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RELIGIOUS BELONGING TODAY: STRATEGY AND VALUES OF OLD-BELIEVERS AND NEO-PAGANS (URAL CASE)

At present time we are witnessing many signs of a growing diversity of lifestyles in regions of Russia. The concept of "lifestyle" used here explicitly addresses the norms, orientations, predilections, convictions upon which a person makes decisions on how to get on in life, whom to bond with, and how to present him- or herself in public. One source of this new era of multiple lifestyles in modern epoch is religion[1]. In fact, religions of various kinds provide one of the first sets of possible discourses and practices after the end of the Soviet system.

In contemporary Russia, on the one hand, there is a marked tendency towards re-strengthening of Orthodox Church. On the other hand, new patterns of religion and religious behavior are manifest. For these reasons, the modern patterns of religious practices, new forms of spirituality and representation of religious identity as a part of individual and collective identities deserve more attention in Religious Studies[2].

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[1] Lily Kong, "Religion and spaces of technology: Constructing and contesting nation, transnation, and place", *Environment and Planning* A 38/5 (2006): 903-918.

[2] Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The spiritual revolution: Why religion is giving way to spirituality* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005).

In accordance with my own research it will be interesting to see in what extent and which ways these issues can be employed in the context of our Ural case studies.

Ural is associated with border between Europe and Asia and represented as a specific region with diverse religious and ethnic groups, producing their own type of regional identity. Under regional identity I also subsume communal identity, i.e., the identity of a place as a local community, the way that inhabitants of a place think of its image, and the way that they "work" on it and present it to outsiders[3]. How do the people of different religious denominations within limits of region want to arrange their place, what do they aspire to, what do they want to express, and by what means? How do they create and maintain social cohesion in era of globalization? How do they express mutual acceptance and recognition, and how do they withhold it? These problems can obviously be described in terms of continuity and change, since religious models are either to be borrowed from some close or distant sources or to be elaborated anew according to particular social and ideological contexts.

This paper examines the alternative moral discourse in framework of "right-wing" religious practices in Ural region. Taking a comparative approach to religiosity, this paper examines different trajectories taken by Old-Believers and Neopagans in Ural region to create new moral and social order for contemporary Russia.

Why these religious groups? These communities eager to promote their own identity discourse, sometimes in clear dissociation from the discourse of regional elites in Ural and in conflict with them. Regional elites offer this own way of getting of moral orientations, focuses on moral potential of European practice while non-traditional religious communities tend to base on their own ideology that contrasts with the official ones.

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[3] Elena Golovneva, "Regional identity: theoretical issues of investigation", *Ural Historical Bulletin* 2/39 (2013): 81-88.

"FROM SIN TO FAITH": DISCOURSE OF URAL OLD-BELIEVERS

Among religious communities in modern Russia, keeping their own standards and values, to a large extent contradicting the faith of an ethnic group and of the state, we can distinguish Ural Old-Believers communities. Despite the fact, that the history of 'ancient Orthodoxy" has been studied by scholars for a long time, there are a lot of gaps today in our knowledge of regional and confessional peculiarities of the Old-Believers movement. At present time more emphasis needs to be placed on understanding the Ural Old Believers as a historical phenomenon as well as their perception of contemporary reality.

Starting from the end of the 17th century, Ural was one of the biggest centers of Old- Believers. Historically the main Old-Believers' centers were mining settlements and also villages, lying on the way from the European part of the country to Siberia and to the Far East. In the 19th century the Old-Believers' movement was on the turn: if in the 18th century it was mostly a social protest movement, in the 19th it was implicated in the emergence of bourgeois life forms. If in the 18th century Old Belief's heads had semi-legal standing, then in the 19th century well-off farmworkers or merchants became heads of the Old-Believers communities and centers of religious life became large, mainly trade, villages.

There were many Old-Believers denominations in five central districts of mining Ural, making up Yekaterinburg eparchy. However, the major denomination among Ural Old- Believers from the beginning of the 19th century became "Chasovennye", who were former fugitive priests lapsed from the official church (so-called "bespopovtsy"). They were called "Chasovennye", because, having refused 2 out of 7 sacraments, they stayed in a chapel without a priest and a temple (in a chapel (rus."chasovnya") there is no altar where a priest serves). They rejected "the World" where the Antichrist reigned, preached the imminent end of the world, asceticism, adherence to the old rituals and old faith. The "Chasovennye" claimed that the true church of Christ had ceased to exist on Earth and they therefore renounced priests[4].

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[4] Andrey Golovnev, "Healthy life to you. Talks with Chapel Old-Believers", *Ural Historical Bulletin* 17 (2007): 47-59.

The tradition of Chasovennye is not based on statehood, or on ethnic origin, but on Christianity as a "civicism" which forms a particular morality in the consciousness of Ural Old-Believers. This morality, in the first place, is founded on the strength of their faith, a strength historically conditioned by the need to resist the official church with its hierarchy as well as the state and western values.

The strength of the Chasovennye's belief is based on the historical tradition. As far back as 1902 there existed its Michaelmas persuasion, named by its founder, Deryabinnikov Michael Illarionovich. Blaming other persuasions for some elderly having personal belongings and money in their skits, Michael called such a life "robber" council and announced that he is separating from it. Michael's followers supported as much remoteness from the secular world as they could. In the chapel councils Michael's followers were known by their inflexibility.

Since that time the social structure of Chasovennye has been non-homogeneous. One can distinguish several categories of belie-vers: "clear" believers and "unclear" believers (mixed) with those who communicate with non-believers: work for the state, attend hospital, go to the cinema, eat sugar, drink coffee, etc. Only "clear" believers are allowed to stay by the altar and bow in first place.

Old Believers especially succeeded in rejecting the state, which it defined as the power of the Beast. An analysis of the range of issues discussed by the Old Believers conventions led to the conclusion that the most pressing issue at the time was opposition to the denial of God sanctioned by the State[5]. Following the established tradition the Old Believers regardless of doctrinal differences resorted to isolation from the hostile environment and thus prevention of the younger generation's exposure to aggressive atheism and other "harmful and ruinous beliefs and practices" of European culture. Desire to protect their unique culture was seen in almost every resolution: reiteration of censure and rejection of those who practiced the inadmissible (deviations from the dress code, tobacco smoking and beard shaving) - were all practiced

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[5] Julia Borovik, "Synodal Conventions of Old Believers of the Urals and West Siberia in the first decade of the soviet power", *Ural Historical Bulletin* 17 (2007): 46.

with renewed emphasis on the mentors' and parent' duty to bring up the children in strict conformity with the "ancient orthodoxy".

At present, according to Old-Believers, true Christianity shall be confirmed by strict fasts and services. Before children turn 3 years old they do not keep the fasts, they feed on milk, meat, eggs and fish. At 3 kids keep their first fast, at 7-8 they go to the first confession. The first confession is comparable to an initiation, the transition to a "servant of God". And then later the confession and the control of themselves become the key elements of faith[6].

According to Old Believers, the life of a person from the very moment of birth is marked by the sin. It is sinful to let the dog to come in house (if it is being seduced by the Devil betrayed the Lord); milk a cow without covering one's head, drink tea and coffee, smoke, steal, watch TV. Old Believers don't accept photos in their houses as well as photographic or printed reproductions of icons in their worship. Secular singing is sinful too; it is opposed to sacred songs, like darkness and light. Any dances and musical instruments, making devilish sounds, are sinful. If a child makes a confession of a sin – he is forgiven, if he does not – he is flogged with a birch.

A confessor remits little sins through the confession. For big sins the penance (epitim'ja) is a reading of the Kormchaja Kniga (Book), including saying prayers, using lestovka (a special type of beads) and many bows, deprivation of supplications. But the most fearful sin is recantation of Christ; for such a sin the penance is perpetual and is equal to martyrdom.

The "real" religious practices for official Orthodoxy, as Old Believers say, seem to be connected to the Orthodox holydays, saints and visiting a church. Old Believers do not venerate saints that appeared in Orthodoxy after 1666. In contrast to the official Orthodoxy, based on a church cult, Ural Old Believers have a book cult. The Gospel Truth, they say, is only contained in the holy books, written in the Old Church Slavonic language, which guard faith from the secular world full of temptation.

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[6] Golovnev, "Healthy life to you", 52.

Between the end of the 18th – the first half of the 19th century books for spiritual leaders of Old Believers consist of rules and regulations. They did not only explain how to keep order in a monastic cell, baptize, etc.; but also contained other kinds of information pertaining to which medicines are "clean" and which are "unclean", what to do at different times during the day, where to put the dishes, where to hang clothes, etc. Due to the importance of the Word in these religious communities Old-Believers' culture could be called, for the most part, bookish.

One of the peculiarities of the religious self-consciousness of the Ural Old Believers is non-acceptance of the chaos in data and morality, generated by IT and by the processes of globalization. In Old Believers' houses there are no TV-sets, because *"if one watches TV he/she does not think about a prayer"*. Especially devilish digital video is dangerous. One of the main things, connected to the modern eschatology, is a computer. The computer, in the judgment of the Old Believers, is the visible embodiment of the Antichrist, whose name is inscribed as 666[7].

Starting with 1666 the Antichrist showed up both sensory and bodily in Nicon, Peter the Great, the Pope, and now it is imagined as a computer network. Using the "web" the Antichrist sends his name ahead making people worship him. Ural Old Believers consider that the Antichrist's name is encoded in every bar code, the three double lines of which mean 666. Through the other codes, like INT (Individual Number of a Taxpayer), all the data about people is devoured by the Beast. After computers and codes the microchips, which will be implanted into people's right hand and the forehead, are supposed to be followed. Then the horrible war will begin which is ended with the coming of the Antichrist's reign[8].

All the links to Old Believers' numerous calculations about the coming end of the world are senseless; their self-consciousness is a religious one where the devotion to some idea, despite its obvious discrepancy with logical analysis and facts, prevails. Today the notion of the Doomsday is widely prevalent along with ideas about omnipre-

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[7] Golovnev, "Healthy life to you", 47-59.

[8] Ibid.

sent sinfulness, the spreading of "unclean" practices, including the internet and increasing dependence on technology.

Despite the fact that the Old Belief totally rejected the "filth of novelties" both in religious sense and in everyday life, in business practices it was the Old-Believers who introduced innovations and took an active part in the modernization of Russian industry in the 18th – the first half of the 20th centuries[9]. Russian entrepreneurs, Old Believers were the first to introduce into their production facilities and family businesses western technologies and innovations (imported machines and equipment, steam engines, etc.). Many Old Believers were the authors of innovation projects (from the building of the first Russian steam engine, railways and shipping companies to establishing banks and trading and manufacturing companies). The practical nature of the Old Believers' spirituality was manifested in its pronounced focus on entrepreneurial values. This formed the basis for special Old Believers attitude towards entrepreneurial activity and the formation of the spiritual concept of Business. All these prove the high adoption potential of Old Believers, their capacity for evolution in conditions of informational and cultural instability.

At present time there is a motorcycle and tractor in every Ural Old Believers' yard; youth are interested in technical innovations. The Father says with deep breath: "*It is for the sake of need. How will we be without them? But this is a sin, we must pray*"[10]. Thus, at the same time they remain committed believers and strictly adhere to the principles of Old Belief.

Aiming to stop the "Devil" (at least among them), Old Believers fight for the limitation of the scientific mind, which broke the nature of the universe. For Old Believers the idea of a "healthy spirit" is very important. In the context of the virtualization of the world and proliferation of data flows the primordial function of religion resumes a renewed role. And this function is to limit the totality of scientific knowledge.

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[9] Valery Kerov, "Old Believers' business as the «blessed guilt»," *Ural Historical Bulletin* 17 (2007): 13.

[10] Golovnev, "Healthy life to you", 58.

It seems that modern discourse of Ural Old Believers is complicated and confused, it includes many contradictions and prohibitions. The case of Ural Old-believers has either features of anti-secular and secular processes.

"REVIVING THE FAITH": DISCOURSE OF NEO-PAGANS

Another example is related with activity and worldview of Neopagan groups. First of all, it is necessary to make some general remarks about the dogmatic teaching, ritual practice and everyday life of the neopagan movement in Ural, so called *Svarozhichi*[11].

This movement is headed by the leader called himself Dobroslav. His followers of different social background are attracted with exotic rituals and special spirit atmosphere. The community's activity is financed by parishioner's sponsor's contributions. The community exists as a secret order and there is no any information about its activity for another people. Neopagan community does not open up so easily to newcomers and give relatively vague answers.

According to Dobroslav, Svarozhichi respect sacred books of all religions, but the most important are considered ancient Russian vedic scriptures (Velesov Book, Perun book, Russian Vedas etc). The doctrine includes the preposition about world's multiplicity (material and spiritual), about their hierarchy. Russian patriotism, devotion to tribal and family ideals and respect to all living creatures on the Earth are considered ethic principals. Svarozhichi respect ancient slavs gods (first of all, Svarog, Perun, Sventovit, Lada Godness and sacred ancestors), which are considered as incarnations of one God. According to them, a person involved in space fight of evil and kind forces. The world of spirits consists of light and dark worlds. Svarozhichi criticize Christian church and European values for distortion of truly faith.

Although the ideology of the movement can undergo certain changes, its main idea focuses on the creation of the new society free of

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[11] Official website of the movement *Svarozhichi,* http://www.svarozhich.net. Accessed December, 10, 2015.

violence and aggression, living in harmony with physical environment and the nature. The practical steps to achieve the goal are, as declared by the leaders, (1) moral and spiritual perfection of the movement followers; (2) establishment of new social relations within the community; (3) attempts to give up modern technology and western values and all activities leading to 'pollution' of natural environment and human body.

Participants of this community are fostering ethnic revival: not only remembering the glorious past, but also rebuilding it, here and now[12]. Paganistic national visions are based on a unique interpretation of ethnic proto-history, a strong commitment to non-Christian, «ancient» roots of ethnic culture and a spiritual concept of the nation. The movement's legitimacy is based on a presumed continuity with the cultural heritage of pagan ancestors. As detailed historical continuity is broken for almost a millennium, native faith movements have to invent their own traditions. The linkage between religiosity and nationalism takes a new form: it is the (alternative) spiritualization of ethnicity and nationalization of contemporary spirituality.

Rituals play a significant role in the involvement of participants, in the articulations of shared meanings and the formulation of new community ties. Native faith movements are not based merely on ideologies and mythical constructs; religious practice and spiritual experiences are not less significant. Our example is related to neopagan religious ceremonies in Ekaterinburg, where ritual of veneration of ancient Russian Knights plays a great role among *Svarozhichi*. These forms include the practice of so called veneration of ancient Russian Knights. This ceremony is organized in May of the 9th and it is dedicated to victory of Prince Svyatoslav in the battle with Hazars. The sense of this ritual is closely related with attracting to Slavic ideas of new members, the whole generations of families. The family values are crucial part of moral discourse of this community. Follower may tell the brothers and sisters about his misdeeds, moral problems and so on and

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[12] Victor Shnirelman, "Ancestral Wisdom and Ethnic Nationalism: A View from Eastern Europe," *Pomegranate: The International Journal of Pagan Studies* vol. 9, no. 1 (2007): 41-61.

ask for relevant suggestions. The ideology of this movement can to be compared with the Soviet moral discourse in which the future society to be created by members of the society should avoid any 'negative' (or 'unfavorable') forms of human behavior and social life including selfishness and pride, aggression and social inequality.

A general common point of different pagan movements is in their basic aspiration for the reconstruction of an imagined pre-Christian native faith. Post-socialist phenomenon of alternative spiritualities is often connected to ethno-political processes, national symbolization and local interpretations[13]. It's especially true for post-socialist neo-paganism, which has a distinctive character among the international pagan movements. According to Wiench's definition[14], it is 'a movement inspired by nature-based spirituality, stressing the need to return to ethnic or tribal identity, to pre-Christian roots, to the old customs and indigenous values'.

CONCLUSIONS

Nowdays religious groups in Ural often use mythologems for constructing their moral ideas. The production of mythos and "invented traditions" are vital ways in which non-traditional religious communities remember, reactualize and articulate their religious identity. Mythologems are numerous, but the ones – principal for the religious identity - are the mythologems of "hero", "particular way", "enemies and those who are guilty", "great nation", the aim of which is to bring sense to the individual existence of the religious group, and arouse the feelings of unity and greatness of one's own nation[15]. Typical methods, used by religious leaders in order to reproduce the religious identity and inspire the ethnic groups, can include: historical description, conscien-

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Piotr Wiench, "Neo-Pagan Groups in Central-Eastern Europe", *GRUPĖS IR APLINKOS,* no. 2 (2010): 105.
[15] Anthony D. Smith, *Chosen peoples: Sacred sources of national identity,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

tious sacralization (some of the scope of activities and some important people are excluded from the sphere of the every-day perishable life); rituals practicing.

In my point of view, a possible reason for this conversion to solid moral values within different religious groups is the presence of eschatological motives connected with different circumstances within contemporary Russian consciousness[16]. It is as well an ideological doctrine accompanied by the elimination of the state from the sphere of individual stratification and a situation, which generates the realization of one's own unclaimedness. Also included in this moral turn an environmental problems connected to habitat destruction and natural resource exhaustion. Economic instability and widespread private competitiveness operate as additional coordinates for the appearance of this move to solid moral ground. Fear of globalization also plays an important role.

The search for a means to symbolically and practically overcome these difficulties specifically through religious conversion is natural in such a situation. The demand for religious conceptions is explained by the way in which they create prospects for clear personal activity, providing solutions for many problems.

Neopagan and Old-believers movements are revival movements, which aim the cultural purification of their national culture from non-native as well as western elements. Beliefs in a (national-and--pagan) golden age, which existed before the political and spiritual corruption of the nation, before the age, when old mores were exterminated and substituted for «alien» ones, are salient among pagan and old-believers sympathizers today also.

The conclusions are the following:

(1) Non-traditional religiosity plays a substantial role in reshaping social frames of remembering and *myth-building*. When collected at the level of a collective regional consciousness, these myths create a speci-

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[16] Vladimir Yashin, "Hierotopical motives and locus cultures in new religious movements", *Omsk Scientific Bulletin* 3/109 (2012): 95-99.

fic "myth of place"[17]. The emerging paganistic and old-believers historical narratives characteristically oppose mainstream historical canons. An alternative, non-canonical cultural memory is being fixed, which deeply influences group beliefs of nationalist subcultures;

(2) It provides a cultural-political frame for an alternative discourse. Based upon these foundations, a *counterculture* is being formulated; its adherents are constructing an «Other World» and building an «anti-discourse», in opposition to the official ones;

(3) It includes *late-modern elements*: individual coping mechanisms are associated with «groupist» answers; participants are urged to connect their personal problems and values to national group narratives. Late-modern alternative spiritualities, processes of individual identity-building and «groupist» thinking are interconnected. In the words of Doreen Massey, here we have "a multitude of stories with a spatial character"[18].

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[17] Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin. Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London: Routledge 1991), 47, 61.

[18] Dorin Massey, "Travelling thoughts," in *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall,* eds. Paul Gilroy, Lawrence Grossberg, and Angela McRobbie (London: Verso, 2000), 231.

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PRZYNALEŻNOŚĆ RELIGIJNA DZISIAJ:
STRATEGIA I WARTOŚCI STAROOBRZĘDOWCÓW I NEOPOGAN
(CASUS URALSKI)

Streszczenie

We współczesnej Rosji, z jednej strony istnieje wyraźna tendencja do ponownego umocnienia Kościoła Prawosławnego, z drugiej strony, ujawniają się nowe wzorce religii i zachowań religijnych. Artykuł analizuje alternatywny nurt zauważalny w odniesieniu do kwestii moralnych w ramach wybranych wspólnot religijnych w regionie Uralu. Przyjmując porównawcze podejście do religijności, w artykule Autorka rozpatruje różne ujęcia przyjmowane przez staroobrzędowców i neopogan w celu stworzenia nowego porządku moralnego i społecznego dla współczesnej Rosji. Autorka próbuje odpowiedzieć przede wszystkim na następujące pytania: w jaki sposób ludzie różnych wyznań chcą zorganizować zamieszkiwaną przestrzeń? Co pragną osiągnąć, co i w jaki sposób chcą wyrazić? W jaki sposób tworzą i utrzymują spójność społeczną? Jak wyrażają wzajemną akceptację i uznanie, i jak je utrzymują? Problemy te mogą być opisane za pomocą odwołania się do reguł ciągłości

i zmiany, gdyż modele religijne są albo zapożyczone z bliskich lub odległych źródeł albo opracowane na nowo w zgodzie z konkretnymi ideologicznymi i społecznymi kontekstami.

Tłumaczenie: Anna Sieradzka-Wawryszczuk

Słowa kluczowe: staroobrzędowcy, neopoganie, Ural, tożsamość religijna, relacje Państwo – Kościół, wolność sumienia i wyznania, pluralizm religijny, religia w przestrzeni publicznej, przekonania światopoglądowe, laickość, sekularyzacja

Key words: Old-Believers, Neo-pagans, Ural, religious identity, religious discourse, State-Church relations, freedom of conscience and religion, religious pluralism, religion in public space, philosophies of life, secularism, secularization