventions were not beautiful, but they were workarounds that solved real problems. Keen
observation and experimental practice had made grandfather the sought after man he was today.

Above all, however, grandfather was sought for his fine work as an iron smith. People
from the village would place orders ranging from bread baking pans to pliers, and from hoof
nails to horse shoes. And in his shop he taught me one day how to make horse shoes. He could
have explained in words what he wanted me to do, but instead he performed each task and then
had me mimic each move as closely as I could. He would make an angled strike with a sledge
hammer, then have me repeat it until I had it just right. He would fine tune an edge with the
strike of a slender hammer, and I would work until I could repeat it. As my moves became
increasingly coordinated with his, we began moving back and forth between fire and anvil like
a team. His method and rhythm were beginning to make sense to me, and soon there emerged
between us a natural workflow. After a while grandfather said, 'You're just like a wolf, Alex!'
(Rus."Nu Sashka, ty priam kak volk!"). His statement took me by surprise. What did wolves
have to do with working together in a smith shop? But as my skills improved, grandfather would
repeatedly use terms describing wolf behavior to commend my progress: 'You're nimble like a
wolf,' (Rus. "Nu tyi shustryi kak volk, Sania.") or 'you think like a wolf' (Rus. "soobrazhaesh
ekak volk"). Only later did it dawn on me: In grandfather's experience wolves were able not only
to follow sequences they had observed, they were able to anticipate the next step in yet
uncompleted sequences. They were able to see ahead and anticipate another's intent. In some
sense, grandfather was a wolf.\footnote{Like the wolf-birthed black smithing ancestors from the origin myth of "the early Turks (the Tujue of Chinese
sources), who dominated Inner Asia from 552 to about 630 C.E. and again from about 682 to about 744 C.E." (Drompp 2011:516-517),
grandfather combined in his person an occupational tradition historically associated
with wolves.}
Invisible Movement, Empathetic Evasion
Grandfather had been teaching me in his shop how to see like a wolf. And seeing like a wolf required putting yourself in the position of the one watching your movements. Burged's recollection of the wolf couple's deceptive work, described above, illustrates the wolf's keen awareness of the field of vision in other animals, including humans. It also speaks of the human awareness of this trait in wolves, an awareness I soon began to acquire for myself. On my regular hikes between Uro and Sorok I often encountered wolf tracks in fresh snow. One autumn morning I noticed two adult wolf tracks running side by side. Both tracks were fresh, as it had snowed only an hour ago. The couple were headed in the same direction as myself, and so I followed their tracks for a good while until their even pace approached an isolated winter cabin perched on a steep stretch of river bank. The family were home, and they were keeping a few sheep and cattle. Their animals were leisurely scratching away for forage within close range of
the cabin, which was surrounded by uneven, sparsely wooded, hilly terrain. Whenever the trail I had been following went over a small rise in the ground, the wolf tracks would depart from it, running a diversion, only to return to the trail behind the rise. At first I did not understand these maneuvers. The cabin was now within a rife shot's distance, and I was surprised the wolves had ventured so close to human habitation in broad daylight.

Curious to know what these wolves might have seen, I crouched down in their tracks. My eyes were now level with the height at which I suspected their's had been. Standing in the wolf track with my head lowered, I could no longer see the cabin. My body was now hidden from sight of someone who might be looking through the north-facing window of the cabin. Had I followed the wolves' tracks in this ducking position all the way from the denser forest, I would have reached the cabin without once being exposed to eyes peering from behind the reflecting glass of the window. I visited the same household two months later in the depth of winter, and I was told that wolves had recently been here in the night. They had taken two sheep from inside their pen. This was quite a daring feat, I was assured, since the winter pen is located directly below the kitchen window. Judging by the wolves' tracks in the morning, the sheep had been heaved over the fence, down the slope, and into the forest. It was a rare thing that wolves would enter a pen and carry whole carcasses over a fence as tall as this one, the householders said. Looking back to my previous observations of the wolf tracks which I had followed around the cabin, it seemed plausible that the attack had been carried out by members of the same pack. Their earlier visits had afforded them an intimate knowledge of the terrain, and they had clearly established a path based on what they anticipated could be seen from the cabin's windows. They had empathetically circumnavigated the human gaze.

But not only were these wolves attuned to the ways in which humans looked for them in the landscape, they had also become aware of several of the implements humans were using against them, and they had adjusted their movements accordingly: Uncle Borzhon remembered how he had joined a group of hunters who, under the leadership of the region’s mayor, had
rented a helicopter in 1989 or 1990 to hunt wolves. Flying over dense stands of bare larch crowns reaching tall into the sky, the men had tracked a pack of wolves on a hillside. As the pilots lowered the aircraft for better aim from the air, the wolves slowed down and began looking for shelter. Each wolf hiding behind a tree stood on its rear legs, front paws propped up against an upright stem. Their bodies were flush with the trunks, and they manoeuvred their bodies in relation to the hovering helicopter in the sky. Like the wolf couple approaching the cabin, these wolves were anticipating the human gaze, and more likely the flight line of bullets to come from barrels pointed at them through the helicopter's open sliding door. Borzhon never again hunted wolves from a helicopter. In later years renting them had become too expensive, and as the experiment had shown, hunting wolves from the air was an inefficient method. There was no concealed intent in the flying fortress of an MI8 helicopter.

**Designs of Concealed Intent**

Of less conspicuous design had been old-fashioned wolf traps. If wolves knew how to position themselves in the landscape in such a way as to conceal their movement from the human gaze, then humans had found ways to conceal their intentions from wolves in equally shrewd ways. Several of my interlocutors in Tofalariia remembered the use of what they called 'wolf cages' (Rus. *volchia sadka*). This was a kind of trap well known throughout Eastern Siberia. Their descriptions of this trap design closely resembled Cherkasov's (2013:165 [1867]) account of a design that would be erected during the summer months. Wooden stakes were arranged in two circles—one inside another—to form a corridor of no more than 10-12 inches in width. In autumn live bait, such as a lamb, was placed inside the closed inner circle. A square opening in the outside wall allowed young and inexperienced wolves, drawn by the calls of the bait animal, to enter and familiarize themselves with the structure. Come winter, when the wolves had grown and their fur was thick, a door would be installed several inches wider than the corridor into

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108 The 'wolf cage' is only one among many different types of traps that were used to catch wolves. My interlocutors in Oka described several other designs not mentioned here. Pavlinskaia (2002:128), in her field notes, describes additional designs.
which it opened. A habituated wolf could now enter the corridor in one direction only. With the wolf unable to turn in the narrow corridor, the door would serve as trap until a hunter would come on horseback to conceal his tracks. He would kill the trapped wolf inside the corridor without leaving the saddle by silently strangulating it from above. Blood spill was averted to prevent disclosure of the purpose of the structure. But like other wolf trapping devices that had been used in Oka and Tofalariia until the second half of the 20th century (e.g. cross structured traps, iced slope traps, and concealed knife blades), the last remaining wolf cages were now rotting away.

Soiot and Tofa interlocutors explained to me that wolves had come to understand the danger inherent in these man made objects. They were no longer venturing into these traps. Had wolves seen through the concealed intentions embedded in these structures? No particular historical cases were reported in which someone had used a wolf trap carelessly, compromising its effectiveness, possibly revealing its purpose to wolves. Of course it is possible that improper use contributed to the discontinuation of traps in Oka and Tofalariia. But this possibility was never mentioned to me. If, as Alfred Gell (1996:29) argues, traps “communicate the idea of a nexus of intentionalities between hunters and prey animals, via material forms and mechanisms,” then wolves may be said to have identified this communication, or at least the danger of its concealed scheme had outweighed the lure of its unreachable bait. Although constructed at a rate intended to habituate wolves to a trap's deceptive harmlessness, more recently the sight of traps had inculcated suspicion, leading wolves to avoid them, and eventually defeating the structure's hidden intent altogether. Riding through Tofalarian forest with Denis, I came across several sites which he indicated had once been prime wolf trapping locations. All that was left now were rotten remains, left in the taiga as monuments to an outdated human scheme.
Although traps are human made artefacts, and wolf dens a form of residential architecture, I will argue that both structures share a quality of hidden intent or, at the very least, an intent to hide something. Biologist Michael H. Hansell (2005:2) groups homes, traps, foraging burrows, and other structures under the terms 'animal architecture' and 'animal-built-structures,' grouping together in his comparison humans and other mammals with birds, fish, and insects in their ability to modify materials toward specific purposes. Humans may be the only vertebrates to construct traps (Hansell 2005:21), while wolves rely on trapping prey by utilizing landforms in combination with strategic pack formation in their pursuits. But wolves do construct elaborate underground dens, many of which can hardly be described as simple shelters. They can be seen as architectural modifications of the landscape, the design of which originates with wolves and their predictions of patterns of movement in other animals. According to my interlocutors, wolf dens were built in part with the aim to evade humans. As most hunters in Oka would confirm, it is was not easy to locate a wolf den. They were well hidden, and numerous stories accounted for the various tactics employed by experienced wolves in returning to their dens in fresh snow without leaving a direct track that could be followed.

In early autumn of 2013, one of Uncle Ardan's (b. ca. 1965) healthy working horses had been grazing in the dead angle of a sharp river bend of the Sorok, just north of his cabin. When
Aleksei, his neighbour, walked over to visit Ardan one morning, he passed the spot where the horse had been grazing. All that was left of the horse were blood stains in the fine dusting of early snow. The horse had been torn into pieces, which had been carried uphill, and into the woods. There was nothing left of the horse on the river front. Hobbled horses that were grazing near human households had not been targeted by wolves for a long time, and everyone in the valley was shocked by the news. Ardan identified the incident as the work of the founding couple of a wolf “family” that he had been tracking for some time. He had read their tracks, counting some nine or ten individuals. In this case, he figured the wolves had burrowed the meat somewhere in the forest as a stash for later winter use. The herders at Uro had a general idea of the locations of several wolf dens within their vicinity, but these were not the dens of wolves bothering their stock. Their knowledge of den locations was rarely exact, and even where it was precise, certainty was short lived because wolves relocated or built new dens as soon as a location had been compromised. Ardan believed that the wolf couple near his house was rotating between at least two dens, making it particularly difficult to track them. Annual rotation between dens, and sometimes within a single season, as well as the maintenance of multiple entrances to each den, were all part of a wolf's strategic maneuvering.

Den construction was not described to me directly as a weapon against humans, but herder-hunters at Uro understood den placement and positioning in the landscape as strategic and purposefully covert. Like human architecture, which fulfills many tasks, wolf dens had to be seen as more than shelters. They could serve as concealed cashes, as anchor points in extensive migrations, and as places to safely rear young. They were built on knowledge of prevailing winds, external visibility, optimal return routes, and proximity to water and game.

109 Wolves would not normally eat a whole animal, unless they were systematically building a food stash.
110 Although dens could be located near households, wolves frequenting a certain den were known to target only stock of more distant households. In the words of Buriat shaman Stepanovich, ‘wolves do not attack “their” cattle – that is, cattle living within their territory. They tear [lit. take bites] (Rus. kuski derut) only from cattle located at a distance from their own home grounds.’ As a member of the Oka-Buriat wolf clan, Stepanovich attributed great sacrality to wolves. At his own cabin outside Orlik, he was observing the life cycle of a single female who kept a den near his grounds. She had never attacked his stock, and he did not mind her presence. On the contrary, he would watch her coming and going from the den.
passes. They took into account the grazing patterns of domestic stock, vertical transhumance, and broader regional wolf migrations. Thus they were positioned like traps. And like traps, which were meant to hide their ultimate purpose, these dens with their multiple entrances were edifices of illusion: a wolf could enter a den and never leave, yet she would be gone before a hunter had discovered another exit. Like a wolf trap, so the den could become a nexus between hunter and wolf. Even if it was not intended to trap a human in terms of physical containment, and its “material forms and mechanisms” differed, it was built at the very least with the intent to remain hidden. And were it to be found out, it had been designed to provide the wolf with options for escape and possible counter attack, which remained invisible to the hunter.

**The Den as a Nexus**

Ardan's horse had been killed in autumn – the wrong time to locate a wolf den. Wolf dens had to be searched for in late spring, when the cubs were immature and dependent upon shelter. Their parents would roam in search of food, often leaving their young behind for days on end. In their parents' absence a litter was known to make noise near the den's entrance. Listening for such sounds could lead a careful hunter directly to a den, even in the absence of snow. Wolf cubs were also known to stray from their home, often returning to it in a straight line. At this point in the year, they had not yet acquired the skill of concealing their tracks through backtracking. If snow was still on the ground, the search was simplified. Grandfather recalled an instance ten years earlier, when together with a younger relative, he had come upon the tracks of an adult wolf in fresh May snow. As the two were following the wolf's tracks for miles, they noticed it had caught a hare without breaking into a chase, or altering its path. From the grooves in the snow it was evident how the wolf had held the hare in its mouth, periodically setting it down for a rest. After a long trek, the hunters noticed how the wolf had begun to drag a bit. Shortly thereafter, both spotted five wolf cubs playing under a tall cedar tree.

Opposite the den, in the shade of the tree, snow was covered in blood. Ripped pieces of hare flesh were laying about. Another hare had been brought to the den by a second adult wolf.
Both mature wolves had taken off again. The men killed the litter. According to Soiot seer (canon of traditional Soiot beliefs) to kill an entire brood of any species was prohibited, but by allowing the parents to live, the men would have avoided the impermissible (Ayusheeva 2010:309). However, they proceeded to skin each body, buried three of the carcasses, and then poisoned the flesh of the remaining two. Grandfather left the poisoned carcasses by the den for the parents to eat upon their discovery of the raid. He knew about wolves' revenge: 'You must leave the little ones for them to eat. The meat will calm their fury. If one fails to calm wolves after an attack of this sort, they will track the hunter and catch up with him.' “A wolf is not a companion” (Rus. volk ne tovarish), he concluded. His anticipation of the wolves' anger was in many ways indicative of the nexus of intentionalities represented by the den as an intentionally concealed structure. With its cover blown, the wolf would be infuriated. Grandfather did not know what had become of the adults they had intended to poison, but killing a litter only reduced the headcount for a season. Furthermore, cubs and single males were not understood as key players in this strategic yet opportunistic game.

Although all wolves represented a threat to domestic stock, and in spite of talk about mature and cunning males, it was the wolf-mother of a pack that would be targeted during a hunt, and who was seen to hold ties to a particular territory and its dens. Referring to her late father in law, Inna (b. ca. 1975) recalled:

“Grandfather said that if you are going to kill wolves, preferably kill the female. If the female dies, then the male leader of the pack will abandon the gang and go away in search of another female. And it seems that here in this territory there is a female. Here she has her house [Rus. u nee svoi dom], she gives birth to her little children here, and so she cannot leave [Rus. detenoshek prinosit, i id’ti ne kuda]. And these males, they

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111On another occasion I asked my neighbour Borzhon about this process. He said that they would skin the entire body of the cub, including head and tail, leaving no fur on the body. I was curious to know whether parents would refrain from eating their dead offspring if they recognized it by face or fur. Bulat said that if one wanted to turn it in, one was required to deliver the complete fur of the animal. He also thought that parents would likely eat their offspring, even if tail and face were to remain on the carcass.
come here… They come and they go. [...] That is why grandfather always said to kill
the female. It is useless to kill the male. She will find another, and again they will
terrorize [you].”

To be truly effective, then, a herder-hunter had to find the lead female. Any kind of predictable
wolf movement hinged on her, and her movements were anchored to at least one den. As it
turned out, not only human hunters knew which members of a wolf pack had to be targeted for
maximum efficiency. Wolves too had figured out which members of a household had to be
targeted or coopted in order to best secure their own aims within a herding compound.

**Infiltrating Dog-human Relations**

Uncle Borzhon had a vivid memory particularly of one such wolf, a lone animal, which he
described to me as “an abnormally obnoxious (Rus. *nagly*) wolf.” In the summer of 2003 this
wolf had harassed his household while at summer camp on upper Sorok river. It had beset his
stock day after day, and especially during the nights, over the course of two or three weeks. For
most of the time Borzhon had been in town, but his wife Ranzhur and their sons had taken care
of the household’s yak herd, their cows, horses, and sheep. At night the wolf would cross the
fenced structure surrounding their summer compound. Once inside, the wolf was reckless
enough to frequent even the narrow pathway between Borzhon’s cabin and shed. Here his
hunting dogs were tied up for the night. During the first few of these nightly visitations his dogs
had been barking insistently. But over time, Borzhon recalled, the wolf had been “making
friends” (Rus. *podruzhilsia*) with his dogs. At first I was not clear what Borzhon meant with
“making friends” with his dogs, since all dog owners at Uro knew from experience that wolves
were quick to kill watchdogs, particularly if they were on a leash, as were Borzhon’s. Although
it had been the dog’s job to warn the family of approaching predators, both dogs remained silent
now as the wolf’s visits increased in frequency. Borzhon reasoned that perhaps his dogs had
become “too scared” to bark. Clearly they had been dealing with a young and especially strong
wolf. After all, it had killed “one animal after another” over the course of these weeks.
Every night, following the slightest sound, the men would rush into the dark, rifles loaded. But they were never able to take the wolf down. When Borzhon finally returned to the summer pasture on his horse, his family related the situation to him. He left the same day he had arrived, riding back to Uro where he had a secret stash of wolf poison from years past. Many people were known to have hidden small stashes of Barium which had been dispensed to them prior to the state ban on wolf poison. At the time of my fieldwork, the majority of these hidden stashes had been exhausted. But in 2003 Borzhon still had some left. Back at the summer pasture, he inserted the capsules into bait meat and then set it out for the night. The wolf came again, and by next morning, Borzhon’s sons found the wolf on a bend down river. It had collapsed on the banks of the Sorok, and against their expectations, it had not been a young energetic wolf. Borzhon described him rather as old and haggard112. Although it was poison that had brought him down, the incident of the “abnormally obnoxious wolf” spoke much more empathetically of yet another locally known wolf strategy, namely to infiltrate established dog-human relations.

Singling out and isolating select animals for the purpose of preying on them may be one way wolves generalize their socially learned knowledge, applying it also to humans and their stock. But how does one account for what looks like a systematic destabilization of the human-dog tie? Thinking about differences in cooperation between species, Virányi & Range (2014:55-56) write:

“Further research needs to examine [...] to what extent dog-human and wolf-wolf cooperation relies on the same mechanisms. Based on our current knowledge, we suggest that dog-human cooperation likely relies on the leading role of humans enhanced by the dependency of dogs on humans and by a steeper dominance hierarchy that characterizes dogs in comparison to wolves.”

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112It is possible that the dead body belonged to another wolf which had ingested the poison, but Borzhon and his sons did not suggest so. The harassment had ceased after this death. The mention of their earlier misjudgment regarding the animal’s age was likely intended to further emphasize the multi-faceted unpredictability of wolves.
Indeed, it would seem that the wolf at Borzhon's summer pasture did not share a common sense of subjection with the household's dogs. Instead, Borzhon had spoken of the wolf as if it had recognized the dogs' subordinate function of reporting to their owners, a role in which the dogs became the owner's eyes in the pasture. By “befriending,” through frequent visitation at very close proximity and possibly by implying a threat to the dogs' lives, the wolf infiltrated the hierarchical relationship that united dogs and master, making them temporarily complicit in the wolf's agenda, and silencing them without having to kill them. This infiltration was silent, and under cover of night it remained invisible.

Death in the Odourless
To counter-infiltrate a wolf, a hunter not only had to be silent and invisible, but most importantly, he had to be odorless. On an early afternoon in mid-June, Saizhin (b. ca. 1975) arrived at our summer camp on horseback. Saizhin and his wife Valia were keeping a herd of yak at their remote summer pasture in Khan-Modon. The herd had shrunk in recent years from 70 head to a mere 34—a decline Saizhin blamed primarily on wolves, although bears had also been a problem. Located at the intersection of four river valleys, it was a difficult task to look out for predators at Khan-Modon. And unlike other summer pastures, Saizhin's and Valia's valley had wolves coming and going in all directions. When I asked Saizhin about the use of traps he only laughed. 'They were of little help. You'd catch a few wolves that way, but from then on no wolf would step near that trap again.' “Wolves are cunning,” he said, and “they learn fast.” If a method was to be efficient against wolves, it had to be odorless and invisible. The only weapon that had really worked was scentless poison. As we sat down for tea in Dagzama's summer kitchen on the confluence of Tustuk and Iakhashop rivers, Saizhin gave me a little glimpse of Soiot experience with natural poisons.

A Soiot elder once told Saizhin how Soiots had used wolf poison long before the Soviet's introduction of Barium. This was an interesting fact for me, as I had read about encounters of wolf and fox poisonings in Feliks Kon's recollections of Soiots from Uriankhai (1934), recorded
in pre-revolutionary times. I knew that poisons had been introduced by settlers under the Tsar, but had there been prior indigenous use of poison? According to Saizhin's elder, Oka-Soiots had been making their own poison from a local plant called Bal'shargana. In Russian Saizhin referred to the plant as Bear Grass (Rus. medvezh'ia trava). He said that bears liked it and that entire hillsides were covered with it at Khan-Modon. People would locate tiny buds of the plant before they bloomed. To make the poison, they would take empty steel buckets to cover the shoots in their natural habitat. Rocks were then placed on top of the upturned buckets. This "absence of light seems to turn its juices into poison," said Saizhan. Once the plant had grown to its full size inside the bucket, people carefully harvested the leaves, laid them out to dry, and eventually crushed them down to a powder.

Mixed in with small bits of meat, and strewn in strategic locations in the forest, the powder was easily masked by the scent of blood and meat. Saizhan reckoned that Bear Grass would have been much less powerful than factory prepared Barium, and that wolves would have collapsed only within two or three days after repeatedly ingesting the powder. Although Saizhin was planning on putting the elder's memory to the test, he had not yet done so. But given the circumstances, he was ready to try it out any time now. In a way, returning to his ancestors' pre-Soviet practice would allow him to circumnavigate the government's ban on the use of commercial wolf poisoning. At the same time, it would be a way of responding to the shrewdness of wolves who seemed to evade all other means of extermination. Although wolves were such keen observers and schemers, they had never been able to detect poison. For this reason—in Saizhin's memory—there had been very few wolves during the Soviet years. The kolkhoz had had "a really good thing going" with their poisoning methods, he recalled. Herds were growing substantially then. For Saizhin the ancient Soiot way of concealing death in the

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113 Bal'shargana is also a place name on the Upper Tissa river on the border to Tyva. Sasha's Bear Grass likely corresponds to what is commonly known in English as 'wolves bane' (Aconitum), a highly poisonous plant that has been used by indigenous hunters from East Asia to the Americas. For an insightful overview of traditional indigenous uses of Aconitum, see Jones, D. E. 2007. Poison Arrows: North American Indian Hunting and Warfare. Austin: University of Texas Press.
odorless poison, which the Soviet method of Barium had merely intensified by a few times, "was the way to go" even now.

**Conclusion**

I attempted in this chapter to provide several examples that characterize the encounters of Soiot households with wolves. During my fieldwork there were very many encounters with wolves, most of which I decided not to include in this chapter. The examples I did select relied primarily on recollections of past encounters, intersections between wolves and people during which I had not personally been present. The time that had passed allowed people to make sense of these encounters, something that helped them interpret ongoing encounters. This retrospective view also allowed me to establish what seemed to lie at the heart of Soiot human-wolf relations: the skill to read in another's performance their actual intentions. I introduced this concept with a vignette of a collaborating wolf couple in a summer pasture before briefly reviewing the divergent approaches among small and large scale herders of northern Mongolia and northeastern Russia. The chapter then noted two divergent historical regional approaches to dealing with wolf predation, most notably the Tofa method of "fleeing" wolves by moving camp.

Although cosmological explanations for wolf behavior played an important role among Soiots, my fieldwork suggested that wolves were known primarily as shrewd learners who anticipated the intentions of others through careful observation of routine movement. This became especially clear through my blacksmithing experience with grandfather Dorzho who taught me many things about wolves in Soiot context, not least to view wolves as active learners. To illustrate their capacity to observe how others observed, I described how two wolves had empathetically evaded the human gaze in what may have been preparation of a raid on sheep two months later. This concealed nature of wolf movement was then paralleled in the hidden intent of human and wolf-designed structures. I examined a traditional wolf trap design and compared its concealment of intent to the design of a wolf den, each of which represents a nexus between hunter and wolf in the landscape. The trap concealed in its structure human intent
directed against the wolf, while the wolf den was based on mechanisms designed by the wolf with the human in mind. The chapter concluded with what may be two pinnacle aspects of wolf-human relations in Oka: Firstly, the wolf’s ability to infiltrate the hierarchical sociality of the dog-human interface, thereby rendering the herder powerless, and secondly, the herder’s ability to conceal odorless poison, thereby circumnavigating a wolf’s keen senses and suspending its skill as expert learner.
Chapter Nine: Conclusion

Introduction
I will now revisit the core research questions with which this thesis set out in the introduction. Because my questions grew from material I collected in the field, the logic of this thesis is inherently inductive in that it moves from specific observations to broader generalizations. Several new themes emerged in the course of writing up my field notes, and I have chosen to include several of these in response to the three sub questions, which help structure this conclusion. The main research question around which this thesis is oriented asked:

“How are the relations of Soiot herder-hunters with 'wild' and 'domestic' animals best understood in light of a past defined by reindeer domestication, and framed by competing sacred narratives about 'taming’?”

One preliminary but overarching observation is that skills of interspecies communication in today's Soiot (and to lesser degree Tofa) population are no longer well represented in reindeer. This is an irony since the Russian literature strongly emphasizes the role of reindeer. While communicative skill continues to be honed between humans and other animals, for Soiots the bulk of this skill now seems to be invested in horses, yak, dogs, and even wolves. This generalized observation, which I will address in detail below, sums up the first part of my answer to the core question of this research.

The second part of my answer proposes that human-animal relations are mutually beneficial only where a relationship remains negotiable, or open, and therefore able to be reciprocally balanced. Furthermore, this understanding must be extended to all species within a sacred landscape, including animals belonging to the human household. This part of the answer specifically addresses the wild/tame dichotomy, noting essentially identical parameters at play in the domains of both animals of the forest and animals of the household. What qualifies human-animal relations in this context is the negotiability of intentions, a quality that is marginalized in domestication contexts that emphasize human domination. The Saian herder,
in contrast, not only benefits from the independence of his animals’ intelligent navigation of the landscape and therefore not relying on extensive human care or protection, but he also relies on their recognition of benefits in their relationship to the household – a balance Ingold has referred to as “dual allegiance” (1980:99). Although the relations between herder-hunters and animals with which they interact can be far from egalitarian, my argument proposes that the intentions and viewpoints of other animals are taken into consideration, because only by so doing can the participation of another being be drawn into one's dedication toward a specific task. This observation largely agrees with Charles Stépanoff (2012), who has suggested that “joint commitment” between herders and their reindeer is reliant upon openness to the intentions of non-human animals.

Illustration 28: Old 'Vertushki' (device to prevent fawn from tangling when tied down) brought from Tofalaria in 1994, in possession of Soiot reindeer herder Iumzhap. © 2014, Author

The argument of openness speaks directly against notions of domestication that are based primarily on force or subjugation in the anthropocentric and patriarchal sense by which pastoralism has been identified as opposed to hunting economies (cf. Ingold 2000:61-76). Instead, I agree with Ingold's revised position on the northern pastoralist who controls his herd
by assuming a position akin to that of the spirit master through an anthropomorphic inversion of perspectives (Ingold 2015:27). My argument addresses the nuances of this "control," by showing that the spirit-mastered household, and its human-mastered mirror image, operate on a model of openness to the intentions expressed by its members. In as far as the ascription of autonomy to others is concerned, contemporary herder-hunters, who trace their descent to hunter-hunter ancestors, continue to approach animals belonging to human-mastered herds (i.e. domesticated animals) in ways similar to how they approach animals belonging to spirit-mastered herds (i.e. animals of prey). Although issues of ownership are not usually ambiguous, nor contested, between spirit-owned herds and human-owned animals, in both instances animals are seen as members of a household and must accordingly be approached in terms of a balanced relationship vis-a-vis their owners.

Yet, it would be incomplete—and inaccurate for that matter—to argue perspectival inversion as sole ground upon which distinctions are made, locally, between spirit and human owned herds. In the introduction to this thesis, I touched on the emergence of interconnected kinds in the context of a formation of kinds among degrees (Kohn 2014:278; cf. Peirce's continuum, Deacon 2012). What I had in mind was the fluidity with which reindeer moved between forest and household, in spite of the ways in which categories such as 'domestic' or 'wild' may have come to be inscribed upon them. Based on how degrees of difference in behavior and appearance had been perceived and interpreted by humans, reindeer could indeed become kinds – animals either of the 'wild' or of the 'domestic' sort. However, given their continued ability to live in both environments, viewing reindeer in terms of degrees remains useful, even where a division into kinds co-exists. In semiology, Kohn (2013) has referred to the symbolic quality of human language as a kind that has emerged among degrees of communicative variation across species, and which now serves as a marker, setting humans apart from other species in one sense or another. Yet he argues that even the symbolic nature of language remains open and therefore intertwined with the vast variety of degrees that exist.
across all possibilities within the semiosphere (Kohn 2014). Relating this observation back to reindeer and yak, we note how herders manage the movement of their animals in such a way as to enable them to remain open and intertwined with a variety of degrees of being that are open to them outside the confines conventionally inscribed upon them by the household.

* * *

I have attempted to show how the same idea of openness (or potentiality) applies not only to reindeer but also to other sentient beings, including the landscape itself, within which these relations are emplaced. In the following pages I recast select examples, arranged in response to the three sub questions from the introduction:

a) “How does collaboration between humans, animals, and spirits increase affordances in a sacred landscape?”

b) “How do space and time affect collaborative intensity between humans and animals, both in terms of seasonal and historical fluctuations?”

c) “How are material implements and structures of the household used as communicative devices between humans and other animals?”

I will address these questions in three sections. Section one—Perspective—examines the connection between affordance and perspectival expansion (cf. DeCastro 1996, 1998), which enables animals to hold parallel viewpoints. This provides animals the autonomy of withholding their potential from human-animal relations. I then propose the notion of 'deliberate incomplete domestication,' framing it within the ability to withhold once's capacity from interspecies social relations. In section two—Proximity—I respond to Charles Stépanoff (2012) and others (Stépanoff, et al. forthcoming), who have focused on intermittent (i.e. temporal) proximity, by emphasizing the spatial aspect of proximity. Using Bernard Charlier's (2015) notion of 'presence in absence,' I further expand on the concept of proximity to show how intimate space can remain invisible. Under the term 'collaborative autonomy' I then propose a kind of interpersonal
proximity that sustains inter-species social relations. And in the third and final section—Materiality—I build on Alfred Gell’s (1996) idea of a nexus of intentionalities to emphasize the interpretative fluidity of materials, and to apply it to what I call ‘mutual readings’ enfolded in the material surface of the landscape. I conclude with an attempt to position implements of domestication within Tim Ingold’s (2007) ‘alternative histories’ of materials, before concluding with a small number of promising lines of inquiry for future work in the Eastern Saians.

1. Perspective
Looking at family photo albums belonging to various homes in the valley of Uro, depicting the early to mid 2000s, I was struck by images in which reindeer and horses, yak, and dairy cows were seen mingling near households. Although these encounters were not a daily occurrence, because each species possesses different feeding patterns and because several of them come to visit their human households only periodically, my friends had fond memories of these photographed instances of interspecies mingling. To people’s initial surprise, the reindeer had not upset the other species within the household. Described to me as docile and gentle around other animals of the household, these reindeer were never perceived as a threat by other animals to the limited carrying capacity of their valley. Their primary feed was located at higher elevation. However, at the time of my stay, the relatively recent departure of reindeer from Uro was not lamented only for the loss of the sweet tranquility they seemed to have contributed to this more than human community, but also for the convenience they had represented as a readily available means of transportation for hunters. Family members from several households had made use of their unique attributes as draught animals in challenging terrain. Now that the deer were gone from Uro, for reasons discussed at length in this thesis, the possibilities for hunters to move through the landscape had once again narrowed, and the affordances held in horses and occasional four-wheelers had become more important again.

Affordance and Perspective
The theory of affordance provides us with a practical basis on which to examine the coming
together of species. My argument has been that where humans and other beings enter mutual relationships, the perspective each party holds of the landscape and of its potential resources becomes expanded. As a species increasingly accesses affordances opened up to it in the landscape through association with another, its own perspective and its consequent ability to identify possibilities is broadened. This argument presupposes two things; firstly, that each species' perspective is tied to a specific set of possibilities, forming what might be called a species-specific affordance domain, and, secondly, it suggests that affordances are utilized only when they are recognized. The literature on affordances is split particularly on the topic of affordance and recognition. One side argues that affordances are always already present, recognized or not (e.g. Gibson 2015[1979]), while another side understands affordances to come into existence only when they are recognized (e.g. Norman 1988). When proposing that interspecies sociality expands an entity's perspective and thereby broadens its ability to engage for its own benefit the affordances of others, my argument supports Gibson and others in that it assumes that affordances are always already there, and that the possibility of their recognition is too, if not always already engaged. In this sense, I frame affordance as potentiality that is brought forward through experimental (most often serendipitous) interspecies combinations.

The household represents one place in which experimentation with possible combinations of species, skills, and perspectives takes place on a continuous basis. The diverse qualities themselves, which are found in the household, constitute affordances that have been in existence even prior to their recognition. As species cross paths in the household, their skill sets may come to complement each other. By way of contact routines are formed which optimize combinations of needs with possibilities between beings. Thus, for Tofas the horse's body affords a navigational advantage over reindeer, particularly in the animal's ability to

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114 In this context it is difficult to ascertain whether an affordance is located within the landscape, or whether it is partially located in the entity which opens up possibilities for another being through its specific skills. In many situations another's skill itself presents an affordance.

115 To ride a horse or reindeer remains an unrealized possibility until someone trains and mounts the animal. The affordance of riding itself, as well as the possibilities that come within reach as the result of riding, may not be foreseen. Instead, they emerge from mutual engagement.
function in the heat of summer and to carry heavier loads over longer distances at a swifter pace, qualities which are particularly useful for the procurement of winter firewood during the summer. Reindeer on the other hand move through deep snow, ascend steep inclines, and do not require paths, all of which are prerequisites for a successful winter hunt. A combination of both species' skill sets defines the seasonal rhythm of Tofa hunter-herder movement in the landscape: In winter surefooted reindeer carry hunters into the taiga at slow pace, while feeding on lichen growing in trees and at high altitude. During this time their horses roam freely, foraging in snow-covered valleys. In spring, the reindeer are released to sustain themselves, and the horses are rounded up for summer. Fully tacked, they swiftly carry their riders and packs along well tread paths, following routes of even distance between known grass patches throughout the taiga. In combining the possibilities of horses with those of reindeer, Tofas see the land through the eyes of both species. This perspectival expansion affords them year-round mobility, while it requires structuring their movement around the specific needs of each species.

To invert the focus on affordances recognized by humans in the skills and possibilities of other animals, I would like to draw attention to the affordances animals may locate in humans. In chapter five I invited the reader on a sable hunt with dogs during which a sable's tracks in the snow were repeatedly lost by both humans and canines. Because humans and dogs were losing the track at different times, and on the bases of different shortcomings in each of their sensory repertoires, their coming together in the hunt allowed for a sensory collaboration that enabled them to bridge the semiotic gaps that emerged in their joint pursuit. What the hunter could not see his dogs were able to smell, and what his dogs could not smell the hunter was able to see. Only in the attuned coming together of the hunter with his dogs were their skill sets combined to benefit a common aim. But not only the hunter actively incorporated his dog's abilities: The dogs also incorporated the human point of view as they attempted to fill gaps in

116 Reindeer also adjust their perspective of the land in response to their socialization with humans who guide them into new-to-them landscapes, which include other domestic species. Soiot herders have referred to this process as “acclimatization.” An example of this is found in chapter six, where reindeer enter a new environment in response to changes in human residential pattern.
their own scent cues. Once the sable smell was lost, and the dogs were left with little to follow, they sat down – not to ponder the sable, but to study the human hunter. Although not intended specifically for their reading, the hunter's bodily position, his movement, and his eye-angle had become affordances to his dogs. The hunter had become a sign that could be read in lieu of scent. His elevated viewpoint, which benefitted from intuitive calculation and past experience, had become, for a second, his dogs' eyes over the boulder patch\textsuperscript{117}. Following his gaze, and incorporating the information gained from observing the hunter, the dogs quickly reassembled the fragmented scent trail of the sable.

The above examples represent skills-as-affordances located in others and shared with them through interspecies collaboration. What they fail to show is the biosocial becoming that can occur in tandem with perspectival expansion. I have attempted to show in this thesis that affordances, or possibilities, are always already there, but that they can be brought into use only through specific combinations of individuals and their respective perspectives and associated skill sets. The outcome of such combinations is generally unforeseeable, and in some cases possibilities for a species within a given landscape are activated only through continued habituation to the perspective of another being over an extended period of time. A biosocial example in this context are the horses of Orochen hunters described in chapter three. Trained to survive on a carnivorous diet while in the taiga, they had come to see hunted meat as an affordance – meat being a possibility of which they would not likely have taken advantage in the absence of the hunters riding them. The horses would not have ventured into the taiga on their own, and neither is it likely that they would have been able to procure the amount of meat required for their sustenance. They are, therefore, an example of how biological potential is solicited through the pairing of interspecies perspectives. Because horses posses a non-ruminant digestive system in spite of their ruminant habits (Wright, 1999),\textsuperscript{118} they are able to access this

\textsuperscript{117}This observation is an inversion of an ethnographic instance described in chapter five, where a herder's dogs become his eyes in the field.\textsuperscript{118}There are a number of historical and contemporary accounts of horses consuming meat, collected in such works as O'Reilly's (2011) “Deadly Equines: The Shocking True Story of Meat Eating and Murderous
capacity through their phenotypic plasticity. Their non-activated biological adaptive capacity is brought into action through collaboration with a hunter. To quote deCastro (1998:471), it is here that the hunters' perspective seeps through the porous membrane of the “animal mask,” soliciting a possibility that had always already been there.

**Affordance and Potentiality**

The ethnohistorical example of horses and hunters in the taiga describes an animal's ability to function in different environmental settings, and in combination with different species' skill sets. As such, it is an illustration of the social and biological potentiality of affordances. The horse has the potential to digest meat, and this ability is teased out from the animal by its human owners through a process of gradual habituation. However, the horse is under no obligation to maintain a carnivorous lifestyle upon its return to pastures. Thus it can refrain from engaging its meat-digesting capacity, which under normal circumstances it does

One possibility therefore does not replace another possibility in a linear fashion. Instead, both possibilities exist in the horse in parallel. Although only one possibility may be expressed at a time, the horse is now able to move back and forth between two ways of being. This flexibility affords the animal a degree of autonomy, namely by enabling it to benefit from different environments at different times. Even if the horse did not initially engage its ability to process meat until necessitated to do so by the hunter, its encounter with the hunter has broadened its awareness of affordances. This broadened perspective of the environment provides the horse not only with the ability to engage new possibilities. It also enables the animal to withhold its potentiality, and to be selective.

The ability in animals to leave things undone is evident, for instance, in the wolves described in this thesis: Wolves from time to time attacked and killed a number of sheep while

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Horses.” A prominent literary example of the old fascination with meat eating horses is found in Kafka's “An Old Journal:” “Their horses eat meat too; often a rider will lie down beside his horse, both working on the same piece of meat, from different ends” (Kafka 2007:195).

119To what extent the horse's abstinence from meat is formed by deliberation remains open, and it is not necessary to ascribe or deny the horse moral capacity in order to frame its unsolicited biological affordance as existing (i.e. withheld) potentiality.
eating only parts of a single carcass. Their potential to eat from all slaughtered bodies was not actualized, and neither was their ability to abstain from killing unused animals. What wolves could do was known to humans, but what they would do was not. The privation of 'what could have been' served as a key element in both human and other-than-human autonomy. Autonomy came to fore particularly in animals who had moved (and some of whom continued to move) back and forth between affordances associated with household and forest. Soiots repeatedly emphasized this autonomy in both reindeer and yak, as I have detailed in chapters three and six. But it also came to fore in dogs (chapter five) who were understood as hunters in their own right, and were known at times to withhold their services from collaboration with humans. This ability to withhold possibilities or affordances in self, others, and the environment, featured importantly in the relations between humans, animals, and spirits in Oka. In regard to the northern household and its role in the history of animal domestication, potentiality, and the ability to withhold it, must feature in a doubly important way in that it helps illuminate the nonlinearity with which animals have affiliated across the boundaries of the household. In what follows, I will argue that the potentiality of a 'forest perspective' is not eclipsed in animals who begin to incorporate a 'household perspective,' and that such an expanded perspective increases animal autonomy, which, in turn, sustains human-animal relations.

**Deliberate (In)Complete Domestication**

The idea of animal domestication, and of the physiological and behavioral features in animals associated with this concept, were well known to the people described in this ethnography. In fact, many were actively involved in 'breeding in' or 'breeding out' un/desirable traits for horses and cattle. Yet, as I have described at length in the foregoing chapters, there existed not only an awareness of the possibilities available to animals while away from the household, but also an active effort in householders to encourage this 'non-domestic' potential. In chapter three I described how Borzhon deliberately left behind several nursing yak cows, while driving the remainder of the herd back to his compound for the night. With the exception of roundups for
periodic veterinary inspection, his younger brother, Baianbata, rarely corralled his yak at all. Even when the herd had incurred great losses through wolf attacks, Baianbata would prefer to ride out to his yak, rather than drive them back to his compound for the night. Periodically Baianbata would appear among his yak while afield, briefly making known his presence, performing a swift head count, and then departing again. Although both brothers considered their herds “domesticated” in the sense that they were accustomed to human presence, both emphasized their animals' independence from humans, as was proved in their ability to fend for themselves, year round. Unlike sheep and dairy cattle, the count of which had increased during Soviet years and which relied on grass patches near the household, yak, reindeer, and horses cared for themselves. Their food procurement was independent of the limited carrying capacity found in the valleys of their owners' residences.

To keep intact the advantages of a yak herd's self-reliance, a herder had to allow his animals a degree of autonomy. Only animals whose forest perspective had not been replaced with that of the household were able to flourish in isolation from humans. This advantageous autonomy, however, also posed a risk to the household: Animals were in a position to withhold their willingness to return. In fact, horses, yak, and reindeer often indicated the desire to remain in the taiga, unbothered by their human owners. In the case of domestic reindeer individual animals could disappear in the forest, joining their non-domestic counterparts. But such loss was not always permanent. In Tofalaria individual reindeer, who would be considered lost after two consecutive years of absence, would sometimes return to their domestic herd the following year. The identification numbers that had been trimmed into their pelts were by this time almost completely overgrown. Yet their extended absences from the domestic herd were not indicators of having gone feral. Rather their departure and subsequent return were testimony to an autonomy that relied on an expanded perspective. Their ability to deny their own potentiality of staying away indefinitely (or, conversely of returning) was expressed in their autonomy. They were “free” (i.e. capable of their own impotentiality) in the sense that they were in a position to
move back and forth between affordances linked to the actions of beings of the forest and beings of the household.\textsuperscript{120}

This emphasis among Soiot herders to maintain in animals of their households a degree of autonomy, or a capacity for impotentiality, was mirrored also in their relations with spirit households discussed in chapter four. Although Buddhist emissaries had attempted to 'tame' and fully 'domesticate' powerful spirit masters of Oka, such endeavors were not unanimously deemed beneficial. A burkhan who had joined the ranks of celestial deities in the Buddhist pantheon was no longer available to Soiot hunters in the way it had been as an unenlightened earthly deity. While lamas warned against the strings that came attached to gifts from earthly deities, it was understood by hunters that these very strings undergirded the reciprocity sustaining their social relations with spirit households. An emotionally unpredictable karma-producing spirit master was not bound to incline to the wishes of a hunter, and when it did, it could expect something in return. A spirit master, like a human master, acted from a position of autonomy, rooted in the ability to withhold its own potentiality. An enlightened spirit master, on the other hand, could no longer be summoned to aid in the taking of life. It had become unavailable to the violation of Buddhist precepts. Perfect domestication made impossible any kind of violation. Yet the possibility for temporary violation of precepts continued to play an important role even in the local understanding of balance.\textsuperscript{121} Consequently it was vital for hunters that the domestication of local spirit masters remain incomplete.

2. Proximity
Proximity continues to be a key issue in the reconstruction of animal domestication for North

\textsuperscript{120}The types of affordances for reindeer, made available through the actions of other beings, are enumerated with greater detail in chapter six. Household affordances ranged from salt and smoke provided by humans at camp; forest affordances included the defense of a single dominant bull against the unnerving advances of multiple conspecific suitors.

\textsuperscript{121}Although balance (Rus. \textit{mera}) may be understood as perfect equilibrium between spirit and human households, it also entails room for temporary excess. Once, when I asked how a hunter could justify to the local spirit master the extermination of a whole pack of wolves, he responded by saying that sprinkling enough vodka to the spirit would likely incline him to overcome his rage and forgive the excess of killing that had taken place.
Asian pastoralism. Anthropologists Charles Stépanoff et al. (2017, in press) draw special attention to what they call “intermittent coexistence,” to explain the kind of human-animal relations that drive North Asian husbandry systems in nomadic contexts. Their emphasis on proximal intermittence in the cycles of human-animal interactions is based on multi-sited and long-term ethnographic fieldwork, and it stands very much in agreement with my own observations in western Buriatia, particularly in terms of animal autonomy. However, I would like to balance their emphasis on the temporal aspect of this intermittent proximity by focusing renewed attention on the qualitative significance of the spatial dimension of proximity. Particularly in terms of recent historical developments, there have occurred major shifts in the physical distance that characterizes the relationship between humans and various species within and outside of the household. Not only do these shifts pertain to the entry and exit of certain species to and from the household, but they also have to do with the variable degree of mutual familiarity experienced between species within the household. Interspecies familiarity, I will argue, is affected by the adoption or abandonment of particular proximity-related practices and their associated suites of material implements, be they milking aids, fences, or smudges. At the same time, physical proximity can take on factors of (in)visibility or ‘absent presence’ and autonomous space, each of which I will illuminate in that order.

**Spatial proximity**

Following the rhythms of herders, it is evident that the regular intervals in proximity between humans and their livestock serve a balancing effect preventing human care from resulting in a loss of animal self-sufficiency, while at the same time precluding lack of care that might result in animals going feral. Historical fluctuation in the distance between humans and other animals adds another facet to the topic of temporal proximity, which I have addressed in some detail in chapters six and seven. One illustrative example here is the relationship between herders and their yak, which has changed significantly since the collapse of the kolkhoz system, due to changes in daily physical proximity between yak and herders. The intensive milking of yak
cows for their milk of high fat content, used in the production of butter, which was a procedure that became highly systematized under kolkhoz administration, had once brought young offspring into close daily proximity with milkers. Although yak cows are known to dislike the milking process, continuous contact between newborn yak, their yak mothers, and humans had once afforded a degree of familiarity gained through proximity, which may be likened to that achieved by reindeer herders in their familiarization of reindeer with human scent by hand feeding salt to new offspring. As the role of yak became marginalized in the kolkhoz system, and dairy farming came to focus exclusively on Mongolian cows, this physical intimacy between humans and yak brought about by milking may be understood to have receded significantly.

The milking of herd animals had always played an important role in the relations between animals and their herders in the Saians. Olsen (1921) describes how Tozhu milked their reindeer twice a day, in the morning and in the afternoon, a task that would take about 20 minutes. During this time the animals were corralled, after they had been gathered by adults, children, and dogs, with the more tame cows being milked in the open, and the less well behaved and their young tied to trees (Olsen 1921:59). Similarly, Tofa tethered their reindeer to milking posts (Tof. *danguush*) (Rassadin 2000:313), while their offspring were tied to felled tree trunks (Tof. *salbak*) (cf. Petri 1927:4) to stimulate milk ejection. When the milking was complete, the cows were released, but their young remained tied to the *salbak*, ensuring their mothers would not stray, as well as continue to produce milk. Although Soviet experimentation with reindeer milch pastoralism led to a brief intensification in dairy production for Tofa (cf. Fondahl 1989), and consequently to an increase in the amount of physical contact with the kolkhoz *doiarka* (Rus. for milkmaid), sedentarization into settlements which were located away from reindeer grazing grounds eventually resulted in the separation of family members from herds, a process that was mirrored in Soiot kolkhoz contexts. Finally, with the complete phasing out of reindeer milch pastoralism in the kolkhoz system, women who once played an important role in the
human-reindeer relation now no longer participated in it at all. Instead, daily contact with herd animals became limited to specialist male herders who did not milk on a regular basis.

As outlined in chapter six, continued lack of funding for specialist herders in Tofalaria has in recent years led to the amalgamation of reproductive and working herds. Not only did Tofa herders and hunters report a consequent decline in the reproductive rate of their herd, they had also noted greater autonomy in their animals. The latter was evident in how they were “moving themselves” from summer to winter camp, based on memorized routes rather than in relation to human movement. And in tandem with less time spent close to the herd, people had begun to rely on invitational measures such as salt feedings, smudge fires, and sun shades to gather their animals, rather than on guiding measures aided by tracking activities, fences, and corrals. For Soiots the distance between their communities and their herd had increased even more since 2014, when it had been decided to leave them year-round in the mountainous region near Onot river where they were sheltered from wolves and the diseases carried by other domestic livestock. Until 2010 reindeer had been migrated back and forth between Soiot summer camps and their Onot winter camp. But by the time of my arrival, all herd contact with Soiot households had been terminated. This increased distance between people and their reindeer only confirmed what I have observed previously: Communication skills in today's Saian population were no longer particularly well developed in reindeer. Instead much of the skill that existed had shifted to dogs, horses, yak, and other species of the household as the result of increased and sustained spacial proximity.

**Absent Presence**

At the same time, there were other species which did not belong to the household, but which were sporadically present within it, or at least very near it. Wolves serve as a prime example in this case. In the introduction to his recent book, *Faces of the Wolf: Managing the Human, Non-human Boundary in Mongolia*, anthropologist Bernard Charlier ponders, “how to ethnographically 'catch' an absent presence” (2015:11). What he refers to are “the ephemeral
traces [of wolves] left in the discourses and practices” of the people he stayed with (Charlier 2015:11). He goes on to argue that, for the members of the family he lived with, “‘society' and 'nature' didn't seem to belong to autonomous spheres of existence. [Rather], “[t]he wolf made boundaries apparent but also blurred them...” (Charlier 2015:18). On many occasions, several of which I have described in this thesis, wolves had left clear marks of their presence in our midst: from paw prints in fresh snow, found near our cabins in the morning, to dead sheep carcasses strewn inside corrals, with the traumatized survivors pressing tightly against the periphery of their confinement. Although wolves did not belong to the household, they sometimes mingled within its parameters more intimately than did some yak and horses who were considered members of it. In spite of the visible traces left in our midst, the wolves were highly selective about when and where to disclose themselves to householders. In spite of our hunters’ many attempts, not a single wolf was captured in the confines of the valley during my stay at Uro. Feeding on animals from both spirit and human-mastered households, the wolves' appearances and disappearances at once upheld and broke down the boundaries that would divide human and spirit domains.

A different kind of absent presence was evident in the Soiot reindeer herd, which now resided over 150 km away from the homes of its herders at Sorok and Uro. Ironically, it had been moved to this distant location in part to evade the threat of wolves, which had been so prevalent near the herders' homes. Other reasons involved their incompatibility with current household migration routes and schedules, and the danger of contracting bovine viruses through close proximity with other household stock, as described above. But the herd was present in people's minds, even in its absence. The landscape was littered with memories of reindeer, which until recently had licked kitchen windows and mingled with other stock in the valley. Storage sheds still contained reindeer riding saddles, antler bone, and stiff reindeer coats – and no one seemed in a hurry to dispense with these symbolic reminders. In fact, they served as anchors to a heritage that was now kept alive on the banks of the Onot river. One afternoon a
Russian TV programme about new tourism opportunities for reindeer herders of Zabaikalia was running in the background of my host's living room. Immediately the conversation turned to the merits, feasibility, and potential benefits of such a program in Oka. Clearly it was not inconceivable that the role of reindeer, and the distance between Soiot community members and their herd, might change again in the future. Like the wolves who appeared and disappeared amidst Soiot households as quasi emissaries of surrounding master spirits, but also as mediators between spirit and human households, Soiot herders continued to appear and disappear from the midst of their Onot reindeer herd, deliberately maintaining a connection between past and present Soiot household models.

In Oka the concept of absent presence can be extended far beyond wolves and reindeer. The Soiot household itself, it may be argued, was present at the regional museum of Oka only in its absence. Shamanic practices, which for many elders served as an expression of specifically Soiot ties to the land, had found no display at the museum at all. And yet the unified exhibition of Buddhist heritage served more than one purpose: On the surface it proclaimed a ritual unity between all residents of Oka in their conversion to a common religion. On a more nuanced level, however, the Buddhist display was a proclamation of that which it glossed: a set of practices that remained alive and well in smaller villages and remote homesteads. My Soiot hosts did not seem to protest this museum arrangement as an attempt of a Buriat majority to marginalize Soiot regional identity. On the contrary, the relative absence of a distinctly Soiot voice in the displays could be seen to align with an internal Soiot discourse that critiqued traditional notions of nationhood as artificial. As described in chapter two, such notions had become for many Soiots a kind of inside joke, at least since the late 1990s. Intermarriage with Buriats had been a reality for a long time, and, for many, to make distinctions based on festive dress or other 'ethnic' markers seemed staged at best and divisive at worst. Being Soiot did not hinge on such exterior display. It was expressed much more in an ability to move back and forth between affiliations, without burning bridges to any one of them. This was possible only where social relations could
be maintained to the non-exclusion of others. Rather than replacing a shamanist perspective of the landscape with one from Buddhism, the former would continue to flourish, sheltered as it were, by the overt presence of the other.

**Collaborative Autonomy**
A third way of approaching the role of proximity between entities is by illuminating the ways in which autonomous space is granted with the purpose of growing and maintaining highly collaborative relations. Human-dog relations are especially useful for analysis in this regard, because in Oka these collaborations took shape primarily within the sphere of hunting. Although one might argue that improved nutrition served as a sign of a dog's increased value to the hunter, and that therefore it had to represent a period of time during which their relations were more collaboratively intense, the key to successful communication lay not in achieving greater control over the dog as a member of the household. Dogs, like reindeer, yak, and horses, were most useful to the hunter when they brought to the human-animal relationship negotiable intentions that emerged from their own person. In the case of dogs, this was expressed in the recognition of canines as hunters in their own right. A dog was either an eager hunter, as was evident in its fearlessness and self-initiative, or it was not, in which case it would be denied the right to life—and one might argue—to personhood. Self-initiative made a dog a hunter, both in the presence and absence of its master. For this reason a dog's disposition was consulted prior to the hunt. It was understood that an unfit mood rendered collaboration ineffective, and a hunter would rather wait on a dog's mood change than depart with a dog in the wrong mind. The dogs' enactment of an unfit disposition only serves as a further example of impotentiality in animals, while its interpretation of mood by its master is an example of the ascription of autonomous space, a concept that underlay all human-animal collaboration in Oka. Although human and canine hunters could achieve in their joint practice a degree of collaborative expertise, of the kind Sara Schroer has fittingly described in her recent study of falconry as “creaturely ways” (cf. Schroer 2014), such consolidate sociality relied on an individual's ability to deny it.
Similarly, while trekking from Sorok to the valley of Uro one autumn afternoon, I had asked my host Baianbata, whose elder brother Badma's horse I was riding, how lenient or insistent I was to be in directing this horse. Clearly, the horse I was riding had gone back and forth on the trails between the two settlements many more times than I had. It knew the terrain intimately, both in summer and in winter; while being conscripted for riding, and as a free ranging member of a group of geldings. The horse also had a better sense of other animals moving through the thickets we were navigating, taking into account many variables of which I was only partially aware. I did not know, for instance, what the exact social dynamics were that existed among this specific group of horses, and in relation to which my horse was clearly attempting to move. While Baianbata was riding ahead of me on his own gelding, followed closely by a packhorse, I was trying to keep up, choosing optimal surfaces in this rugged terrain marked by rolling meadows, woods, streams, and mires. In pursuit of the group, I could sense the horse's repeated resistance to my course indications. Not only did it exhibit a desire to browse certain shrubs, or to pause for water—normal actions to be anticipated and accommodated by any rider—the horse also attempted to override my selection of paths and grooves in the ground. In answer to my question, Baianbata encouraged me to steer my horse through the terrain on the basis of a giving and taking of wills. In so doing he took into account both my position as an inexperienced rider in this landscape, and the tendency of his brother's horse not only to self direct, but to play its rider's insecurity to increase grazing and browsing times. Although a confident rider and expert of the terrain, Baianbata always made an effort to allow his horses to communicate their preferences through his reins, making possible a negotiation of intentionalities in transit.

Although Mongolian Buddhism has impressed on the landscape, and on its human and other inhabitants, somewhat of a linear progressive perspective (i.e. towards enlightenment and eventual release from karma), the importance of collaborative autonomy witnessed in the shamanist perspective of the same landscape is not entirely absent within the Buddhist view.
Because spirits and animals are encouraged to align themselves with the precepts that would enable them to experience ultimate release, it is precisely the recognition of autonomy in the other that enables them to collaborate in this vision of the cosmos. As I have shown in 'the benevolence of binding' (chapter four), an emerging practice in Oka attempts to reintroduce the practice of whispering mantras into animals' ears. By so doing, an imprint is thought to be left with the spirit or animal, which in due course may bring about a perspectival change in the sentient entity. While this perspectival change is often equated with 'taming' or 'domestication,' in Oka it is not understood as a forced attempt at conversion, but rather one that is seen as reliant upon the willingness and self-conscription of the sentient entity. While the shamanist perspective does not share the linearity or progressivism of the Buddhist perspective, it too relies on the willingness of sentient entities to enter collaborative and reciprocal relations, even if the means by which this willingness is secured are not subject to a doctrine of nonviolence.

3. Materiality
On a sunny afternoon, during a visit to my neighbour Tsydyp's house, and in the company of his elder brother Iumzhap, the two men began reminiscing about times spent together herding reindeer in the Iakashopskie Gol'tsy near Uro. Their Tofa mentor, Vitka Lomov, had brought with him a series of wooden implements, formerly known to Soiots as möngii (colloq. Rus. vertushki) (see illustration 28). The device had been used as a muzzle for fawns during the milking process of their mothers, preventing the young from suckling prior to the completion of milking. It had also, more recently, been used on fawns during their initial taming period, when they would be tied down by a rope to a root in the ground. Thanks to the movable peg at the bottom of the muzzle, to which the rope was attached, a fawn was able to play wildly without ever becoming entangled in the rope. While sitting on the steps to Tsydyp's house, the brothers carefully produced an old faux leather bag containing a number of these muzzles. Not only did these möngii serve as a pretext to solicit welcome memories of reindeer herding, but the objects' technical finesse remained a testimony to the multifaceted nature of the devices themselves: the
mögii represented a nexus of human and reindeer intentionalities (cf. Gell 1996). The slight protrusion of the upper side of the wooden peg, which gently pushed on the underside of a fawn's lower jaw (where the tongue muscle operates) served to suppress suckling, while at the same time, the rotational aspect of the peg secured a range of bodily movement for the fawn that was unparalleled by any other technique. Although Imumzhap still used mögii on fawns of the Onot herd, their use had been discontinued in Tofalaria, when I visited there.

**Nexus of Intentionalities**

As discussed in the introduction, materiality in the context of this thesis is understood not as a physical object upon which are inscribed metaphysical intentions, but as a co-constituent in the making of meaning in which the properties of materials are histories rather than attributes (Ingold 2007:15). An attribute of a trap, for example, might be its ability to capture a subject. In the trap's refusal to release the subject, the hunter seeks to dominate the intention of continued autonomous movement in his prey – if only by extension of the structure's attribute. However, as we have seen in chapter eight, wolves come to see through a hunter's vested intent in the trap, thereby frustrating his purposes and bereaving the trap of its attribute. No longer can the device's ability to entrap be considered an attribute. The trap's erstwhile ability to ensnare its subject had not depended entirely on the ingenuity of its design, but also on the subject's limited perception of it. As this perception – or perspective – becomes expanded, the trap's attributes become an historical association. The abandoned structure by the wayside is transformed into a monument to a past way of relating to an Other. This Other has not disappeared from the landscape, and neither have the hunter's relations with it. Instead, the material of the trap has come to serve a new purpose: it now reminds the hunter of the ingenuity of wolves, and of the changing significance of material objects in an ongoing relationship with another sentient being. The trap remains a nexus.

Not only do the remains of traps left in the forest embody a history of interacting intentionalities, they continue to attest to an encounter between intentions coming from species-
specific perspectives, or *Umwelten* (Uexküll 1934). We cannot know what the wolf thinks as it slips by a functional trap, but we do know that it will no longer enter the structure, for reasons construed within a *phenomenal self-world* that is distinct from that of the hunter's, but into which the hunter once attempted to pry with the material construction of the trap. Although I agree with Alfred Gell that the trap was designed around the hunter's mental image of his prey's *Umwelt*, I must point out that the trap's gradual loss of efficacy also questions Gell's affirmation of it being “a model of its victim” (1996:27). All the trap can be, in my understanding, is a history of the hunter's foray into the victim's *Umwelt* at a certain point in time. Gell seems to acknowledge the temporality of this foray when he finds that the trap “embodies a scenario, which is the dramatic nexus that binds these two protagonists together, and which aligns them in time and space” (1996:27). Gell further associates this alignment with a hierarchy between hunter and prey in which the hunter successfully subverts the habits of his prey (ibid.). Again, it would seem that any such hierarchy must be understood in temporal terms, and therefore as historical. A hierarchy in which the hunter stands above the wolf cannot be seen as an attribute of the material itself, but only as a historical property of it, an association with a point in time. The present inefficacy of the trap furnishes a new history, one in which the hunter's supremacy is subverted by the wolf.

While the trap represents a material arrangement that once allowed the linking of divergent intentions emerging from separate self-worlds, albeit with one side succumbing to trickery, it is also an example of the negotiation between divergent kinds of beings. Beyond the trap, this negotiation is evidenced in material objects which have been intended by humans for purposes other than to kill, and which are not yet decommissioned in Oka. Rather than

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122 To be fair, Gell too seems to anticipate a potential future escape for the dead shark in Damien Hurst's formaldehyde filled fish tank installation, indicating that the established hierarchy of the trap may not be definitive or everlasting.

123 Another approach to the fluctuating efficacy of materials in mutually exploitative interspecies encounters may be the notion of co-evolution as an “arms race,” to which biologist Martin Stevens (2016:9) alludes when he speaks of parasitic relations between caterpillars and ants.

124 As is evident in chapter eight, trickery is rarely single-sided in the context of Oka, and examples of wolves successfully tricking humans seem to abound in Soiot memories.
accepting yak corrals, horse hobbles, dog leashes, or reindeer muzzles as material implements that have been utilized by humans with certainty in terms of the hierarchical outcome of their application, this ethnography has framed such artefacts as inherently open to interpretation and ownership. While their application is conventionally thought to nudge or encourage an animal to move in a certain direction, lassos or reins, can also be seen as objects of reciprocal communication, understood to be initiated by animals just as much as by humans. The horse is nudging its rider in a certain direction, making use of its halter among other implements. Horse and rider read each other's movement 'through' the same material, interpreting cues as expressions of the other's intent. Both seek to establish a relational balance with the other; a give and take, even if their motivations diverge. In either case, the human desire to “pervade” the horse's strength to “create and transform through the miracle of attunement” (Despret 2004:125) relies on careful negotiation with the horse through the material of its reins. And while the inner world of the Other may never be fully exposed to either communicant, both entities construe an interpretation of the Other, based on their 'reading' of how the material that connects them is invoked.

**Mutual Reading**

Even if my Soiot friends did not specifically refer to materials as texts, they were deeply engaged in the shaping, reading, and interpreting of materials. In as much as these materials-as-texts (or as communicative devices) did not possess inherent attributes, they were subject to histories as properties, which were at different times not only read into them, but also through them. Reading and writing are useful metaphors because, as communicative devices, they rely on a degree of perspectival overlap, or a degree of agreement on material interpretation. Having

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125 At a recent dog agility competition in British Columbia, I was warned by a handler not to touch a competing dog's cast-off leash while the dog was present. Her explanation was that the dog related intimately to the leash as its own property, and that, threatened by a stranger touching it, the dog might attack. It could be argued, the leash formed a communicative tie between dog and owner, a tie invoked from both ends, and considered indispensable by the dog.

126 The motivations guiding their negotiation in this joint movement may not be identical: The rider may have a specific destination in mind, while the horse may seek to minimize the rider's impact on its body.
touched on material artifacts, from traps and lassos to corrals and möngii, each of which come to life when they form an active nexus of intentions between living beings, I shall now shift focus to the affordances of materials as devices of illusive-deceptive communication, or trickery. Only where two or more parties have established some minimum agreement regarding the meaning of an object or an action do they seem to have grounds for misleading one another. I have described the use by wolves of indentions and protrusions in the ground in line of sight from households as 'empathetic evasion' (chapter six), in which they anticipate what can and cannot be seen by others. It is this kind of tactic that made wolves revered learners in the eyes of my Soiot friends. To decrypt the covert pathways of traveling packs in the landscape, and to locate their deliberate emplacement of dens within it, Soiot herder-hunters relied on an extensive repertoire of oral accounts and personal experiences, both of which were not as informative on specific locations as they were detailed in terms of the ways in which wolves were known to betray shared interpretations of objects.

One example of a betrayal of shared interpretations comes from Aunty Vera's summer pasture. At her encampment on Tustuk river she was operating, together with her adult children, a large sheep corral accommodating most of the sheep held by individual families at Uro in winter. Vera had strategically placed reams of shiny black ribbon from old cassette tapes on each of the posts that was holding up the cross-bars of the corral. Given their minimal weight, the slightest breeze would agitate these reams of glittering tape, creating movement around the corral, and producing strange sounds. Her intention had been to scare off wolves. In a way, her cassette tape corral resembled the scarecrows made by the Runa of Ávila to defend cornfields against parakeets (Kohn 2014). Eduardo Kohn describes these scarecrows (or 'scare-parakeets') as effective in their purpose, because Runa had accurately represented in them what they thought parakeets identified as the outline of a raptor. In other words, the cornfields were safe because the Runa and their parakeet neighbours had agreed that a cross of two boards, decorated in raptor feathers, could stand in as a symbol for a raptor. For the Runa this symbol consisted
merely of boards, as much as Vera's 'scare-wolf' consisted of technology eclipsed by mp3 players. But what mattered was that since she had placed the tape on the corral for several summers in a row, there had been no wolf attacks. In the summer of 2014, however, on a clear afternoon, with the wind blowing through the reams of tape, a pack of wolves descended upon the sheep grazing near the 'scare-wolves.' Vera had made no mistake in her interpretation of the wolves' fear of tape, but she had rested in this symbolic agreement long enough for the wolves to use it against her.

The Tofa trap described above, and the 'scare-wolf' mentioned here, differ from each other in terms of how reading and writing are used by each party involved: The hunter built his trap in a deliberately staggered manner, beginning in early spring and lasting well into the summer months, so as to habituate wolf cubs over the course of several months to the object's seemingly benign nature. Only when he installed the trap door on the last day of construction would he betray the meaning he had so painstakingly established for the circular build. The 'scare-wolf', on the other hand, is an example in which a pack of mature wolves invert the meaning that has been established by humans. They allow the human operator of the corral to rest in the belief that human and wolf object interpretations continue to overlap, when in actuality they no longer do. Here the wolves follow the pattern of the trap-building hunter, without having to build anything of their own. Although both examples are founded on overlap in symbol interpretation followed by the intentional surprise of an inversion of meaning, they each differ in how habituated reading can be exploited in built environments. The one relies on habituation through construction, the other relies on habitation through use (or disuse).

**Alternative Histories**

Whether we look at the changing meaning of rotting wolf traps in the landscape, or at the efficacy of symbols of 'fear'—such as the glittering tape of Vera's sheep corral—the ways in which objects come to serve as communicative devices between species ever change. It is insufficient then to approach objects in the assumption that their attributes are inherent and
static. Looking to the divergent ways in which möngii were used in Tofalaria and Oka, as well as to the ways in which their use in both regions had independently changed over time, perhaps a better way of approaching material implements of the household is Ingold's (2007) view of alternative and emerging histories. These histories must be understood as context specific, both in terms of time and geographically. Although there has occurred some cross fertilization between Tofa and Soiot reindeer herding practices since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the relative geographic and political isolation experienced between the two groups has led to significant divergence in herding styles even within the past 15 years. It does not come as a surprise then that the use and significance of specific objects, such as möngii, continue to change. The histories of both herding and trapping implements have been subject to changing socio-political and economic circumstances, but they have also been affected by the animals that have engaged them in different ways at different times. To isolate human or animal interpretations of materials from the contexts under which they are made would be a mistake. However, this thesis has argued that in the herding and hunting styles of Soiots, there remains sufficient room for animals to express their intentions by invoking materials variously, and that such intentions are taken seriously, even if they change over time.

**Future Research**

The data presented in this thesis suggest a number of promising directions for future research. In the context of expanding perspectives in animals, by way of coming together with another species, there is much to learn about how phenotypic plasticity affects human-animal collaborative efforts. What other examples are there in which herders and hunters draw specifically on short term adaptive capacity in animals? Particularly horses, and their ability to digest meat, seem underrepresented in the literature, although anecdotal mention of this phenomenon surfaces in many contexts\(^{127}\). Further, changes in patterns of routine physical

\(^{127}\) One possible reason for Soiots not to train their horses to eat meat is ruggedness of terrain. Even if horses were to live on meat in the taiga, their owners prefer not to take them into terrain that is steep or otherwise dangerous to them.
proximity to animals raise questions about how human-animal relations are affected in diverse pastoral contexts of the Saians. How, for instance, does the quality of relations between herders and herd animals (particularly those belonging to reproductive herds) change when milking-related implements become obsolete? In the context of alternative histories of material objects, another promising line of inquiry is concerned with the adjustment and transferral of historical and contemporary implements, such as saddles, halters, and fence structures from one species to another (e.g. from reindeer to horses). Finally, more research needs to be conducted on the role of animals in the emergence of social and cultural identities in Soiot and Tofa contexts. One way in which this could be accomplished is by following discourses surrounding Tofa-Russian 'Métis' identity, and how it draws on the continued importance of hunting with reindeer. These are only a small selection of possible lines of inquiry for promising future work in the Eastern Saians.

Conclusion
This concluding chapter was framed by an observation that contemporary Soiot human-animal skills are better represented in species such as dogs, horses, yaks, and wolves, than in reindeer. This insight may seem ironic, especially given the sustained focus on reindeer in Russian ethnographic literature on the Eastern Saian region. Following this shift in species emphasis, the chapter turned to the question of how best to understand contemporary human-animal and human-landscape relations in a Soiot context. It argued that human-animal and human-spirit relations are best understood in terms of efforts made to maintain the negotiability of intentions between sentient beings. Using select examples from the fieldwork, the chapter responded to each of the core questions that were set out in the introduction. The chapter followed three main themes: 1) perspective, 2) proximity, and 3) materiality. By combining perspective with affordance theory, the first section argued that human and animal perspectives of the landscape expanded in their coming together. It further argued that the potential to function in expanded ways could be used to deny collaboration, which further emphasized autonomy. On the human
side of things this found expression in deliberate incomplete domestication of both animals and spirits.

The second section focused on the significance of fluctuating proximity in human-animal relations, emphasizing the qualitative importance of spatial proximity. Looking at the effects of the demise of yak and reindeer milch pastoralism, it went on to apply the concept of 'absent presence' to illustrate ways in which the perceived distance between human, spirit, and ancestral households was at once accentuated and de-emphasized. Finally, the chapter turned to the materiality of household implements, including traps, by re-examining Alfred Gell’s (1996) notion of the 'nexus of intentionalities.' It explored some of the nuances of this nexus through the metaphor of 'mutual reading,' in which humans and animals are not bound to interpret lassos, muzzles, or reigns as implements of human domination, but are able to engage them as communicative devices, open to interpretation. In this way, human-animal relations within the household are characterized by mutual negotiation of intentions through objects that are by definition not tied to particular meanings. The possibility for this kind of negotiation was further extended beyond the household, where the communicative quality of wolf traps and wolf deterrents lent itself to an inversion of mutually accepted meanings, by both wolves and humans, in an effort to turn the communicative capacity of the built environment against the Other. This openness to interpretation, by both humans and animals, of the implements that connect them, or that form a nexus of intentionalities between them, was then summarized by Ingold’s (2007) distinction between inherent attributes and alternative histories of materials.
Glossary

The following glossary draws on Buriat (Bur.), Russian (Rus.), Soiots (Soi.), and Tofa (Tof.) terms.

Herding related terms:

adaguusan (Bur.) domestic animal
agtalkha, khöngelkhe, shemkhekhe, to castrate
zahakha (Bur.) lasso rope
argamzha (Bur.) lasso loop
butuubshe (Bur.) milking (of any species)
haakha (Bur.) yak
harlag (Bur.) yak herder
harlag khardag khun (Bur.) herd (of animals, generic)
hureg, hörög (Bur.), stado (Rus.) lasso pole
hurgaag (Bur.) spring pasture, encampment
khabarzaan (Bur.) shepherd
khonishon, khoni khardag khun (Bur.), winter stables with fence
chaban (Rus.) corral, fence made of poles
khoton khoeo (Bur.) cattle breeding
khuree (Bur.) mal udkhekhe (Bur.)
mal, adaguusan (Bur.) cattle

128This list of terms heavily relies on V. I. Rassadin's articles Zhivotnovodcheskaia leksika v iazyke Okinskikh Buriat i Soiots (Animal terminology in the languages of Oka-Buriats and Oka-Soiots) (1996) and Promyslovaia leksika v govore Okinskikh Buriat (Hunting terminology in the Oka-Buriat language variant) (1987), as well as on his Slovár Tofalarsko-Russkii i Russkó-Tofalarskii (Tofalar-Russian and Russian-Tofalar dictionary) (2005), and I. V. Rassadin's (2012) article, O kharaktere olenevodstva u okinskikh soiots (On the singularities of reindeer breeding of Oka Soiots).
malshan, mal khardag khun (Bur.),

*tabunshik* (Rus.)  herder, herdsman

*namarzaan* (Bur.)  autumn pasture, encampment

öbelzőön, uteg, ötög (Bur.),

*zimnee stoabishe* (Rus.)  winter pasture, encampment

*pastuug* (Bur. from Rus.)  shepherd (herder) of for any species

*salma* (Bur.), *arkan-lasso* (Rus.)  lasso without pole

*taban khushuu mal* (Bur.)  the five kinds of animal

1)  *morin, aduun* (Bur.)  horses
2)  *ukher* (Bur.)  cows
3)  *harlag* (Bur.)  yak
4)  *khonin* (Bur.)  sheep
5)  *iaman* (Bur.)  goats

*tugal khardak khun* (Bur.)  calf herder

*tugalshan* (Bur.), *teliatnik* (Rus.)  calving assistant

*ukher kharaasha,*

*ukher khardak khun* (Bur.),

*korovyi pastukh* (Rus.)  cow herder

*ukhershen* (Bur.), *skotnik* (Rus.)  cattleman

*urga* (Bur.), *arkan* (Rus.)  lasso, usually on a pole

*zuhalan* (Bur.), *letnee stoabishe* (Rus.)  summer pasture, encampment

**Reindeer related terms:**

*ak* (Soi.)  white

*ak-an* (Soi., Tof.)  wild reindeer

*an* (Soi.)  wild, non-domestic

*basagan inzagam* (Bur.)  female calve, up to one year of age
bor’bidkho (Bur.)  
reindeer hobbling technique

chary (Tof.)  
reindeer, trained to ride, or pack bull

daspan (Bur.)  
female calve, up to two years of age

daspan (Tof.)  
reindeer, two-year-old

dobpshun (Tof.)  
reindeer

ebter chary (Tof.)  
breeding bull

emeer (Bur.)  
breeding bull

gun’zhan sagaan (Bur.)  
cow, three year old

hoeolon (Bur.)  
bull, four to five years of age

hoog-hoog! (Bur.)  
salt beckoning call

hur hoeolon (Bur.)  
bull, over five years of age

ibi hoiluga (Tof.)  
domestic reindeer

inzagan (Bur.)  
calve, up to one year of age

khasuurni khöbkhö (Bur.),
mokh borodach (Rus.)  
old man's beard (Usnea, lichen)

khizaalan (Bur.)  
bull, three to four years of age (training period)

khod, khod sagaan (Bur.)  
pack reindeer

khushain khöbhkö (Bur.)  
woody moss

mal sagaan (Bur.)  
domestic reindeer

modni khöbhkö (Bur.)  
fir moss

möngii (Soi.)  
self-rotating muzzle for reindeer calf

mukhatar (Bur.)  
bull-calve, up to two years of age

nogto (Bur.)  
reindeer bridle

oin sagaan, gurööhen sagaan (Bur.)  
wild reindeer

ölegshen, eme sagaan (Bur.)  
mature cow

sagaa khardag khun (Bur.),
олений пастух (Rus.)  
reindeer shepherd (herder)

сагаан кхүбкхө (Сои.)  
reindeer lichen

сагаан мал (Бур.),  
reindeer lichen (moss)

domashnyi severnyi olen' (Rus.)  
domestic reindeer

сагаан кхөбкхө (Бур.)  
reindeer lichen

сагаан суу (Бур.)  
reindeer milk

сагаашан (Бур.), оленьевод (Rus.)  
reindeer herder

шудлен (Бур.)  
bull-calve, up to three years of age

согоног (Бур.)  
calve muzzle

солбок (Бур.)  
horizontal tethering pole

tuugeg (Бур.)  
smudge fire

унакха сари, сагаан унаа (Бур.)  
reindeer trained to ride

зары (Бур.)  
castrated reindeer

зары инзаган (Бур.)  
bull-calve, up to one year of age

зерлиг (Тоф.)  
wild

холоо (Бур.)  
hobbling rope

**Dog related terms:**

anguusha nokhoi (Бур.)  
hunting dog

bulgasha nokhoi (Бур.),  
hunting dog, trained for sable

sobaka-soboliatnitsa (Rus.)  
hunting dog, trained for sable

eme khokhoi (Бур.)  
bitch

erе khokhoi (Бур.)  
dog

gulegen (Бур.)  
puppy

kherm eshe nokhoi (Бур.),  
hunting dog, trained for squirrel

sobaka-bel'chatnitsa (Rus.)  
hunting dog, trained for squirrel

khokhoi (Бур.)  
dogs
khotosho nokhoi (Bur.)  watch dog, yard dog
suut'-suut', suush'-suush'! (Bur.)  dispatching call
talkhan-bulkhar (Tof.), boltushka (Rus.)  dog feed (flour-water batter)
ts-ts-ts! (Bur.)  beckoning call

**Horse related terms:**

aduun (Bur.)  horse herd
alkhakha (Bur.), idti shagom (Rus.)  walk (gait)
azarga (Oka-Bur.), zherebets (Rus.)  stallion
baigahan (Bur.), ialovaia kobylina (Rus.)  filly fed for slaughter
daagan (Bur.)  foal, up to two years of age
ed dik (Tof.)  horse
gunan (Bur.)  foal, up to three years of age, either sex
gur’bal (Bur.), puty-trenog (Rus.)  three-leg hobble
gur’baldakha (Bur.)  to hobble a horse
guun (Bur.), kobyla (Rus.)  mare
iikhe morin (Bur.), kon' (Rus.)  mature horse, steed
khariaikha, guikhe (Bur.),
bezhat' gallopom, skakat' (Rus.)  gallop, canter (gait)
khatarkha (Bur.), bezhat' rys'iu (Rus.)  trot (gait)
khod morin (Bur.),
viuchnaia loshad' (Rus.)  packhorse
khuushan hoeolon (Bur.)  seven-year-old horse
khuzaalan (Bur.)  five-year-old horse
kush-kush' (Bur.)  dispatching call
mor' hurakka (Bur.)  to train a horse
morin (Bur.)  horse of any age, gender
*pröög-pröög!* (Bur.) beckoning call

*shene hoeolon* (Bur.) six-year-old horse

*shogshokho, gun'shulkhe* (Bur.),

*bezhat' tikhoy rys’iu* (Rus.) quiet trot (gait)

*shuglen* (Bur.) four-year-old horse

*shuu-shuu!* (Bur.) urging call

*tpruu!* (Bur.) slowing/halting call

*tumakha* (Bur.) hobble, front

*unagan* (Bur.), *zherebenok* (Rus) foal, up to one year of age

*unakha morin* (Bur.) horse broke to ride

*uree, emneg* (Bur.) untrained horse

*urööl* (Bur.) hobble, both legs on left side

*zhoroo, zhoroo morin* (Bur.) horse chosen for ambling gait

**Cattle related terms:**

*bukha* (Bur.), *byk proizvoditel’* (Rus.) breeding bull

*haa-haa!* (Bur.) calming call while milking

*khamagsha, shurge, shorgo* (Bur.),

*namordnik* (Rus.) device to prevent suckling

*Mongol ukher, mongol neen* (Bur.) Oka-specific cattle

*ukher* (Bur.) cattle, including dairy

*ukheri suu* (Bur.) cows milk

*uneen, neen* (Bur.) dairy cow, milking cow

**Yak related terms:**

*harlag bukha* (Bur.) yak bull

*harlag burun* (Bur.) yak, up to three years of age

*harlag dunzhen* (Bur.) four-year-old female yak
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>harlag gunan (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak, over three years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlag gunen (Bur.)</td>
<td>four-year-old yak bull</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlag gunzhan (Bur.)</td>
<td>female yak, older than three years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlag gygal (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak calf, up to one year of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlag khasharag (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak, up to two years of age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlag neen (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak cow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlaii delhen (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak hair, underline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>harlaii suu (Bur.)</td>
<td>yak milk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iikhe harlag (Bur.)</td>
<td>mature yak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khainag (Bur.)</td>
<td>hybrid, Oka-specific cattle with yak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khainag neen (Bur.)</td>
<td>hybrid cow (male hybrids are not bred)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Goat related terms:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>babana (Bur.)</td>
<td>goat buck, domesticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>eme iamaan (Bur.)</td>
<td>goat doe (ibex)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iamaan (Bur.), sibirskii kozerog (Rus.)</td>
<td>Siberian ibex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oin eme iamaan (Bur.)</td>
<td>goat doe, domesticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oin iamaan (Bur.)</td>
<td>goat, domesticated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tekhe (Bur.)</td>
<td>goat buck (ibex)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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**AAMO 1994, 38-1-176:1-4** [Dokumenty po olenevodstvu {Dogovor o kuple i prodazhe, Akt o peredache olenei k/zu 50 Let Oktiabria, i vedomosti zatrat brigadi olenevodov} za 1994 god (Reindeer herding documents {Contract for purchase and sale, Deed of reindeer transfer to 50 Let Oktiabria kolkhoz, and an account of reindeer herding brigade expenses} for 1994)]

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