

April 1, 2014

Reading: Vitebsky, *Reindeer People*

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-Conflicting beliefs about Bayanay, specifically on the topic of hunting

Why bother hunting if Bayanay will just present prey for you? God helps people that help themselves...but this doesn't appear in Vitebsky

Consequence of living in capitalist society is that we see ourselves as making conscious decisions and directing our own lives;

Eveny may see their lives as something they don't have complete control over, but as part of a bigger whole- have different, more integral relationship with environment- on a continuum Higher level process that they are a part of that they can't understand, so develop stories/attribute human qualities so they can explain it

Explanation (religion) may have happened after hunting was already established practice Bayanay rewards those in good physical condition- more externalized than good physical condition means I can kill more successfully

-Given that reindeer are such a good candidate for domestication, why did reindeer domestication happen in Russia and not elsewhere?

giant migration patterns in Russia, not in Canada? Relative scarcity may explain...

Vitebsky sees domestication of reindeer on parallel with domestication of humans- necessary for success of reindeer herders

Russian north better suited for migration/people- Canadian north may be too harsh

-The effect of Soviet communism on the relationship between domesticated reindeer and the Eveny people

communist theory says provide for everybody, but killed shamans? early communism government needed to modernize so economy and military would be prepared in war- weren't caught up to industrialization, so communism didn't work the way it was supposed to after WWI empire was dissolved- needed to be a unionized country to be modern, so had to collectivize the reindeer herders/nomads- considered backwards and nonproductive without intervention of Soviet government

-Treatment of animals in a capital vs Soviet communist society

Wasn't supposed to be a formula, but there was- tried to fit reindeer herders into new communist society

Difference in communist understanding of morality in treatment of animals and treatment of nature (mastering/subduing it)

Capitalism: people who do the work don't get the profit they create

Communism:

-Commodification of animals: how did the relationship change between humans and reindeer as the animals changed from partners to commodities?

Important shift: state sees reindeer as commodity; Eveny see as social creatures, part of community- we are unusual b/c western society sees itself as society unto itself- animals are either instrumental or commodities, with no intrinsic worth

-Division between domesticated and wild reindeer: change of genes? What accounts for the differences?

-Relationship of animal treatment in correlation with religion in pastoral and nomadic societies

Eveny are pastoral nomadic

Comes down to attitude towards nature: pastoralism is dominion over flock (as in Christianity);

Reindeer are more communal- not hierarchal; no differentiation in souls

Seeing animals as individuals w/ names, not just "a reindeer"

-How we treat our pets vs animals that are domesticated for food

-Domesticated people: can humans be domesticated in the same way that animals can? Did this happen to the reindeer people?

-Dream interpretation

Dying reindeer=Dying person (predetermined event)

Unsurprising that Eveny identify with reindeer in dreams- have simple lifestyle with few animals, reindeer are important to their own survival

Dreams thought of as unconscious processes being projected into conscious mind- can only be understood/interpreted through symbolism → dreams are about whats going on in our heads, not whats happening in reality (might reflect reality, but it's all inside our heads)

Eveny believe that dreams are foretellings of fate- not directions or something we can do anything about