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STORYING WITH HOMELANDS: EMPLACED (HI)STORIES AND RESILIENCE-IN-MAKING

ABSTRACT

Pastoralists who live in the Tyva Republic approach their home landscapes as sentient and engage with them through a reciprocal relationship.[1] The sociality of landscapes builds upon a multigenerational belonging amongst Tyva kinship groups with their homelands. In this study, I explore how community-homeland belonging allows for a more-than-human practice of engaging with the past—storying with homelands. I draw on a case study, which involves the construction of a Buddhist stupa by the Soyan kinship group at a site named Chylgy-Dash in 2019. I suggest that the community's storying with an endangered landscape aims, first, to bridge with the past across socialist decades when the state neglected human–nonhuman relationships, and, second, to enact and to story-into-being community-homeland belonging.

Keywords: Indigenous historicities, more-than-human storytelling, memory politics, post-socialism, community-homeland belonging

REMEMBERING THE (LOST) HOMELAND

I grew up in the omnipresence of the Khaan Kögei Mountain range.[2] This mountain range formed the line of the southern horizon, visible from all encampment sites in Shara-Nuur where the herdsmen from my paternal Soyan kinship group live between April and late November. Every morning when I opened the south-facing door of my grandparents' yurt in Shara-Nuur, I saw the Khaan Kögei. Sitting in our yurt and observing the mountain through the open door, my grandmother, Kadyp-ool Irisiŋmaa Norbuevna (1930–2023), shared her memories of her grandmother, Bayan Chula, who brought edible roots of the *bes* (*Erythronium sibiricum)* and *ai* (*Lilium martagon*) from her visits to the Kögei. She remembered, 'When it was forbidden to visit the Kögei Mountains, my grandmother Chula longed for her homeland. In the summer heat of Shara-Nuur, she often recalled the Khaan Kögei's pastures with their green grass and cold streams, the cool air, and the abundance of wild animals and berries.'

What my grandmother did not tell me is the story of how our people lost their clan grounds in the Khaan Kögei Mountains, according to the 1929 Tyvan–Mongolian agreement on the border demarcation, followed by an actual demarcation in 1932, forced displacement of the clan in the 1930s, and

the final restriction on crossing the newly established border in 1946 (Aranchyn 2011: 46–48; Khertek 2016: 75–76; Otroshchenko 2015: 34–35). My grandmother and grandfather, Kadyp-ool Soyan Kunuiaevich (1930–2016), experienced these historical events and their impact as children and young adults. They both lost their fathers and many close kin during the political repressions of the 1930s, which harshly targeted the Tyva clans living along the border due to their opposition to government orders and continuing seasonal movements to the former pasturelands.

Unreachable by the Soyans during socialism, the Khaan Kögei still dominated the landscapes of the clan's seasonal grounds. Drawing upon Bender (2002), the mountains continued to provoke memories of living there and of abandoning their lands. Like my grandmother's story about the bountiful Kögei, some stories were considered 'safe' to share under the socialist rule. Other stories were too dangerous to remember collectively. These stories which carried traumas of a lost homeland, repressions, and fear began emerging only in the late socialist years, before and after the demise of the Soviet Union.

The continuing presence of the Khaan Kögei in the Soyans' collective memory aterialized for me in June 2016 when I visited the mountain range for the first time in my life. At the edge of the pine forest, a tree stood decorated with colourful *kadak* and *chalama* ritual scarves. I added to them a blue *kadak*, which I purchased for this occasion at the Gandantegchinlen monastery, the Buddhist temple in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Later, the owners of the yurt nearby told me that the scarves were left by the Soyan people who came here to pay their respects to their homeland. The Khaan Kögei range continues to participate in the Soyans' identity negotiations which, in the case of the Tyva people, include clan homelands (Bavuu-Surun 2018: 274). This vignette about the lost and remembered homeland of the Khaan Kögei provides the necessary context for understanding the case study at the centre of this article—the building of a Buddhist stupa and storying about the clan's belonging with the endangered landscape as an act of resilience against the government's plans to begin explorations of a chromite deposit. Those explorations could endanger their current seasonal grounds in the Lake Shara-Nuur area near Mount Agar in the Tes-Khem province of Tyva.

I begin by introducing the main arguments and the theoretical and methodological framework in the next section. An introduction to the case study then follows. I next provide insights for understanding the status and sentience of landscapes and discuss how the Chylgy-Dash site, where the stupa was built, is now included in the collective memory of the local kinship group. The last section discusses the entanglement of the community's identity negotiations with their homeland, collective memory, and engagements with the past and how they come together to protect the contested landscape by actively storying with the landscape and constructing the Buddhist stupa there.

FRAMING THE NARRATIVE

In this article, I draw upon one case study: the construction of a Buddhist stupa by the Soyan kinship group in southern Tyva in order to protect their land from mining during the spring and summer of 2019. In using this case study, I argue, firstly, that the landscape (of homeland) safeguards the kinship group's collective memories; secondly, it supports the clan's emplaced sense of belonging; and, thirdly, it provides the means for resilience against the

violent politics of the state (Russian Federation) and representing it in the local government (of the Tyva Republic).[3] I approach these arguments through an inquiry of the following research questions:

- How does storying with landscapes contribute to the Tyva kinship groups' identity negotiations and collective memory?
- How do landscapes offer solutions against threats to community-homeland belonging and pastoralists' livelihoods?
- How do landscapes safeguard stories and memories under repressive regimes?

The theoretical and methodological framework for this study is based on *storying*, which builds upon the work of Indigenous scholars who approach storying as a collaborative knowledge production process (Sweeney and Windchief 2019; Fast and Kovach 2019; San Pedro and Kinloch 2017). Indigenous storying methods aid me in revealing the potential of landscapes to ground a land-based identity of the Tyva kinship groups, to keep and share memories amidst the state's suppressive memory politics, and to support more-than-human resilience strategies. Briefly put, I study how a more-than-human storying 'can construct meaningful bridges in disruptive situations' (Cruikshank 1998: 3–4). In her compelling works about the power of Indigenous stories, the Canadian anthropologist Julie Cruikshank uses the term 'storytelling' (1998; 2005). Whilst inspired by Cruikshank's approach to stories, I also lean on other researchers in Indigenous studies when using the term 'storying'. For instance, Timothy San Pedro and Valerie Kinloch define storying as 'the convergence of theory and practice, theory, and method, which invites into relationships where we dialogically listen and give back to the stories shared and questions that arise with others' (2017: 377–378). My approach to storying draws upon the Tyvan concept *töögü*. In the Tyvan-language, the noun *töögü* corresponds to 'history' and 'a story' in English. Thus, my field conversations with Tyvan-speaking interlocutors lack a distinction between 'history' and 'story'. For instance, in the following excerpt from a recorded semi-structured interview, my uncle, Byzaakai Andrei, described a way of sharing knowledge about the past using the term *töögüleer*. This term reflects a verb translated literally as 'to story (about the past)'. He also used the expression *khöi töögü*, which can be translated as 'much history' or 'many stories':

> During the war, our parents had horse herds. [Our] horses originate from that herd, which included racehorses and working horses among them. Horses were traded, sold, and exchanged; they were used as meat, as a winter meat supply. The herd has grown and we still keep it. At the time when they [my parents] had to give their livestock to the collective farm and were left without horses, they managed to hide away one or two animals. Later, in the 1960s and 1970s, when it was allowed to keep a few private livestock, they restored their horse herd. If I am to story that time [literal translation of uncle Andrei's phrase '*Ol* üeni *töögüleer bolza*'], there are many stories/much history [uncle Andrei's words '*khöi töögü*' can be translated as both]. (Byzaakai Andrei Taraachevich, fieldwork interview, Kövürüg-Aksy campsite, Tes River, Tyva, 14 June 2015)

The ambivalence of the Tyvan *töögü* as 'a story' and 'history' perhaps allows for bridging between history and memory. It also provides

space for discussions about more-than-human engagements with the past and practices of keeping and sharing (hi)stories, which emphasise one's relationships with their homelands. Taking this idea further, I suggest that the more-than-human practice of storying is a process of making—reinvigorating, healing, and strengthening—relationships between Indigenous communities and their homelands.

Relationships are also grounded within my research methodology. During fieldwork in my home region in Tyva, I have storied with my kin when discussing our relationship with our homelands and observing the circulation of stories about the past and how they appear in the collective memory. I relied on participant observation as the primary ethnographic fieldwork method. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews and created an audiovisual documentation of land-related practices (e.g., Beahrs and Peemot 2021, ethnographic film). When the confrontation between the Soyan community and the Tyva Republic's government began in late winter and spring of 2019, I was in Finland. During this period, I followed the community–government confrontation online, through publications in local newspapers and on television news channels. In the next section, I introduce the case study. The following sections place the case study at the centre of the research debate and provide ontological insight for its understanding.

STORYING WITH THE HOMELAND AS RESILIENCE-IN-MAKING

This case study focuses on the construction of a Buddhist stupa in a place named Chylgy-Dash in the Tes-Khem province of the Tyva Republic, Russian Federation. More precisely, Chylgy-Dash is situated on the southern slopes of Mount Agar, between the eastern end of Lake Shara-Nuur and Yamaalyk Mountain less than 20 kilometres from the border with the Uvs province of Mongolia. Chylgy-Dash literally means 'the horse (herd) stone'. The name captures the landscape's distinct feature—numerous dark-coloured boulders spread around the steppe. When viewed from a distance, the large stones resemble horses. These landscapes are part of the territories where the Soyan clan, who built the stupa, have lived for numerous generations. Growing up with my grandparents, I lived with our Soyan kin at seasonal camps on both the northern and southern slopes of Mount Agar. All of these landscapes keep the (hi)stories of several generations of my family.[4]

The stupa was built in response to news about possible chromite mining in Shara-Nuur. In December 2018, the government of Tyva approved 'A Strategy for Social and Economic Development in the Tyva Republic Until 2030', which included a plan to prepare the necessary paperwork for geological investigations and the exploration of several deposits in Tyva, with the chromite deposit 'Shara-Nurskii' on Mount Agar listed amongst them.[5] The government's introduction stated that this chromite ore is one of the largest deposits in Siberia (104 km^2) and with a high quality (Decree No. 638 was issued by the Government of the Tyva Republic on 24 December 2018). Less than two months later, the limited liability company 'Resurs', registered in the Republic of Buryatia, Russian Federation, applied for the rights to begin exploration and mining at the 'Shara-Nurskii' deposit.

News about the mining company seeking a permit to explore and mine the chromium ore deposit in Shara-Nuur broke on 5 February 2019. That news was followed by a media confrontation between the local community and the government of the Tyva Republic in

February and March. The following provides a chronology of media publications.

On 19 February 2019, the newspaper *Risk Inform* published an editorial, entitled 'The people's way of life is under the threat' (*Dongur-ool* 2019a). That article quickly followed an exchange between the head of the subsoil use department of the Central Siberian region, Nina Shevtsova, and Vladislav Kanzai who, at the time, was director of the Ubsunur Biosphere Reserve. Shevtsova announced that they are considering an application from the company 'Resurs' about granting rights to conduct an exploration, evaluation, and mine at the chromium ore deposit 'Shara-Nurskii' in the Tes-Khem province, Tyva (the letter was dated 28 February 2018). Vladislav Kanzai replied that, because the deposit is situated in the territory of a protected nature reserve, no mining is permitted there. A journalist, commenting on the officials' correspondence, pointed out that, despite the negative response, Shevtsova made a subsequent, second inquiry (4 December 2018). This time, she was asked to inform if it is possible to conduct geological explorations through well-boring and pits, as well as mining, whether it is sufficient to have an agreement with the biosphere reserve and results from an ecological expertise, or if regulations regarding protected areas issued by the government of the Tyva Republic were ruled out. This article included an open letter addressed to Vladislav Kanzai, signed by 728 people from Ak-Erik, dated 7 February 2019. I include here a translated excerpt from the collective letter from the Ak-Erik community. This excerpt reveals the importance of the land to the community's livelihoods and their veneration of Mount Agar and Lake Shara-Nuur. It also demonstrates that people have kept painful memories about their clan's forced displacement from their homeland in the Khaan Kögei Mountains followed by the repressions of the 1930s and 1940s:

> Lake Shara-Nuur and Mount Agar are the only territories where the native population of the Kyzyl-Chyraa *sumu* lives and practices pastoral livestock husbandry. The above stated works [exploration and mining] will deprive 97% of the *sumu's* population of their main source of income, livestock husbandry, due to the destruction of their pasturelands. We raise our livestock in these territories where we move, depending upon the season, between summer, autumn, winter, and spring pastures.
>
> Furthermore, Mount Agar and Lake Shara-Nuur are places that our ancestors have venerated. We venerate them, too. Our ancestors have bequeathed us to preserve and protect this sacred land. We will fulfil their will. … Shara-Nuur is a salt-water lake, its water and mud are healing; hundreds of people come here from Tyva and regions of Russia seeking healing. … [O]ur people were subjected to mass repressions during Stalin's years, when the majority of our territories (up to 70%) were given to Mongolia and we were left with the smallest part, which included Lake Shara-Nuur and Mount Agar. After losing most of our homeland, our people have lived here. Now, outsiders aim to destroy this land, too. In the recent past, due to their resistance to forced displacement, more than half of our men were executed, imprisoned, or exiled. Many have never returned. We hope that this history will not repeat itself. (Risk Inform, 4 December 2018)

The letter reveals vivid memories of the state's violence experienced by the community in the early socialist period and how that violence affected Soyans' understanding of the state's

politics as a recurring danger to their belonging with their homelands. After the article and letter were published, a series of media items followed.

On 26 February 2019, an article about the Soyans' displacement from the Khaan Kögei homelands was published in the same newspaper, *Risk Inform*.

On 5 March 2019, the pro-government broadcasting company, Tyva24, aired news about the government officials' meeting with the Ak-Erik community on 2 March 2019. The officials insisted that the government had no plan for mineral explorations in the municipality's territory and condemned the community's open letter published in a newspaper, labelling it as 'a loud noise for no reason', doubting whether people signed the letter.

On 6 March 2019, digital media outlet mk-tuva.ru supported the government's narrative in a report about meeting in Ak-Erik.

On 8 March 2019, the Biosphere reserve, Ubsunur, published on its website a brief follow-up to the meeting of the government representatives with the Ak-Erik community, entitled 'Concerned people'.

On 12 March 2019, the article 'How has Kara-ool been selling Tyvan deposits' was published (*Dongur-ool* 2019c). No articles were published after that.[6]

I followed the above-listed media confrontation from a distance from Helsinki, Finland. When I arrived in Tyva at the beginning of June 2019, the Ak-Erik people were building the stupa in Shara-Nuur. I visited the site and met a group of local men working on the construction site and the person in charge, Vladlen Doptan. He told me that the Soyans living in Ak-Erik and beyond have donated money, construction materials, and food for the workers. Vladlen shared his initial concerns about building the stupa in the seasonal pastureland, where families live only for a part of the year. This would mean the stupa will be left unattended during winter. He took his concerns to the Kamby Lama, the highest-ranking Buddhist lama in the Tyva Republic. Vladlen told me that he was assured by Kamby Lama that the stupa can be built in any place, even at seasonal grounds, and that it will protect the people and their homeland. Moreover, Kamby Lama advised to build the *suburgan* in Shara-Nuur, saying that it is the right thing to do (video-recorded conversation, Chylgy-Dash, Shara-Nuur, 21 June 2019).[7] Vladlen also explained to me that this particular site, known as Chylgy-Dash, was chosen to host the stupa because of the site's beauty, special name, and since it is a part of the Soyans' story as an historic place for community gatherings:

> Chylgy-Dash was chosen because it is our beautiful homeland with a special name. Chylgy-Dash is a place where many horses graze. I have heard that in the old times when the elders performed Öör-Ovaa, the cairn consecration ritual, on Mount Agar, all people gathered here in Chylgy-Dash. In the middle of these horse-shaped stones, there is a flat area, which is suitable for *khüresh* wrestling. It is a natural stadium. During the races, horses ran from Lake Töre-Khöl to the finish line here in Chylgy-Dash. It would be great for us to gather here every year, make the *suburgan's dagylga*, and celebrate it with wrestling and horseraces. (Video-recorded conversation, Chylgy-Dash, Shara-Nuur, 21 June 2019)

Because I was conducing fieldwork with reindeer herders in another part of Tyva in the Tozhu province, I could not participate in the *dagylga* consecration ceremony of the Chylgy-Dash stupa. It took place on 6 July, which was

the birthday of His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Later, I heard about the event from my kin: the Buddhist lama was invited to perform a ritual, and people cooked and shared a communal meal on the site. Since 2019, I have not been to Tyva. Thus, I asked my kinsman Vladimir Orus-ool to take a photograph of the stupa and share it with me [Feature 1. The Buddhist stupa in Chylgy-Dash on Mount Agar, Tyva, July 2022. Photograph courtesy of Vladimir Orus-ool].

The next section provides ontological insights into understanding the stupa's construction as an appeal to the superior nonhuman for protection and a way to take conversations about protecting homeland as officially and legally recognized.

THE STATUS AND SENTIENCY OF LANDSCAPES

There are two factors defining the Tyvan practice of storying with homelands: its contribution to pastoralists' identity negotiations and acknowledgement of landscapes as sentient and, often, superordinate nonhuman beings. Leaning on my doctoral dissertation research, I briefly discuss here the Tyva pastoralists' personification of a landscape as a sentient nonhuman nonanimal being—a master of the land (*cher eezi*). *Eezi* is the third-person possessive form of the singular noun *ee*, meaning 'an owner' or 'a master'. Various landscapes have nonhuman nonanimal masters (plural: *cher eeleri*), who are understood as having power within their own territories and potentially helpful or harmful to humans. My local interlocutors often omitted the word 'master' (*ee*) when talking about the masters of the land or addressing them directly. This leads to a superposition of the concepts *land* (*cher*) and *master of land* (*cher eezi)*. Anthropologists Caroline Humphrey and Urgunge Onon argued that the concept of 'master' (in Mongolian, *ejiin*) has allowed people to approach landscapes as sentient beings. They write, 'What is important is that the idea of masters allowed people to talk about the inner or concealed power of entities in the world and to have human-like intentional relations with them. In this view natural objects "gave" things to human beings, who were to use them in ways corresponding to the given parameters of nature' (Humphrey and Onon 2003 [1996]: 85). This observation by Humphrey and Onon is paramount for understanding the pastoralists' approach to landscapes as sentient, social, and powerful.

Communities in southern Tyva and western Mongolia where I have conducted fieldwork since 2015, consider the Taŋdy-Uula and Altai Mountains as the most powerful landscapes. They approach them as superior beings who oversee the lives of humans, domesticated and wild animals, and plants in their own territories. In addition, pastoralist communities develop special relationships with landscapes, which are part of their clan grounds. For instance, the Soyans venerate Mounts Agar and Kezhege in southern Tyva. Soviet ethnographer Leonid Potapov observed that the Tyva people refer to the prominent mountains as elder kin, noting that the Soyans explained the form of endogamy practised by the clan as 'the will of the Kezhege Mountain' (1969: 60). Anthropologist Selcen Küçüküstel, who studied amongst the Tyvan-speaking Dukha reindeer herders in northern Mongolia, draws a distinction between a perception of landscapes by outsiders and by people who belong with them—the former perceived the taiga as 'the wild geography', while the latter approached the taiga as the homeland, as 'the beloved taiga' (2021: 28).[8] Küçüküstel further explains the difference leaning on one's own experience. Over multiple visits to the taiga, she bonded with some landscapes which

came to hold precious memories to her (2021: 31). Küçüküstel's observation about 'a map of memories in a spirited geography' (2021: 27–46) is similar to sentient homelands, which keep and share memories amongst pastoralists in Tyva.

The Tyva people acknowledge the sentiency of landscapes in different communal and family practices: food offerings, asking for help, prohibitions on activities that could be offensive (e.g., leaving trash and speaking ill about them), and understanding some nonhumans (in the steppe ecologies—horses and wolves) as communicative bridges between homelands and human–livestock communities (Argent 2010; Charlier 2015; Peemot 2021). The above-mentioned practices are mostly individual or performed in an intimate family setting. They survived under the Soviet regime when other—communal—practices of bonding with sentient nonhumans, *dagylga*, were prohibited. Post-Soviet political transformations, including decollectivisation and a shift in memory politics, triggered the reverse process—strengthening the sense of belonging with the homelands. The communal *dagylga* of the homelands has been revived, drastically increased, and transformed since the 1990s (Lamazhaa and Suvandii 2021; Mongush 1992).

The syncretism of Buddhism and mountain worship amongst the Tyva people allows for non-conflicting hierarchies, where the superordinate being is understood as either Buddha (*Burgan bashky*) or a mountain. The best illustration for this syncretic belief system could be the mountains passes where a ritual cairn *Ovaa* and a Buddhist stupa are built next to each other. Examples can be found at the passes Kaldak-Khamar and Teeli in the Taŋdy-Uula Mountain range.

Feature 1

Feature 2. The ritual cairn *Ovaa* at the pass Teeli, western Taŋdy-Uula Mountains, Tyva, July 2016. Author's own photo.

Feature 3. The Buddhist stupa at the pass Teeli, western Taŋdy-Uula Mountains, Tyva, July 2016. Author's own photo.

I also observed this phenomenon in everyday situations amongst pastoralists in Tyva. For instance, a herder who defines himself as a Buddhist visits the Buddhist temples in Tyva and Mongolia and invites a lama to perform rituals. He also venerates (masters of) his homelands, including Mounts Agar and Khaan Kögei. The difference between the Buddhist stupa and a sentient landscape lies in the official recognition of their statuses as the sites of worship. The high hierarchy of Mount Agar and Lake Shara-Nuur as respected and sentient homelands is acknowledged by the Soyan community and revealed in multiple practices, which continue from generation to generation. However, this status is not ecognized by the state. The Buddhist stupa transforms the Chylgy-Dash site and its surrounding landscape into a religious worship site, which can be ecognized in the state-approved legal system. As such, further activities at the site, including its protection, can be interpreted within the framework of Law of the Republic of Tyva No. 253, 'Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations' from 1995 (modified in 2015) and Federal Law No. 125, 'Freedom of Conscience and Religious Organisations' from 1997.

CHYLGY-DASH AND SHARA-NUUR IN THE SOYANS' IDENTITY AND COLLECTIVE MEMORY

Maurice Halbwachs noted that every collective memory unfolds within a spatial framework: 'It is to space—the space we occupy, traverse, have continual access to, or can at any time reconstruct in thought and imagination—that we must turn our attention. Our thought must focus on it if this or that category of remembrances is to reappear' (1980: 6–7). Following Halbwachs' suggestion, I link the collective memory of the Soyans to the clan's home landscapes. I begin by clarifying the community-homeland identity negotiations. Amongst pastoralists who live in the Saian and Altai mountainous regions of Inner Asia, one's identity is connected to their life's geography. Tyva linguist Mira Bavuu-Surun observed how the Tyva people define themselves in relation to the geography. She suggested that the Tyva have a strong sense of belonging to their own clan and homelands:

> The names given to each other by the Indigenous Tyva people on a geographic principle are interesting. The Tozhu–Tyva self-identify as Tozhu, or the Tyva of Tozhu, whilst they define the rest [of the Tyva people] as the Khemchik, inhabitants of the Khemchik area. People from central Tyva, which lies adjacent to the Yenisei River, are distinguished from the Erzin–Tes people, the Tozhu, and the Khemchik (inhabitants of the Khemchik River drainage basin), whilst they define themselves as the people of Ulug–Khem. Within the larger territories, the clan's grounds are distinguished as well. This reveals the Tyva people's acute sense of belonging with a particular clan and with a particular territory. (Bavuu-Surun 2018: 274, author's own translation)

In the case of my Soyan kin amongst whom I conducted research, clan identity is connected to current-day clan territories in southern Tyva. Different Soyan groups live in other parts of Tyva; my clan distinguishes themselves as the Soyans of Ak-Erik. When I say that I am from Ak-Erik, my Tyva interlocutors immediately connect the place to my clan as belonging to the Soyan. In my doctoral dissertation (Peemot 2021), I applied the Tyvan concept *cher törel*,

which I translated as 'land-based kinship', to define the relationship between the Tyva pastoralists with sentient nonhumans—that is, landscapes and animals. The concept *cher törel* encompasses the meanings 'those who are born in the same land' or 'those who are related through a shared belonging to one homeland'.

This observation, that the Tyva people tether their identity to their homeland, corresponds with other Indigenous peoples' understandings of their close ties to their homelands. For instance, Opaskwayak Cree researcher Stan Wilson, writing about '[t]he (literally) grounded identity of Indigenous peoples', coined the concept 'self-as-relationship' which underlies Indigenous epistemology where one learns through a complex relational network (Wilson 2001: 91). The same idea appears in the work of Elizabeth Fast, a Métis from St. François-Xavier, and Margaret Kovach, who has Nêhiyaw and Saulteaux ancestry. They wrote, 'A self that [has] a deep relationship with place, kinship, and community can be found in myriad Indigenous cultures' (Fast and Kovach 2019: 23). I draw attention to and emphasise the relationship with 'place, kinship, and community' due to its importance for, on the one hand, understanding Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and, on the other hand, research methodology when working with Indigenous communities. Indigenous scholar Shawn Wilson noted the inseparability of Indigenous ontology and epistemology, stating 'Nothing could be without being in relationship, without its context. Our systems of knowledge are built by and around and also form these relationships' (2008: 76–77).

The model 'self-as-relationship' (Wilson 2001; Fast and Kovach 2019) helped me in my research with my kin in our shared homelands. Tyva pastoralists follow an annual cycle when moving within their homeland—they move from one seasonal ground to another and regularly return to the same landscapes. This implies the landscapes' entanglement in the (hi) stories of different generations of local families. These landscape-bonded stories may follow the life geography of an individual (human or nonhuman animal) or a family's belonging with its seasonal grounds (a camping site with a dwelling, and close or far-afield pastures for livestock) over multiple generations. Some emplaced stories testify to the past of the entire clan. In my opinion, anthropologist and archaeologist Barbara Bender's definition of landscape as 'time materialising' suits the meanings landscapes carry for the pastoralists in Tyva. Bender discusses the landscapes' temporality and the human–landscape engagements, specifically the involvement of landscapes in memories and actions (2002):

> Landscape is time materialising: landscapes, like time, never stand still. […] Landscapes are created out of people's understanding and engagement with the world around them. They are always in the process of being shaped and reshaped. Being of the moment and in process, they are always temporal. They are not a record but a recording, and this recording is much more than a reflection of human agency and action; it is creative of them. Landscapes provoke memory, facilitate (or impede) action. Nor are they a recording for they are always polyvalent and multivocal. (Bender 2002: 103)

Similar to Bender who approaches landscapes as continually 'being shaped and reshaped', other scholars who researched pastoralist communities pointed out the inherent temporality of landscapes and how they are made in social engagements with the human–nonhuman

communities inhabiting them (Humphrey 1995; Takakura 2010; Fijn 2011; Pedersen 2016). Tim Ingold observed that a place owes 'its character to the experiences it affords to those who spend time there—to the sights, sounds, and indeed smells that constitute its specific ambience' (2002 [2000]: 192). Likewise, geographer Yi-Fu Tuan emphasised social engagements between a place and those who interact with it. Tuan wrote, 'A place has a history and meaning. Place incarnates the experiences and aspirations of a people. Place is not only a fact to be explained in the broader frame of space, but it is also a reality to be clarified and understood from the perspectives of the people who have given it meaning' (Tuan 1979: 387). In relation to pastoralist landscapes, Tuan noted, 'The nomad's world consists of places connected by a path. […] Nomads pause and establish camp at roughly the same places (pastures and water holes) year after year; the paths they follow also show little change. For nomads, the cyclical exigencies of life yield a sense of place at two scales: the camps and the far larger territory within which they move' (2001: 182). Tuan suggested various models in which movement, time, and space are bonded together (Tuan 2001: 181). The Finnish anthropologist Rani-Henrik Andersson, who works with the Lakota people, makes a similar observation about a connection between time and place: 'For many Indigenous peoples, time and place are linked through a connection to lands and waters, to places they hunt and fish, and to where their ancestors have lived and been buried' (2019: 68).

During fieldwork in Tyva in June 2019, the theme of the mining project in Shara-Nuur and the Ak-Erik Soyans' joint purpose to build the Buddhist stupa and protect their homeland have frequently occurred in conversations with my kin and interlocutors. My grandmother Irisiŋmaa Kadyp-ool shared her memories about living at the Chylgy-Dash site in the early 1950s. She mentioned that 'there were fewer snakes at Chylgy-Dash' compared with other summer camping sites along the southern shore of Lake Shara-Nuur. The only disadvantage of Chylgy-Dash, according to my grandmother, was a lack of drinking water, whereby women had to walk to the well close to the lake. In the stories I recorded from other interlocutors, the themes of the clan's belonging with the homeland and resilience against the state's politics of displacement and repression were prominent. Below I share excerpts from two conversations which took place in Shara-Nuur in June 2019:

> Our people are the Soyans of Mounts Agar and Iamaalyk and Lake Shara-Nuur, places that we see around us at the moment. Until 1932 or 1934, the Soyans lived in the great homeland of our ancestors—the Khaan Kögei Mountains which are now part of Mongolia. Our people were forced to move north, to here. They came here and settled around three lakes: Töre-Khöl, Shara-Nuur, and Bai-Khöl. After a few years, these people, who were relocated due to the border demarcation and just began building a new life here, were repressed. Many men were imprisoned. Our people experienced great misfortune. (Viacheslav Arina, b. 1959, video-recorded conversation, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, June 2019)

> In the past our people stayed on Mount Agar for winter. The spring and autumn places were by Lakes Töre-Khöl, Shara-Nuur, and Bai-Khöl. In summers, they moved to Khaan Kögei, some families lived there all year. My grandfather and his ancestors lived there. During the period of the People's Republic of Tyva, the Soyans' administrative unit was named the

> *Kögei sumu*. Since 1929, the Communist University of Workers of the East in Moscow began to educate the government officials for Tyva. These people had a purpose for Tyva to follow the USSR's politics, the politics of Stalin, and they returned to Tyva and organised the coup. Before that, the government in Tyva did not want to give our territories to Mongolia. When Salchak Toka and his supporters seized power, they gave large territories to Mongolia. To free the territories from the Tyva people, they used forced displacement. After that, the displaced people were repressed. Sandaŋmaa Soyan, the head of the Soyans' Tere-Khöl municipality which was established in the new place after relocation, was executed in 1938. (Vladimir Orus-ool, b. 1959, video-recorded conversation, Shara-Nuur, Tyva, June 2019)

These conversations demonstrate, firstly, how landscapes are understood as part of the clan's identity. Secondly, they show how people perceived losing a part of the clan's territory as a great injustice. Thirdly, they reveal how people's (hi)stories are tethered to their home landscapes. This leads to an understanding of landscapes as keepers of collective memory and life stories. These two stories may also illustrate Ingold's observation about the Indigenous people's history, which unfolds in 'their relationships with the land, in the very business of dwelling' and how '[b]oth the land and [the] living beings who inhabit it are caught up in the same, ongoing historical process' (2002 [2000]:139).

CONCLUSIONS

When discussing how the Soyans confronted the government and involved their homelands in storytelling about their clan's belonging to an endangered landscape, it is important to situate these activities within the broader context of Putin's tightening memory politics in the years preceding the temporary occupation of Crimea in 2014 and invasion of Ukraine in 2022. The first post-Soviet decade was a time when 'history itself was only now becoming possible' (Humphrey 1992: 379) and the past was critically re-assessed. After a brief period of democracy in the 1990s, Russia became a police state, favouring vertical power structures and attempts to control interethnic narratives, including identity narratives, amongst its subjects. Since Vladimir Putin was elected president in 2000, Russia's approach to its past has shifted to suit the state's ideology. Putin's Russia reinstated control over the narratives of the past and the collective memory using the same repressive tactics characteristic of the Soviet regime (for more on the politics of memory in contemporary Russia, see Miller 2012; Oushakine 2013; Sherlock 2011; Wijermars 2019; Weiss-Wendt 2021).

At the time of the events discussed in 2019, tension already existed between the state-approved version of history and Indigenous historicities. In the public sphere, traumas associated with Soviet colonisation were silenced and collective memories were perceived as dangerous. In these circumstances, the Soyans' engagement with the traumatic past, its revival in the collective memory, and the active sharing of these stories can be understood as acts of resilience. This case study, which focuses on Soyans remembering the stories of their belonging with the endangered site and the

building of a Buddhist stupa there, speaks to the ability of the homeland to safeguard the stories of its people and empower resilience, especially under a colonial and a totalitarian regime.

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NOTES

1 The Tyva Republic is a part of the Russian Federation, which was annexed by the Soviet Union in 1944. The Tyva people are the ethnic majority in the republic. The Tyvan language belongs to the Turkic language family, and the region is situated between the Altai and Saian Mountain ranges of Inner Asia.

2 Specific letters of the Tyvan Cyrillic alphabet are transliterated as follows: ө – ö, ү – ü, ң – ŋ, ы – y, й – i, ч – ch, ш – sh, ж – zh, and х – kh. Vowels are short, long, or pharyngealised. Pharyngealisation is marked by the phonetic sign ʔ, as in aʔt [аът]. The ethnonyms and toponyms (Tyva, Kyzyl, Soyan, etc.) are listed in the established transcription system. The form Tyvan is used as an adjective.

3 Tyvan ethnographer Marina Mongush, who studies the history of Buddhism in Tyva, noted that Buddhism first came to the territory of Tyva as early as the First Turkic Khaganate in the sixth century. The second wave of Buddhism came to the territories of Mongolia and Tyva in the thirteenth century and coincided with Genghis Khan's expansion of the Mongolian empire, the most active period running from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries. During socialism, Buddhism was suppressed and many lamas were persecuted during the Purges of the 1930s. The fall of the Soviet Union represented the beginning of the religious revival, with Buddhist temples and stupas built in various parts of Tyva. The Tyva follow the traditions of the Gelugpa School of Tibetan Buddhism, led by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, who visited Tyva in 1992. The Institute of Kamby Lama, the highest Buddhist authority in Tyva, was established in 1997 (Mongush 2000; Mongush 2001). A stupa is a Buddhist monument built for various purposes and which holds relics and/or sacred elements and treasures.

4 Lake Shara-Nuur is part of the Kyzyl-Chyraa municipality in the Tes-Khem province of the Tyva Republic. The municipality is also known by the name of its administrative centre—the Ak-Erik village. Sometimes, local Soyans refer to themselves as 'the Soyans of Ak-Erik'.

5 For more on the natural resources and geology of Tyva in general, see Hausen (1925) and Sarbaa (2015).

6 Sholban Kara-ool was the head of the government of the Republic of Tyva from 2007 through 2021. Since October 2021, Kara-ool has served as the deputy chairman of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. Kara-ool has been supported by Sergei Shoigu, minister of defence of the Russian Federation (2012–present), the longest-serving politician in the Russian government since the fall of the Soviet Union (*The Economist*, November 7, 2015). Shoigu was born in Tyva. Since Shoigu assumed leadership of the political party *Edinstvo* or 'Unity' (the predecessor to *Edinaia Rossiia* 'United Russia'), Tyva has been among the regions with the highest levels of support for the Kremlin's political policies.

7 I use the nouns stupa and its Tyvan translation *suburgan* interchangeably.

8 I provide here the name of the ethnic group as *Dukha*, following the orthography in the cited source. However, the people in question define themselves as the *Tukha* and refer to thier own language as the *Tukha* language; they also use the same definition 'Tukha' when speaking about the Tyva people in the Tyva Republic and the Tyvan-speaking people in western Mongolia (Peemot, fieldnotes and recorded conversations, fieldwork in Mongolia in summer 2023).

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