

9. The Role of Academia in Finding, Claiming, and Authorizing Sakha Religions

Liudmila Nikanorova

Introduction

Scholarly writings are often perceived as legitimate and authoritative sources of knowledge by fellow academics, various political and social institutions, and the general public. When disputes and differences in opinion occur, scholarly voices are the ones that are typically called upon in an effort to make a more substantial argument. In this chapter, I address the role and power of scholars and scholarly endeavours, in regard to the processes of finding, claiming and authorizing Sakha practices as religious.

Throughout the last four hundred years, Sakha people and their practices have become the objects of translations into the Russian language and Russian worldviews on the one hand. On the other hand, Russians and their practices became the objects of translations into the Sakha language and Sakha worldviews.¹ Although translations of practices went both ways, the power dynamics were far from equal. Russians and other Europeans had the resources to make written records of their translations using their own vocabularies. These written documents were consistently treated as legitimate sources of Sakha people's past and their traditional worldviews, which quickly placed Europeans into the position of definers of Sakha practices. Bjørn Ola Tafjord argues that 'to define is to exercise power'.² This chapter demonstrates how this power has been exercised in regard to Sakha practices.

Inspired by the scholars in the field of critical study of religion who challenge the assumption of religion as something universal

How to cite this book chapter:

Nikanorova, L. 2022. The Role of Academia in Finding, Claiming, and Authorizing Sakha Religions. In: Rydving, H. and Kaikkonen, K. (eds.) *Religions around the Arctic: Source Criticism and Comparisons*. Pp. 257–277. Stockholm: Stockholm University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.16993/bbu.j>. License: CC BY 4.0

and timeless, I explore the role of scholars in recording and authorizing Sakha religions.³ I make use of Markus Dressler and Arvind-Pal Mandair's theoretical model of religion-making,⁴ which focuses on the way religion is being made through different dimensions and different actors.⁵ I focus in particular on its dimension of *religion-making from (a pretended) outside*, which I apply heuristically in my study. This dimension encourages to explore the impact of scholars and scholarly works in the processes of religion-making, and how they reify and normalize certain ideas as characteristic or even essential, to the notion of religion.

Finding Religion and Shamans among Sakha

European travellers to Siberia, the marker of the colonized territories by Russia, were the first to leave ethnographic accounts of Sakha people from the seventeenth century. Among them were Danish diplomat Eberhart Isbrand Ides (1657–1709), Swedish officer Philipp Johan von Strahlenberg (1676–1747), and German-born Russian historian Gerhard Müller (1705–1783). Their records were typically written in European languages and featured Christian perspectives in the descriptions of Sakha practices, which made them the first translators of Sakha worldviews towards the domain of religion.⁶ The value of these writings was accentuated by one of the most respected ethnographers of Sakha origin Gavriil Ksenofontov (1888–1938). He argues that the writings of Ides, Strahlenberg and Müller were more objective than the writings of later scholars, who, according to Ksenofontov,⁷ were corrupted by Russian and Tsarists attitudes.

In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, missionaries, political exiles, and ethnographers with predominantly Christian backgrounds continued to translate and categorize Sakha practices.⁸ As a result, a new category appears in descriptions of Sakha practices – ‘shamanism’. The term ‘shaman’ is not domestic to Sakha language. The Sakha practitioner *oyuun* along with the Manchu *sama*, the Buryat *böö* and the Khanty *ñajt* was compared to the Evenki *šaman*. Based on these comparisons, Evenki *šaman* transformed into a collective term ‘shaman’.⁹ But what was the premise of such a comparison?

According to the historian of religions Håkan Rydving, different practitioners around the world were labelled as shamans because of their ‘analogous functions’ (Fr. *de fonctions analogues*).¹⁰ However, not all peoples whose practitioners had analogous functions to the Evenki *šaman* were compared to each other. No Russian or other Slavic practitioners were compared to *šaman*. Settler practitioners with similar features and functions were named as *tselitel’* (Ru. ‘healer’), *znakhar’* (Ru. ‘know-er’), *vedun* (Ru. ‘lead-er’), but never shaman. The term shaman was reserved to the non-settler societies of Siberia, historically categorized as *inorodtsy* (Ru. ‘of other kind’), to mark their assumed ethnic and civilizational difference. Such comparisons were never impartial and neutral, and further fed colonial imaginaries that continuously attempted to primitivize colonized communities.

Sakha practitioners were not only labelled as shamans but also classified into holy and evil types. Ivan Khudyakov (1842–1876) was a Russian folklorist and revolutionary who was sentenced to exile in Verkhoyansk.¹¹ There he learnt Sakha, compiled a Sakha–Russian dictionary, and translated the Old Testament from Russian to Sakha.¹² In his monograph *A Brief Description of Verkhoyansk District* (Ru. *Kratkoe opisanie verkhoyanskogo okruga*), Khudyakov writes:¹³

Shamans are the translators of gods on earth. They are the interpreters of god’s will, givers of health and diseases, abundance and hunger, good and evil. Therefore, they are divided into good and evil, who shaman for the devil.

Very occasionally there might be a sorcerer-shaman (*aptaakh-oyuun*) and a sorceress-shaman (*aptaakh-udagan*). Even the regular shamans are dangerous people: there are some who do not have shadows, while others have two: one of their own, and the other of their devil.¹⁴

This short, yet illustrative, excerpt demonstrates the way Sakha practitioners were described and how observers found not only religion among Sakha, but also shamans and a devil. Such religionization, shamanization and demonization of Sakha practices and practitioners, who were considered ‘primitive’, was common in nineteenth-century language. Waclaw Sieroszewski (1858–1945),

a Polish revolutionary who spent 12 years in Siberian exile (also in Verkhoyansk like Khudyakov) published the first comprehensive ethnographic account of Sakha practices, livelihood and worldview: *Yakuts: Experience of Ethnographic Research* (Ru. *Yakuty: opyt etnograficheskogo issledovaniya*). Like Khudyakov, Sieroszewski suggested his own typology of Sakha shamans:

- a) *The last* [Sa. *kenniki oyuun*]; they are not really shamans but various hysterical, crazy, whacky and strange people, who have abilities to interpret and see prophetic dreams, tell fortunes, treat simple diseases, chase away dirty devils; they lack *emehet* and are not able to shaman with drums, spells and sacrifices.
- b) *Medium shamans* [Sa. *orto oyuun*], – are the ordinary sorcerers, who possess magical powers of different levels, corresponding to their talents and their *emehet*.
- c) *Great shamans, whose patronizing spirit is Uluu-toyon himself* [Sa. *ulakhan oyuun, emehetteeh uluutuiar Uluu toionton ongorulaah*], – are powerful sorcerers; their call is addressed to the lord of darkness himself; I was told that there can be only four great shamans at the same time in the Yakut land.¹⁵

Sakha *oyuuns* were seen by Sieroszewski either as mentally unstable people or as followers of the devil. According to Sundström ‘depicting foreign people’s spiritual and political leaders as frauds, maniacs or devil-worshippers could be the only reason needed to motivate colonisation and the subjugation of the land and the peoples.’¹⁶ Sieroszewski was one of many who mirrored these attitudes in his writings, where he dehumanized Sakha *oyuuns*. Another political exile, Vasily Troshchansky (1843–1898), is largely known for his work *The Evolution of Black Faith (Shamanism) among the Yakuts* (Ru. *Evolutsia chernoi very (shamanstva) u yakutov*) (1902), where he labelled Sakha practices as ‘black/dark faith’.

From the beginning of the twentieth century, ethnographers with Sakha origin began writing about Sakha practices. The Sakha scholars’ contribution does not only consist of writing ethnographies using their linguistic expertise on Sakha language, it also includes a unique access to daily Sakha life and worldviews. However, this is not to imply that Sakha scholars did not

lean on earlier scholarships and categories. Due to their academic training and the environment they worked in, which were both heavily informed by Christian, Russian and Western perspectives. Sakha scholars also wrote about Sakha religion and Sakha shamans using established terminologies. For instance, Sakha ethnographer Gavriil Ksenofontov drew analogies between Christianity and shamanism to demonstrate that Siberian shamanism represented an organized religion just like Christianity.¹⁷ This can be seen as an attempt to analyse Sakha practices as equally complex and legitimate as the Russian practices.¹⁸

The above-discussed ethnographic accounts from the nineteenth and early twentieth century are broadly employed to conceptualize Sakha practices by scholars and the Sakha public today. Terminologies used by these authors or their colonial attitudes do not necessarily form an issue considering the academic traditions at that time. However, the way they are currently considered and interpreted as authoritative unbiased descriptors of Sakha traditional authentic practices makes it difficult to acknowledge the contemporary Sakha practices that do not fit into these accounts. Moreover, assuming that Sakha religions existed statically for several centuries not only freezes Sakha in the past, it also disregards the processes of translations of Sakha practices towards religion. These translations were made by a few European individuals with predominantly Christian backgrounds, who were convinced that religion was a universal phenomenon found in all cultures during all time periods. Furthermore, the category of shamanism exoticized Sakha practices and placed Sakha people outside of modernity. These processes of religion-making and shamanism-making that were uncritically exercised by ethnographers justified anti-religious and modernizing Soviet missions in Sakha context, which led to dramatic consequences for Sakha practitioners.

Soviet Policies on Religion and Eradications of Shamans

Contrary to popular belief, religion or adherence to a religious community was not initially criminalized as such in the Soviet Union. The Constitution of the Soviet Union from 1924 contained article 4 that guaranteed ‘religious freedom’ (Ru. *svoboda religioznykh ispovedanii*), as well as ‘freedom of anti-religious

propaganda' (Ru. *svoboda anti-religioznoi propagandy*). Anatoly Lunacharsky from People's Commissar for Education¹⁹ (Ru. *Narodnyi komissariat prosveshcheniya*) made some statements in which he claimed that religious freedom could be suspended 'when it is abused for the direct class struggle against the proletarian dictatorship'.²⁰ Then in 1929 new laws on 'Religious Associations' and amendments to the constitution which prohibited all forms of public, social, communal, educational, publishing or missionary activities were adopted.²¹ As a result, hundreds of priests were executed, thousands of churches were destroyed, and publication of most religious material was prohibited. These persecutions affected not only Russian Orthodox Christians but also Muslims, Catholics, Protestants, Buddhists and practitioners, who were categorized and described in religious terms such as shamans. Shamans were labelled as 'class enemies' and selected for complete eradication.²² Sakha practitioners named *oyuun*, based on its translation into 'shaman', were imprisoned and executed as a result of anti-religious policies in the Soviet Union.²³

Not only religious but also the ethnic identity of a person was compromised in favour of promoting an idea of a Soviet citizen. In 1928, Stalin began 'The Great Transformation', a process which in the words of Susan Crate aimed 'to wipe out all backwardness and reminders of the past, and to manipulate ethnic differences into a streamlined Soviet identity'.²⁴ The policies of internationalism (Ru. *mezhdunarodnost'*) and nativization (Ru. *korenizatsia*) were promoted to create local intelligentsias that could bring socialism and modernity to their compatriots.²⁵ According to Peers & Kolodeznikova,²⁶ this type of social and cultural engineering during the Soviet Union, has influenced the way ethnicity and religion are currently framed throughout the former Soviet Union when the idea of a Soviet citizen faded and the focus was redirected to different expressions of ethnic and religious identities. In the Sakha context, this period is often described as the Sakha national revitalization.²⁷

Claiming Sakha religions

In 1990, Sakha declared their sovereignty within the Russian Federation, which resulted in the establishment of the Sakha Parliament, the adoption of the Sakha Constitution (1993), and the

recognition of Sakha as the official language within the Republic. In 1990, freedom of conscience was officially re-introduced in Russia, which had a major impact on the way Sakha practices were conceptualised.²⁸

The 1990s were a rather chaotic period when various Sakha activists attempted to run several organizations that claimed to revive Sakha language, Sakha culture, Sakha philosophy and Sakha spirituality.²⁹ In 1996, the first president of the Sakha Republic, Mikhail Nikolayev, founded the Akademiia dukhovnosti (Ru.) (Academy of Spirituality) in which various actors, including the Russian Orthodox bishop of Sakha, were assigned to reawaken and develop spirituality in the multi-ethnic population of the Republic.³⁰ However, by the end of the 1990s Sakha authorities turned from encouragement to distancing themselves from Sakha activists as some of them developed radical religious and national attitudes.³¹ Some activists, Lazar' Afanase'v-Teris and Vladimir Konkakov, continued their work and became the initiators of the three religious organizations that claim to represent Sakha religion today: Aar Ayuu Itegele (Kondakov), Ayuu Itegele (Afanase'v-Teris), and Tengrism (Afanase'v-Teris).

One group of scholars and activists established the 'Social Centre of Yakutia' (Ru. *obshestvennyi tsentr yakutii*) in 1989, members of which founded a group Sakha Tyla (Sa.) ('Sakha language') in collaboration with Sakha linguists.³² In 1990, Sakha Tyla led by Sakha linguist Lazar' Afanasi'ev-Teris opened a school called Kut-Syur, which positioned itself as a philosophical-theological school with the main purpose of revitalising the moral values of Sakha. The teaching of this school was named Aiyu Eyerege (Sa.) ('Teaching of Aiyu'), and this was claimed to be rooted in Tengrism.³³ At about the same time in 1990, Sakha historian Vladimir Kondakov founded the Association of Sakha Medicine, arguing that Sakha medicine is a part of the spiritual culture (Ru. *dukhovnaia kul'tura*) of Sakha.³⁴

Aar Ayuu Itegele

Vladimir Kondakov is a well-known figure in Sakha society beyond his role as the founder of the Association of Sakha Medicine. He led the ceremonial part of the Sakha annual event Tuymaada Yhyakh from 1991 to 1997, and actively participated in the

conceptualization of *yhyakh*. *Yhyakh*, recognized as the Sakha national day in 1991, is one of the most significant and largest annual Sakha celebrations. Scholars have been historically describing *yhyakh* as a ‘shamanic ceremony’, ‘religious ritual’, and recently as an ‘indigenous festival’. These descriptions of *yhyakhs*, however, are nearly absent among the contemporary visitors, who attend *yhyakhs* predominantly to see sports competitions, concerts, and to enjoy the day in the company of friends and family.³⁵ Tuymaada Yhyakh is the first public *yhyakh* that took place in Yakutsk in 1991, the capital of the Sakha Republic. It was named after Tuymaada valley where Yakutsk city is situated. Rapidly, the Tuymaada Yhyakh grew into a massive event celebrated by thousands of people.

Vladimir Kondakov introduces himself in his books as a professor, doctor of medical sciences, researcher of shamanism (Ru. *issledovatel' shamanizma*) and *aiyy oyuun*.³⁶ American anthropologist Marjorie Balzer met Vladimir Kondakov in 1991 and writes about him as *aiyy oyuun*, which she translates into a ‘Sakha shaman’.³⁷ By the time of his death in 2009, Kondakov had written a six-volume book *Aar Ayuu Itegele* (2003–06) along with many other publications on Sakha medicine and Sakha worldviews. With these books as basis members of the Association of Sakha Medicine applied in 2011 to the Ministry of Justice of the Russian Federation with the request to register ‘Aar Ayuu Itegele’ as a religious organization.³⁸ This was the first time an organized group claimed to represent Sakha religion. The application was written by Sakha scholars in philosophy (Viktor Mikhailov) and philology (Nikolai Petrov and Konstantin Utkin), and sent in by the initiator of the organization, Avgustina Yakovleva.³⁹ In this application, Aar Ayuu Itegele argues that it represents the ‘ancient religion of Sakha people’ (Ru. *drevniaia religiiia naroda Sakha*):

According to the scholarly literature, historical roots of religion Aar Ayuu Itegele is in pan-Turkic religion – Tengrism [Ru. *tengri-anstvo*]. Aar Ayuu represents the ancient religion of Sakha people [...]

[...] Aar Ayuu can be categorized as paganism [Ru. *yazychestvo*] considering its polytheistic system, attention to the world of spirits [Ru. *dukhov*], sacrifices for appeasement of spirits, and attribution

to all things with qualities of living entities. Due to the exceptional role of a shaman [Ru. *shaman*], religion Aar Ayuu can be called shamanism.⁴⁰

The organization acknowledges a variety of categories that could be applied to Aar Ayuu Itegele such as paganism (Ru. *yazychestvo*) and shamanism. This can be seen as an example of how Aar Ayuu Itegele chooses to effectively manage earlier established categories applied to the notion of Sakha religion. However, they do not claim shamanism or paganism, instead they choose to name their practice Aar Ayuu Itegele.

The registration process consisted of several questions that were set by an expert committee. One of them was ‘Can Aar Ayuu Itegele be considered as a religion?’ To answer this question both the applicants and the committee referred to definitions offered by classic theorists of religion such as William James, Sigmund Freud, James George Frazer, Max Sheler and Émile Durkheim, as well as Russian scholars of religion such as Olga Lobazova, Gennadiy Torgashev, Georgy Plekhanov and Dmitry Ugrinovich.⁴¹ Another question was: ‘Is it possible to teach religion and train its followers without formalized and published sources of teaching?’ To make an argument, the applicants argued referring to Émile Durkheim that illiterate religions just like the literate religions have similar social roles, and therefore both can be seen as religions.⁴² In 2018, I met one of the initiators of Aar Ayuu Itegele, Tamara Timofeevna, who shared with me that the organization later decided to write ‘a Bible and Quran like book’ in order to fit better the criteria of the Ministry of Justice.

One member of the appointed expert committee, Popkova wrote a special opinion (Ru. *osoboe mnemie*) regarding the application of Aar Ayuu Itegele.⁴³ Special opinions from the experts, usually of scholarly backgrounds, were extensively used during the registration processes by the Ministry of Justice. The major critique on Aar Ayuu Itegele was, according to Popkova, its claim to represent the ancient Sakha religion. Referring to the submitted application text and Vladimir Kondakov’s books, Popkova commented on the extensive use of terms as karma, aura, trans, ecstasy, cosmic powers, pantheon of gods and astral spirits.⁴⁴ These terms according to Popkova suggested that Aar Ayuu Itegele is

not an ancient religion of Sakha, but a recent reconstruction and an example of the New Age movement. Following this Popkova recommended a further examination of the organization. Despite her critique, Aar Ayuu Itegele was registered as a religious organization in 2011 and became the first officially registered religious organization that claimed to represent Sakha religion.

Ayuu Itegele

Another key figure to this discussion is Lazar' Afanas'ev-Teris, a philologist by education and one of the founders of the Kut-Syur school, who applied to the Ministry of Justice in 2015 to register his organization Ayuu Itegele as religious:

Religion Ayuu is a modern Tengrism [Ru. *tengrianstvo*]. Many scholars considered the religion of Sakha surprisingly organized and systematized. The religion of Sakha is based on the belief in Ayuu. His full name is Urung Ayuu, which in translation means the White Creator [Ru. *belyi tvorets*] [...]

[...] Children of Ayuu together with the White Creator form nine heavens. In other religions, there are also similar notions, such as Jacob's ladder from the Old Testament. [...]

The main source of Ayuu religion is *olonkho*, the greatest creation of Sakha people.⁴⁵

The comparison of nine heavens in Ayuu Itegele to Jacob's ladder is one of the examples of Afanas'ev-Teris comparing Ayuu Itegele to Christianity. Like the initiators of Aar Ayuu Itegele, Teris also stresses the important role of Sakha oral culture, specifically the Sakha epic style *olonkho*, which was recognized by UNESCO and added to their list for Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2005.

Sakha historian Valeriy Vasil'ev, who was a member of the expert committee appointed by the Ministry of Justice, wrote a special opinion on Ayuu Itegele. He made the following comments:

- calendar celebrations and rituals of Ayuu Itegele seem to be rooted in Christian celebrations and are following the solar calendar. Whereas Sakha have been historically following the lunar calendar;

- according to Gerhard Müller, Sakha were divided into various ‘sects’ and their religious system has not been as systematized as Ayuú Itegele claims;
- there are no sources about nine *chakras* among Sakha. This element has been borrowed from the Sanskrit terminology.⁴⁶

Vasil’ev concluded that Ayuú Itegele is a new movement of Tengrism with cultural elements from the East and from the West.⁴⁷ Müller’s account from the early eighteenth century was used to contest the applicant’s claim made in the twentyfirst century about the Sakha religious system. The solar calendar celebrations that Ayuú Itegele articulated as Sakha were dismissed solely based on the scholarly sources claiming that Sakha followed the lunar calendar. At last, the final comment criticizing the existence of the nine chakras among Sakha was again based on the lack of the written scholarly sources. All these examples demonstrate the power of vocabularies employed by the early ethnographic records of Sakha practices. Despite these critical remarks, Ayuú Itegele was registered in 2015 and became the second organization that claimed to represent Sakha religion.

Tengrism

In 2016, Lazar’ Afanas’ev-Teris again applied to the Ministry of Justice to request the registration of his other organization Tangara (Tengri) Itegele as religious.⁴⁸ He applied together with Lena Fedorova, official representative of Tangara Itegele. Like in Ayuú Itegele, Afanas’ev argues that Tengrism (Ru. *tengrisnastvo*) is the traditional monotheistic religion of Sakha people with Tengri as the one and only God-Creator.⁴⁹ To which the expert committee responded:

The practice of this religious community is nothing but an artificial reconstruction based on the fragments of Sakha traditional beliefs and compilation of elements of the religions of Turkic peoples, Buddhism and Christianity.⁵⁰

In addition, Tangara Itegele was criticized for a lack of religious activities such as services, rituals and ceremonies. The committee also commented on the double religious affiliation of Afanas’ev-Teris

(with both Ayu Itegele and Tangara Itegele), which they found as contradicting to the established traditions and practice of confessional affiliation.⁵¹ As a result, the application of Tangara Itegele was declined.

In 2017, Lena Fedorova applied again to the Ministry of Justice. This time, Tangara Itegele collaborated with one of the most prominent Sakha ethnographers, Professor Anatoly Gogolev. Gogolev supported the application and presented his special opinion stating that ‘the organization Tangara Itegele is authentic to the teaching of Tangara (Tengri), as is presented in a number of research materials.’⁵² Despite Gogolev’s opinion, the expert committee concluded:

At the moment, the scientific theory about Tengrism as a common religion of Euroasian peoples, on which Tangara Itegele is based on, cannot be either approved or disapproved because of the lack of research and scientific sources.

Ceremonies and rituals of this organization are not independent and overlap with the religious practice of Aar Ayu Itegele and Ayu Itegele, which both claim to represent the traditional religion of Sakha people.

The expert committee concludes that Tangara Itegele does not fit the criteria of a religious organization.⁵³

Committee member, Nikolaev, wrote also a special opinion regarding the submitted application:

1. Application is written by non-competent ‘office theorists’, who do not even differentiate the concepts of ‘religious community’ [Ru. *religioznoe ob’edinenie*] and ‘religious organization’ [Ru. *religioznaia organizatsia*].
2. Application is based on research of various scholars, which contradicts to the basic condition of any religion, which is belief in the Absolute [Ru. *absolut*].
3. There is no proof in the application that Tangara Itegele is the successor of the ancient belief of Sakha in Tangara (Tengri).
4. It is clear that Tangara Itegele used Christian and Islamic religious organizations as templates for their own practices.⁵⁴

Firstly, the organization was challenged for their lack of scholarly sources about Tangara Itegele. Secondly, notwithstanding this

argument it was then criticized for using academic research as a resource instead of forming their teaching based solely on belief in ‘an absolute, as in any other religion’. Moreover, all the of the three organizations had to meet the standards of religious organizations, which were clearly informed by the world religions paradigm, but at the same time they were accused of using world religions as templates. Despite these contradicting arguments, Nikolaev then concludes that Tangara Itegele can be recognized as a religious organization as it does fit the nature of a religious organization: it performs religious activities and it is practised in the territory of the Sakha Republic.⁵⁵

The extensive ways in which academic research was employed in the registration processes is also apparent in an attempt of Nikolaev to delegitimize some scholars who he reduced to non-competent ‘office theorists’. Who is then regarded as a competent scholar? In this struggle of competing authenticities among Sakha scholars, Sakha activists and Sakha state institutions, it seems that pre-Soviet research conducted by non-Sakha ethnographers treated as the most legitimate. In April 2019, on its third attempt, Tangara Itegele was finally registered as a religious organization by the Ministry of Justice and Lena Fedorova became the official leader of Tangara Itegele. Lazar’ Afanas’ev-Teris passed away in late 2017 without ever witnessing this recognition.

Concluding Remarks

My research findings revealed a multi-layered role of scholars and academic research both in the processes of finding, claiming and authorizing Sakha religions. The leaders of the three main religious organizations that claim to represent Sakha religion have scholarly backgrounds, Vladimir Kondakov in history and Lazar’ Afanas’ev-Teris in philology. All three organizations, which intended to claim Sakha religion and establish themselves as a religious organization, as well as the Ministry of Justice referred to classics in study of religion, such as Sigmund Freud and Émile Durkheim, to make their arguments. The registration processes of Aar Ayuu Itegele, Ayuu Itegele, and Tengrism demonstrate the normalized features of what a religious organization is expected to be in order to be registered by the state institutions. These ideas, informed by the world religions paradigm, include the

existence of a sacred book such as the Bible or the Quran, regular religious services and teachings. Christianity, Islam and Buddhism were viewed as the ultimate examples of what a religion should be like. The applicants representing Aar Ayuu Itegele, Ayuu Itegele, and Tengrism had to meet these expectations. At the same time, in some occasions they were accused for following these standards too closely and for lacking traditional to Sakha aspects of religion. The Ministry of Justice used the assistance of contemporary scholars by forming special committees, members of which wrote special opinions.

One of the central issues raised in these special opinions was what was authentic Sakha religion and what was artificial reconstruction. In these debates, research of pre-Soviet ethnographers was regarded as the most authoritative source of authentic Sakha practices and seem to have been nearly immune to criticism. However, as I have discussed in the first part of this chapter, the processes of religion-making and shamanism-making conducted by pre-Soviet ethnographers need to be acknowledged and their definitions contextualised. Scholarly categorizations, translations and comparisons have had practical implications for Sakha people, from being targeted by missionaries to being subjected to Soviet eradications. As this case has shown, Sakha people attempt to control translations of their practices, whereas legislations and scholars continue to push their working vocabularies informed by colonial narratives of shamanism, authenticity, and world religions paradigm.

Notes

1. For more on translation as a theoretical concept, see Clifford 2013; de la Cadena 2015; and Tafjord 2017.
2. Tafjord 2006: 374.
3. See Asad 1993; *Secularism and Religion-Making* 2011; Gill 2018; Masuzawa 2011; and Nongbri 2013.
4. Mandair & Dressler 2011.
5. Departing from social constructivist and post-colonial approaches, and inspired by the studies of Edward Said (1978), Jonathan Z. Smith (1988), Talal Asad (1993; 2003), and Tomoko Masuzawa (2011),

Dressler and Mandair suggest three different levels of religion-making: (1) *religion-making from above*, that is as a strategy from a position of power, where religion becomes an instrument of governmentality, a means to legitimize certain politics and positions of power; (2) *religion-making from below*, that is, as a politics where particular social groups in a subordinate position draw on a religionist discourse to re-establish their identities as legitimate social formations distinguishable from other social formations through tropes of religious difference and/ or claims for certain rights; and (3) *religion-making from (a pretended) outside*, that is, scholarly discourses on religion that provide legitimacy to the first two processes of religion-making by systematizing and thus normalizing the religious/secular binary and its derivatives (Mandair & Dressler 2011: 21).

6. More on translations and domains, see Tafjord 2016.

7. Ksenofontov 1937: 23.

8. E.g. Khudyakov 1890; Sieroszewski 1896; Troshchanky 1902; and Jochelson 1906.

9. Znamenski 2003: 1; Rydving 2011: 2; Sundström 2012: 356.

10. Rydving 2011: 8.

11. A town in the Verkhoyansky District of the Sakha Republic.

12. Khudyakov [1860s] 1969: 14.

13. Khudyakov [1860s] 1969: 303–306.

14. *Шаманы – переводчики богов на земле. Они толкователи божеской воли, податели здоровья и болезни, изобилия и голода, добра и зла. Потому они и делятся на добрых (святых) шаманов и злых (едунов, сиэмэх ойуун), которые шаманят только на дьявола. Очень редко бывают еще колдуны-шаманы (аптах-ойуун) и колдуны шаманки (аптах-удабан). Однако и простые шаманы – страшные люди: из них есть такие, у которых тени не видно (күлүгэ көстүбэт баҕады), и другие, у которых две тени: одна их собственная, а другая их дьявола (Khudyakov [1860s] 1969: 306).*

15. а) *Последние, кенники оюн; это собственно не шаманы, а разные истеричные, полоумные, юродивые и тому подобные странные люди, обладающие способностью толковать и видеть вещи сны, ворожить, лечить более легкие болезни, прогонять мелких, пакостливых чертей; он лишены амагять и не могут справлять*

больших шаманств с барабанным боем, заклинаниями и принесением жерств. б) Средние шаманы, орто оюн, – это обыкновенные чародеи, обладающие волшебной силой в разной степени, сообразно своему таланту и силе своих амагянь. Наконец: с) Великие шаманы, покровительствующий дух которых ниспослан самим Улу-тоёном, улахан оюн, амагяньх улутуёйр Улу-тоёнтон онгорулах, – это могучие чародеи; их зову благосклонно внимает сам властелин тьмы; таких шаманов, мне говорили может быть одновременно только четыре во всей якутской земле (Sieroszewski 1896: 606).

16. Sundström 2012: 356.

17. Ksenofontov 1929.

18. See Ksenofontov 1929.

19. Which in 1946 transformed into the Ministry of Education.

20. Lunacharsky 1929, cited in Pospelovsky 1987: 52.

21. Pospelovsky 1987: 41.

22. Znamensky 2003: 23.

23. Vasil'eva 2000.

24. Crate 2006.

25. Sundström 2015: 81.

26. Peers & Kolodeznikova 2015.

27. E.g. Balzer 2008; Crate 2006; Peers & Kolodeznikova 2015; Sundström 2015.

28. The USSR law 'On the freedom of conscience and the religious organizations' has been introduced the 1st of October 1990 and has been followed the 25th October of the same year by the Russian Federation's law 'On the freedom of the confessions'.

29. For more details on the religious revitalization in the 1990s in the Sakha Republic, see Vasil'ev 2000; Filatov 2000; and Sundström 2012.

30. Filatov 2000; Sundström 2012.

31. Filatov 2000; Sundström 2012. Representatives of the Sakha organizations Kut-Syur and Sakha Keskile.

32. Vasil'ev 2000: 257.

33. Vasil'ev 2000: 257.
34. Vasil'ev 2000: 257.
35. Nikanorova 2019.
36. Kondakov 2003–06.
37. Balzer 2016: 21. Balzer (2016: 21) writes that she periodically visited the Association of Sakha Medicine and Vladimir Kondakov in a period of 1991–2007.
38. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2011.
39. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2011: 3.
40. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2011: 5.
41. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2011: 5 f.
42. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2011: 12.
43. Popkova 2012.
44. Popkova 2012: 2.
45. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2015: 6 f.
46. Vasil'ev 2015: 1.
47. Vasil'ev 2015: 2.
48. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii*. 2016. 'Ekspertnoe zakluchenie v otnoshenii Mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii goroda Yakutska Tangara iteḡele (Religiia Tengri)'. No. 14/02-30/5765 from June 15.
49. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2016: 3.
50. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2016: 4.
51. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2016: 4.
52. Gogolev 2017. Ру.: *Сведения об основах вероисповедания Местной религиозной организации «Тангара Итэḡэлэ (Вера в Тангара (Тенгри))» аутентичны вероучению Тангара (Тенгри), представленному в ряде других исследовательских источников.*
53. *Ministerstvo Yustitsii* 2017: 5.
54. Nikolaev 2017: 1 f.
55. Nikolaev 2017: 1 f.

Abbreviations

Fr.	French
Ru.	Russian
Sa.	Sakha

References

- Asad, Talal. 1993. *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*. Baltimore, MD: John Hopkins University Press.
- Balzer, Marjorie. 1996. Nationalism, interethnic relations and federalism: the case of the Sakha Republic (Yakutia). *Europe-Asia Studies*, 48:1, pp. 101–120.
- . 2008. Beyond belief? Social, political, and shamanic power in Siberia. *Social Analysis*, 52:1, pp. 95–110.
- . 2016. Shamans emerging from repression in Siberia: lightning rods of fear and hope. *Horizons of Shamanism: A Trinagular Approach to the History and Anthropology of Ecstatic Techniques* (Stockholm Studies in Comparative Religion 36), pp. 1–34. Ed. P. Jackson *et al.* Stockholm: Stockholm University Press.
- Clifford, James. 2013. *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-First Century*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- de la Cadena, Marisol. 2015. *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice across Andean Worlds*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Crate, Susan. 2006. Oluokhai: Sakha's unique integration of social meaning and movement. *Journal of American Folklore* 119, pp. 161–183.
- Filatov, Sergei. 2000. Yakutia (Sakha) faces a religious choice: Shamanism or Christianity. *Religion, State and Society* 28:1, pp. 113–122.
- Gill, Sam. 2018. *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference: Perspectives and Strategies*. Washington, DC: Lexington Books.
- Gogolev, Anatoly. 2000. *Istoriia Yakutii: Obzor istoricheskikh sobytii do nachala XX v.* Yakutsk: Yakutskii gosudarstvennyi universitet.

- 2017. Osoboe mnenie chlena Ekspertnogo soveta”. Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii. <https://minjust.ru/ru/religioznye-organizacii/ekspertnyy-sovet-po-provedeniyu-gosudarstvennoy-religiovedcheskoy-ekspertizy> (accessed 27 Sept. 2019).
- Jochelson, Waldemar. 1906. Kumiss festivals of the Yakut and the decoration of Kumiss vessels. *Boas Anniversary Volume: Anthropological Papers written in Honor of Franz Boas, Professor of Anthropology in Columbia University*, pp. 257–271. Eds. B. Laufer & H. Andrews. New York: G.E. Stechert and Co.
- Khudyakov, Ivan A. [1860s] 1969. *Kratkoe opisaniye Verkhoyanskogo okruga*. Leningrad: Nauka.
- 1890. Verkhoyanskii sbornik. Yakutskie skazki, pesni, zagadki, poslovitsy, a takzhe russkie skazki i pesni zapisannyye v Verkhoyanskom okruge. *Zapiski Vost.-Sib. otdeleniia Russkogo geograficheskogo obshchestva po etnografii* 1: 3. Irkutsk: Tipografia K.I. Vitkovskoi.
- Ksenofontov, Gavriil. 1937. *Urañkhai Sakhalar: Ocherki po drevnei istorii yakutov*. Irkutsk: Vost.-Sib.obl.kn.izd.
- 1929. *Khrestes: Shamanism i khristianstvo*. Irkutsk: Tipografiia izdatel'stva “Vlast' Truda.”
- Kondakov, Vladimir. 2003–06. *Aar Aiyy Itegele*. Yakutsk: Izd-vo SO RAN. Yakut. fil.
- 2013. *Aar Ayuut Itegele*. Yakutsk: Agenstvo CIP NBR Sakha.
- Mandair, Arvind-Pal S. & Markus Dressler. 2011. Introduction: modernity, religion-making, and the postsecular. *Secularism and Religion-Making*, pp. 3–36. Eds. M. Dressler & A.-P.S. Mandair. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism*. Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii. 2011. Ekspertnoe zaklucheniye v otnoshenii Mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii goroda Yakutskaya Aar Aiyy itegele (Religiya Aar Aiyy). No. 02-08/8333 from September 30.

- . 2015. Ekspertnoe zakluchenie v otnoshenii Mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii goroda Yakutska Aiyy iteḡele (Religiia Aiyy). No. 14/02-30/6488 from July 7.
- . 2016. Ekspertnoe zakluchenie v otnoshenii Mestnoi religioznoi organizatsii goroda Yakutska Tangara iteḡele (Religiia Tengri). No. 14/02-30/5765 from June 15.
- Nikanorova, Liudmila. 2019. Religion and Indigeneity at Yhyakh. PhD dissertation. Tromsø: UiT – the Arctic University of Norway.
- Nikolaev. 2017. Osoboe mnenie chlena Ekspertnogo soveta. Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii. <https://minjust.ru/ru/religioznye-organizacii/ekspertnyy-sovet-po-provedeniyu-gosudarstvennoy-religiovedcheskoy-ekspertizy> (accessed 27 Sept. 2019).
- Nongbri, Brent. 2013. *Before Religion: A History of a Modern Concept*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Peers, Eleanor & Lyubov' Kolodeznikova. 2015. The post-colonial ecology of Siberian shamanic revivalism. *Worldviews: Global Religions, Culture and Ecology* 19:3, pp. 245–264.
- Popkova, N.N. 2012. Osoboe mnenie chlena Ekspertnogo soveta. Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii <https://to14.minjust.ru/ru/osoboe-mnenie-chlena-ekspertnogo-soveta-popkovoy-n-n> (accessed 27 Sept. 2019).
- Pospielovsky, D.V. 1987. *A History of Marxist-Leninist Atheism and Soviet Antireligious Policies*. New York: St. Martin's Press.
- Rydving, Håkan. 2011. Le chamanisme aujourd'hui: constructions et déconstructions d'une illusion scientifique. *Études mongoles et sibériennes, centrasiatiques et tibétaines* 42. file:///C:/Users/lnio20/Downloads/emscat-1815%20(3).pdf (accessed 27 Sept. 2019).
- Secularism and Religion-Making*. Eds. M. Dressler & A.-P.S. Mandair. New York 2011: Oxford University Press.
- Sieroszewski, Waclaw. 1896. *Yakuty: Opyt etnograficheskogo issledovaniia*. Saint-Peterburg: Tipografiia Glavnogo Upravleniia Udelov.
- Sundström, Olle. 2012. Is the shaman indeed risen in post-Soviet Siberia? *Post-Secular Religious Practices* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 24), pp. 350–387. Ed. Tore Ahlbäck. Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History.

- . 2015. Shamanism, politics and ethnos-building in Russia. *Religion, Politics and Nation-Building in Post-Communist Countries*, pp. 75–98. Eds. G. Simons & D. Westerlund. Farnham: Ashgate.
- Tafjord, Bjørn Ola. 2006. Defining religion, defying tradition? Concord and conflict about the role of religion in a Costa Rican indigenous community. *Exercising Power: The Role of Religions in Concord and Conflict* (Scripta Instituti Donneriani Aboensis 19), pp. 374–392. Ed. T. Ahlbäck. Åbo: Donner Institute for Research in Religious and Cultural History. <https://doi.org/10.30674/scripta.67318> (accessed 27 Sept. 2019).
- . 2016. Directinality and domains: translation toward religion and indigeneity. Paper in the PhD course *Translations: Indigenous, Religion, Tradition, Culture* (REL-8004). Tromsø, 18 August 2016.
- . 2017. Scales, translations, and siding effects: uses of *indígena* and *religión* in Talamanca and beyond. *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous* (Supplements to Method and Theory in the Study of Religion 7), pp. 138–177. Eds. C. Hartney & D.J. Tower. Leiden: Brill.
- Troshchansky, Vasily F. 1902. *Evolutsiia chernoï very (shamanstva) u yakutov*. Kazan: Tipo-litografiya Imperatorskogo Universiteta.
- Vasil'ev, Valery. 2000. Religiozny faktor v mejetnicheskikh otnosheniakh: retrospektiva i sovremennost'. *Etnosotsial'noye razvitiye Respubliki Sakha (Yakutia): potentsial, tendentsii, perspektivy*, pp. 239–269. [By] V.B. Ignat'eva. Novosibirsk: Nauka.
- . 2015. Osoboe mnenie chlena Ekspertnogo soveta. Ministerstvo Yustitsii Rossiiskoi Federatsii.
- Vasil'eva, N. 2000. *Yakutskoe shamanstvo 1920–1930-e gody*. Yakutsk: Bichik.
- Znamensky, Andrei. 2003. *Shamanism in Siberia: Russian Records of Indigenous Spirituality*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.