The Horse in My Blood: Multispecies Kinship in the Altai and Sayan Mountains
Victoria Soyan Peemot
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The Horse in My Blood is manifold, much like the Tyva horsemen, horses, multispecies communities, and sentient homelands the book represents. Peemot draws primarily on her fieldwork among her Soyan kin and other horseman–horse–homeland triads in southern and southeastern Tyva as well as in western Mongolia to propose a "generalized model for understanding the more-than-human sociality among pastoralists in Inner Asia." According to this model, livestock—namely hierarchically elevated species (e.g., horses) and special types therein (e.g., "consecrated," "beloved," and "racing" horses)—mediate between humans and superordinate beings (e.g., "master of the land" spirts) within a moral economy underpinned by "land-based kinship" (*cher törel*) which enmeshes humans and other beings along obligations that are met (or not) through (in)appropriate quotidian and exceptional practices.

Tyva horsemen, horses and homelands are made multiple and dynamic by their mutual interdependence in *cher törel,* and by the latter's interplay with (inter)national politics. As landscapes, homelands are immovable sites of idiosyncratic ecological-social-economic affordances, temporalized through interspecies communities' inhabitancy. As emplaced nexuses of undomesticated nonhumans, homelands are sentients responsive to the needs and (mis)deeds of the humans and livestock akin to these places. The social agency of homelands is exemplified in the figure of the "master of the land" (*cher eezi*), a spirit who, at its (dis)pleasure, elevates or lowers the "life energy" (*kheĭ-a˝t*) of humans and their livestock. While their sense of belonging with(in) homelands can be immovable and intergenerational, multispecies communities were relocated by the state and thus disarticulated from direct participation in their familiar homelands' *cher törel,* and compelled to develop kinship with new places—as was the case for Peemot's Kögeĭ Soyan forebears who were relocated from the Khaan Kögeĭ Mountains after the 1932 demarcation of the Tyvan–Mongolian border ceded those mountains to Mongolia.

Horses are "livestock" (*mal*), private property that, despite its agency, is largely determined by humans. Livestock can be gifted, sold, used, and/or eaten by their owner, or, as was the case under socialism, collectivized by the state. But as "livestock of the land" (*cher maly*), horses determine much about their human owners and the latter's

networks. In search of untouched grass, horses range farther afield from the encampment's "core" (*kodan*) than do other steppe-dwelling livestock, setting the encampment's edge. Rhythmically shifting between far-range pastures and the *kodan,* horses are preeminent mediators between humans and sentient homelands. Moreover, the episodic need to retrieve horses from pasture draws humans into encampments' peripheries, where they, too, are further exposed to land-based kin beyond their immediate multispecies community. Within and beyond encampments, as well as during and beyond the animals' lifetime, relationships with horses are important determinants of humans' life energy. Consecrating a horse as a living offering to a superordinate nonhuman can bring fortune to, or dispel sickness from, its human owners and their family, but also risks the opposite. The way one treats one's beloved horse and its tack affects one's life energy and, subsequently, one's treatment in the afterlife. Racing a horse elevates the life energy of its horseman, rider, kin, region, and nation; even the sweat from a racing horse can have such effect.

The outcomes of human–equine relationships are dependent on the tenor of their engagement, and on humans' (non-)compliance with customary regulations of *cher törel*. While humans are subordinate to horses and masters of the land in the Tyvan *cher törel,* humans can affect their superordinate kin and the broader system. Peemot's forebears, for example, treated their champion racing horse Ezir Kara well and thus pleased him and his homeland's master in ways that enabled the gelding to raise the life energy of his owners, community, region, and nation. But when the horse's owner, Sandaŋmaa Soyan, was executed on 23 June 1939 in "an attempt by the Tyva government […] to destroy the Soyan identity, which was associated with the now-lost homeland (the Khaan Kögeĭ Mountains"), two weeks later Ezir Kara was forbidden by the authorities from racing in the national *naadym* games. Thus the horse, the Soyan clan, and the Tyvan people were robbed of life energy. Moreover, because Ezir Kara was confiscated by the authorities and disappeared (reportedly killed in secrecy) in an attempt by the Tyva government to prevent the horse from "undermining its politics defined by the Stalin-inspired political repressions, the socialist modernization of pastoralist communities […] and the objective to depopulate the transborder region," the gelding's human kin were unable to honor him with appropriate funerary rites. This diminished their life energy, stirring feelings of terrible loss that mirrored the terror which befell Tyva at the time. The resilience of south Tyva life energy was then represented by Ezir Kara's sibling, who raced at the 1939 *naadym,* and since 1993 by

horse races held to celebrate Ezir Kara in the martyr-equine's homeland, as well as by Soyan people conducting *dagylga* rituals—honoring their belonging with the land and its master spirit —in Ezir Kara's homeland, thus re-establishing Ezir Kara as a mediator and raiser of life energy within *cher törel*.

Peemot's book bridges academic and indigenous epistemologies and methodologies to elaborate a generalized theoretical model. The author serves as a trans-realm mediator (much like the 'horses in her blood'), and, based on my own research, the model holds insofar as Duha reindeer-centric, more-than-merely-human communities in northern Mongolia are concerned. The book is dually therapeutic. By means of 'responsible more-than-human guesting' (*aaldaar*) and storying (foundations of her indigenous methodology), Peemot re-invigorated her kinship ties and renewed her obligations within *cher törel,* helping her heal from years of absence from her homeland. By those same means, Peemot helps resurrect and add to the original story of Ezir Kara (one temporalized and emplaced in *cher törel* as well as in specific events of trauma and resilience), buttressing against the twenty-first-century reinvention of the story (one where the protagonist's specificities are occulted, Ezir Kara being relegated to a "nomad" from the "deep past"), and thus helping heal the "historical amnesia" under which multispecies trauma and resilience are buried in accordance with "memory politics," which, in "Putin's Russia," have resurrected Soviet-like "repressive practices of censorship and controlling the circulation of the past" as well as "state violence" toward "more-than-human belongings." Finally, Peemot's book is a tacit invitation for readers to practice a sort of "responsible guesting" within the stories the author braided—vicariously, within the multispecies, intergenerational communities evoked therein—and, where appropriate, within our own research communities.

For such a socio-geographically specific and deeply personal work, the book is widely relevant. It is a must-read for anyone studying Tyva and/or Tyva-adjacent Mongolian pastoralism, and would benefit any study of Inner Asian pastoralism, or of the entanglement of multi-species lifeways, history, geography, and politics, regardless of location.

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