

DANILA RYGOVSKIY

Women in Russian Old Belief:
Religious Practices and Public Imagination
on the example of Siberian and Estonian Old
Believer Communities



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ETHICAL PRINCIPLES OF THE RESEARCH

Working with communities of religious minorities that experienced state-sponsored persecutions in the past, such as Russian Old Believers, requires approaches that would help to establish trustful and long-term relationship, guarantee an informed and safe participation of their representatives in the research, and protect sensitive information about them. In her recent research on historical memory of Old Believers, Nataliia Dushakova points out that narratives about harsh persecutions in the period between the mid-17th century and the early 18th century, state repressions in the 20th century still form an important part of historical memory of the group and “allows to integrate local history with the common history of Old Belief” (Dushakova 2022: 65–66). Given that, I do not provide full names (only abbreviations), or photos of my interlocutors that would reveal their identity, unless permission to do that was granted. In most cases, I did not know the exact age of my interlocutors because it would have been too suspicious to inquire them about it. Taking into account that the information about age might be useful for my readers to understand who the women and men I talked to were, I felt a need to at least indicate the approximate age of an interlocutor.

All these agreements were made orally with every interlocutor because Old Believers in general do not trust official documents and prefer more informal ways of communication. During my fieldtrips, I ensured that I was not interrupting the daily life and work of Old Believers, especially during busy times such as haymaking season, for instance. I also carefully learned the rules of hospitality and ritual purity that I describe in Chapter III, respected them, and tried to abide.

A NOTE ON ENGLISH TRANSLATION AND TRANSLITERATION

All translations of Russian and Estonian scholarly works, archival documents, and quotes from interviews into English are made by me, unless otherwise specified. Translation was made into standard English and does, therefore, not reflect dialectal or individual features of my interlocutors, or linguistic specificity of the quoted documents. I am aware that this strategy is imperfect as it eliminates the specificities of different Russian languages – Old Believer vernacular Russian used in villages, the language of Old Believer manuscripts, standardized Russian of research and popular publications, old and new rules of spelling, etc. My only excuse is that linguistic differences are not that important in the course of my research. However, I have to point out that they exist. I hope it does not create confusion because I always quote various users of Russian in the context: who said what, when, and under what circumstances.

Transliterated words usually include specific vernacular terms or group names. All such words are written in italics, group names with a capital letter. Besides that, I tried to keep Russian grammatical forms in transliterated words. Therefore, categories of number, gender, and sometimes cases were preserved. For example, names of Old Believer factions, such as *Chasovennye*, *Fedo-seevtsy*, *Pomortsy*, *Stranniki*, etc., are written in italics with capital letters and following the Russian forms signifying the plural. *Mirskie* is a category within an Old Believer community and is spelled in a similar manner. Lowercase first letters signify objects, attributes, or concepts, as in *mirskaia chashka* (lit. a common bowl) *mirskaia* does not mean a group. Also, it has a different form from a similar word *Mirskie* because the vernacular term *chashka* requires feminine case ending.

INTRODUCTION

Research question and goals

It is likely that these days a woman will also bring a new impulse into the matter of Old Believers' benevolence and community education. Old Belief is disrupted before our eyes. Faith of young people is declining. Spiritual power of elders is weakening.

A woman can mend the revival of Old Orthodox spirit fading away.

Mikhailova, E., Svetlye obrazy proshlogo,
Rodnaia Starina, 1928 №3, 6

It has been stated many times that a woman should not occupy the last place in a Christian community. In addition to being a mother and an educator, a woman possesses the natural right to be welcomed as an active member of the community. Obviously, regarding the canon, an unbreakable rule must remain that a female teacher or preacher is not accepted. However, based on examples of the ancient church, she can be a very useful colleague, for instance, in matters of benevolence and domesticity.

I.P., Sluzhenie zhenshtchiny v starovercheskoj obshtchine,
Rodnaia Starina, 1928 №3, 24

The quotes above are taken from *Rodnaia Starina*¹ (lit. native antiquity), a journal published by an Old Believer² organization called *Kruzhok revnitelei stariny* (lit. zealots of the old ways), affiliated with *Grebenshtchikovskaia* community of Russian Old Believers in Riga, Latvia. The whole third issue of the 1928 journal is dedicated to one topic – the role of women in Christianity and Old Belief. Heroines from Church history, pastoral pictures of traditionally dressed women (pic. 1) and female choirs (pic. 2, 3) are depicted throughout the pages. The above-mentioned journal is just a drop in the ocean of literature produced by Old Believers where the 'women's issue' is discussed. In fact, this topic attracted not only a lot of attention among Old Believers themselves, but also of intellectuals and general public of that era, i.e., the late 19th to early 20th century. It was also the period when Old Believers became a representative social group of Russian society. Old Belief has been regarded as an exceptional phenomenon of Russian life, rooted in national customs. In search of answers to profound questions of striking modernization of the time, various public intellectuals³ appealed to Old Belief, suggesting that they can find solutions

¹ All transliterated words that do not have any analogies in English appear in italics.

² Names of religious groups are written with upper case letter.

³ I am not specifying whether these public intellectuals were researchers, philosophers, journalists, politicians, or someone else, because for various reasons this field in Russia has been arranged complex. In case of Imperial time, these spheres of intellectual production, or, rather, the languages were entwined, partially, because the same people could publish ethnographic or historical research on Old Believers and more journalistic style materials, being at the same time a state official assigned to gather information and file a report on 'Old Believer affairs'. This also included clerics and missionaries of Russian Orthodox Church

appropriate for Russian ‘soil’, and at the same time remain different from the West. That is why they were, in particular, trying to investigate whether women had more freedom in the Old Believer communities compared to the official Orthodox Church. Although the 1917 Revolution and other historic conflicts interrupted this discussion, some backwashes can be trailed in academic publications and writings about contemporary Old Believers.

In Old Belief, the predominant discourse favors supremacy of men over women and places a clear distinction between them in ceremonial and domestic labor, i.e., men should perform rituals and speak for the spiritual issues, while women are responsible for raising children and keeping the household. The actual female agency is often doubted and problematized; for instance, some of my male informants of *Chasovennyye* faction from Siberia shared their thoughts about female salvation. They believed that the number of women whose souls will be saved after the Judgment Day will be seriously less than the number of saved men (only one in ten thousand women against one in one thousand men), because women are more culpable by nature. Some of my interlocutors shared concerns that a lot of people believe that if women outnumber men, as it happens in some places in Estonia, this means that Old Belief is in decline there, because it is impossible to have a ‘proper’ religious life without men.

There seems to be opposition between the two parts in the title of this research – religious practices and public imagination. Here, public imagination stands for a social creative power, similar to Anderson’s imagined nations (Anderson 1983). As a marginalized religious group, Old Believers have been depicted or, rather, exoticized by the ‘general public’ (see Rygovskiy 2021). On the other hand, they have been considered as being a shard of historical and true Rus, an ‘alive museum’ of Russian native tradition that could help reinvigorate the society.

Public imagination can be regarded as a powerful yet often invisible structure that informs everyday practices, beliefs, and reactions of a society. From this point of view, it is close to Charles Taylor’s conceptualization of the social imaginary: “It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life” (Taylor 2004: 24). However, Taylor observes it in a similar way with Benedict Anderson, i.e., as an in-group attribute. At the same time, public imagination is capable of attributing non-members with certain qualities, quite often in a form of a ‘suspect community’. This term appears in western criminology regarding the Irish community in Britain (Hillyard 1993). According to Marie Breen-Smyth, “‘suspect community’ can be seen as a group of people, or a sub-set of the population constructed as ‘suspect’ by mechanisms deployed by the state to ensure national or state

(officially called Greek-Russian Orthodox Church) who criticized Old Belief but, at the same time, provided valuable materials on them. In Soviet time, research was also often accompanied with a massive critique of Old Belief. Specific names of these intellectuals will pop up in the introduction, as well as in the main body of the current thesis.

‘security’ and reinforced by societal responses and social practices”; however, it should be also taken into account that the ‘suspect community’ is “constructed in the imagined fears of its non-members” (Breen-Smyth 2014: 230–231).

To a large extent, Russian Old Belief can be defined as a ‘suspect community’, although its particular features were subject to change in accordance with contemporary ideological beliefs. At some point, Old Believers were transferred from the category of ‘suspect’ to ‘praised’. I discuss these issues as a part of the history of research on this group later in the Introduction (pages 27–48).

It is public imagination that makes Russian Old Belief ‘Russian’. Old Believers are often described as a relic of ‘old Russian ways’. For instance, Sergei Zenkovskii, a historian of early Old Belief, suggested this assumption as one of the reasons why it is important to study this religious group:

Old Believers have best retained old Russian ways, folklore, and applied arts of the Moscow Rus when they split with the Russian Patriarch’s Church that prevailed. That is why the anthropological study of their ways gives us at least a partial picture of Russian life of the 17th century (Zenkovskii 2009: 356).

At the same time, there are other ethnic groups among Old Believers. This religion is common for Karelians in Leningrad Oblast (Fishman 2003). Yelena Danilko extensively discusses non-Russian Old Belief in the Urals. Some Finno-Ugric (Komi) and Turkic (Chuvashi) groups living there belong to this religion (Danilko 2006, 2015, 2018).

What happened to the perception of and research on Russian Old Belief in Russian humanities scholarship, is quite similar to Orientalism discussed by Edward Said. He points out that Orientalism “is a field of learned study” that arose from various discourses, study practices, and imagination of certain geographies (Said 2003: 49–73). Of course, Said’s argument cannot be strictly applied to Old Believers but there are a lot of common features between how Orientalism and the field of Old Believer studies have been formed. Mostly, I appreciate Said’s take on how Orient as a geographic and cultural concept has been addressed mutually in scholarly and non-scholarly discourses, and that alienated geographies come from the collective imagination of the Western public. I observe the development of research on Old Believers in the respective section below on pages 27–48.

The title of the present thesis might suggest that I focus on distinguishing between how the intellectual elite perceive Old Believers in general and the role of women within the movement (i.e., public imagination), versus what is the actual state of affairs (i.e., practice). Indeed, such a dichotomy can be observed, but it does not mean that the ‘external world’ with all the senses, material forms, discourses, narratives, and ideologies does not have any effect on Old Believers. On the contrary, the external world is one of the sources for Old Believers to conceive and reimagine their identity. Since the formation of the Old Believer movement, they have used and reinterpreted external sources for their own needs (see Guryanova 2007). I will show many examples of it in the subsequent

chapters of this research paper. Therefore, I rather see religious practice and public imagination as two interrelated sites where the role of women is performed.

Regarding all this, I would formulate my **research questions** as follows: by means of what and under which circumstances does female agency implemented in various activities (i.e., conducting service, writing, executing the demands of external piety, etc.) find the way out in the conservative field of Old Belief; how do various symbolic and social frictions, that appear due to the increasing role of women in the life of Old Believer communities, reshape the female religiosity and influence women's religious practices?

In order to provide answers, I need to set several **goals**:

- 1) to explore external factors that might affect changes in gender roles in Old Believer communities. These factors can be economic (e.g., occupation, labor migration, etc.), social (e.g., aging of population) or even cultural (e.g., new attitudes towards religion). I do so on the basis of the concept of local gender contracts that allows to capture all the enumerated here factors (see Chapter I);
- 2) to observe in detail the meaning and actual practice of female leadership in the Old Believer communities, taking into account how this issue has been discussed in public since there are controversial opinions about women who run Old Believer communities (see Chapter II);
- 3) to observe a role of micropractices in shaping and reshaping of female agency. In particular, to demonstrate how the so-called bowl rule – a practice that regulates relationships of Old Believers with the strangers and affects the structure within community – is interiorized and produced by Old Believer women (see Chapter III);
- 4) to analyze by what means authoritative figures within the Old Believer communities communicate requirements for an appropriate appearance to their congregations and how these forms affect the gender roles in Old Belief. Here, I draw upon a concept of external piety that is formulated by Old Believers (see Chapter IV);
- 5) to analyze how female writing practices and women's authority as authors of Old Believer spiritual literature is being built on the example of spiritual literature created by nuns from Siberia Dubches monasteries of the *Chasovennye* faction (see Chapter V).

Overview of Old Believer history and materials used in this research

Background of Old Belief

The Old Belief (*Staroverie*) appeared in the mid-17th century as a dissenting movement within the Russian Orthodox Church that had separated itself from official church hierarchy in the aftermath of a liturgical reform and a revision of liturgical books (1640s–1660s) implemented by patriarch Nikon and his supporters (for the history of Old Belief in English see Crummey 1970, Michels 1999, Michels and Nichols 2009, Robson 1995). Old Believers claimed that the reformers pushed Russian Church into heresy and *Raskol*⁴, since they continued to keep the unreformed old Orthodoxy. However, Old Believers themselves have been accused of being *Raskolniki* (Schismaters), who suffered religious persecution until the beginning of 20th century. Their movement consists of numerous factions that consider adherence to the ‘official church’ as being heretical, and have a similar attitude towards each other, i.e., members of different Old Believer factions view each other as strangers, albeit they share similar ritual practices and identify themselves with resembling doctrines. This fractionization makes Russian Old Belief similar to Protestantism, though barriers between groups of the former religion are much harder to distinguish in comparison with groups of the latter religious conviction, in the sense that Old Believers do not let followers of one particular faction to pray or be in communion with any other one. A faction within Russian Old Belief is usually called *soglasie*, a word that appears as an emic term in the early years of this movement, but has been borrowed by historic and current authorities, writers, academics, and has partially lost its ‘native’ value. In particular, I am focused on two groups, *Pomortsy* in Estonia and *Chasovennye* in Siberia who are both ruled by blessed laypeople (*nastavniki*) who are in charge of performing regular and occasional services, sacraments, and all other aspects relevant to the life of religious community.

I have chosen Estonian *Pomortsy* for a demographical reason. Their congregations consist of mostly women. In half of the congregations, place of a leader is or used to be occupied by knowledgeable women. Even if they are run by men, most of the active practitioners are women, who also take part in singing, reading religious texts, doing chores in the prayer houses, i.e., in any case playing an active rule in the community. Siberian *Chasovennye* are very close to *Pomortsy* in terms of religious practice, which they admit themselves. However, demographics of this community is the opposite compared to *Pomortsy* with the exception of a few communities⁵.

⁴ In Russian scholarship, it is customary to write the term *Raskol* (lit. Schism) with an upper-case letter, as it signifies a historical event. I have retained this spelling in the transliteration.

⁵ I observe demographics of *Chasovennye* in Chapter I.

Old Believers in Estonia are represented by two relative factions, *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy*. A brief history of the two groups has been published by Pentikäinen and Raudalainen (1999: 87–94). Both factions keep *priestless* ceremonies and belong to the tradition of Russian North or *Pomorje*. *Pomortsy* constitute a predominant group in the region. *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy* are featured for their discussion on the legitimation of marriages, i.e., whether such sacrament as marriage can be approved and performed in times of Antichrist, who has already arrived in the form of spirit as they believe. Both *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy* deny marriage sacrament. They believe that it was spoiled after the reform of patriarch Nikon (1650s–1680s). When *Pomortsy* have allowed simple rituals in the prayer house performed by *nastavnik*, then *Fedoseevtsy*, on the contrary, do not allow such rituals. They do not let members of their community to get married, and in the past those who were living together or married in official church, were excluded from the community. At least temporarily, until they move beyond their reproductive years and leave their partners.

Fedoseevtsy (*Rabskie* in local dialect) used to be the most significant and largest faction in the Baltics and Estonia particularly. Currently, there are only two nominal prayer houses of their faction, one in Malye Kolki / Väike Kolkja⁶, and another one in Raja. Nominal, because *Fedoseevtsy* are not so strict about marriages nowadays as they used to be. In other Prichudie / Peipsimaa settlements, like Voronja / Varnja, Kallaste⁷, Kasepel / Kasepää, Mustvee⁸, etc., and of course, in Tartu and Tallinn (9 in total), there are communities of *Pomortsy*. This transformation from *Fedoseevtsy* to *Pomortsy* happened gradually, probably starting from *Grebenshtchikovskaia* community in Riga, which used to be one of the three most influential *Fedoseevtsy* centers after Moscow and St. Petersburg (Smirnov 1893:111). In 1820s–1830s, Riga community remained *Fedoseevtsy* by title but began to recognize marriages same as *Pomortsy* (Podmazov 1998: 119). Newly married couples were still not allowed to participate in religious services on the same terms as non-married congregants, but community leaders started blessing marriages and conduct relevant rituals in the prayer houses. In 1863 Nikolai Leskov, best known as a classic Russian novelist, was deployed to Riga as an official of the Ministry of Public Education to question local Old Believers on the subject of their grassroot school system, which had a strong reputation among Old Believers in Russia. Leskov pointed out the mixed character of *Fedoseevsky* teaching in Riga, which appeared, as he quotes Old Believers, “out of human weakness” – a phrase highlighting that *Fedoseevtsy* in Riga failed to prevent their congregants from forming couples and decided that it would probably serve a better cause if those couples would be blessed. Contrary to them, *Fedoseevtsy* of the neighboring Pskov region

⁶ For places in Estonia, I give the Russian (vernacular) and Estonian (official) names of Old Believer villages subdivided by a slash. Further in the text, I mostly switch to Russian names following my interlocutors.

⁷ Historical Russian toponym would be Krasnye Gory, however, currently local Russians call it the same way as Estonians.

⁸ Mustvee used to be known as Posad Cherniy in Russian.

accepted marriages as part of teaching after public discussions were held, sponsored by a monk called Pavel (Leskov 1996: 390). A similar state of affairs remained in some *Rabskie* communities in Prichudie. For instance, only a decade ago a congregation in Malye Kolki allowed married and unmarried members of their community to pray together due to the rapidly decreasing number of active members.⁹

Contrary to *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy*, discussion about marriage was never touched among *Chasovennye* Old Believers or *Chasovennoe soglasie*, since they had come from a totally different background of *Popovtsy* Old Believers¹⁰. Their name, *Chasovennye*, is a derivation from Russian ‘chapel’ (*chasovnia*) that signifies a common practice to perform all sacraments, rituals, and ceremonies priestlessly in the so-called ‘churches without altar’, i.e., chapels or prayer houses. It is considered that *Chasovennye* appeared in forests of Kerzhnets¹¹ and were also known by the names of *Safontievshchina*¹² and *Starikovshchina*¹³ (Kelsiev 1860: XVI). Nowadays, *Chasovennye* live predominantly in the Urals, Siberia, and the Far East. Relatively big communities are settled in several US states (Alaska, Oregon, and others), as well as in Canada, Brazil, Argentina, and some other countries.¹⁴

There are two types of communities of Siberian *Chasovennye*. Most of them consider themselves as laypeople. However, there are also some monastic communities that bear a common name of Dubches monasteries or *skity* (lit.

⁹ See Chapter I, sections 1.7 and 1.8 for more details on the story of Malye Kolki community.

¹⁰ *Chasovennye* used to accept priests ordained in the heretical from their point of view Russian Orthodox Church if these priests were baptized in the same manner as *Chasovennye* practiced themselves (a person should be fully immersed three times into water during the ritual). Also, it was important for these Old Believer that a bishop who ordained a priest would be baptized accordingly. In fact, they traced the baptismal line of succession back to the pre-Schism times. By the mid-19th century, *Chasovennye* figured out that they could not be sure in Orthodox priests’ baptismal background and decided to refuse from accepting them. Since then, this faction completely turned into priestless ritual and lay elders took over the performance of sacraments that priests used to do (see Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 301–303).

¹¹ Forests of Kerzhnets or just Kerzhnets was one of the historical Old Believer habitats in contemporary Nizhnii Novgorod Oblast named after the eponymous river (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 138). *Kerzhak* is a common nickname for an Old Believer in Siberia, which probably refers to the place of origin of some of them.

¹² By the name of a Kerzhnets elder Sofronii (Sofonii) (ca 1637–after 1710) associated directly with the foundation of *Chasovennye* faction (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 16; Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 301–306).

¹³ *Starikovshchina* used to be a common name for *Chasovennye* Old Believers in Siberia. It referred to the fact that the faction was led by *stariki* (elders) and reflected priestless tendencies in it (see Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 13). Nowadays the term mostly is unfamiliar for Old Believers.

¹⁴ *Chasovennye* had to leave Russia after the Revolution of 1917, because of the severe antireligious policy of Bolsheviks and further repressions against religious groups and peasantry.

hermitages but in fact they are monasteries). If lay communities have religious leaders instead of priests, monasteries are inhabited by monks, nuns, hermits and guests (lay people that have not been ordained as monks yet). Hegumens (abbots) and hegumenesses (abbesses) are in charge at male and female monasteries respectively. I explain the phenomenon of Dubches monasteries in more detail and provide the necessary references to the works focused on it in Chapter V.

Background of the fieldwork

In this section, I am going to briefly describe the sites and general principles of my fieldwork. A more detailed overview about the visited communities is given in Chapter I, but since I opted for multisite ethnography, it is necessary to provide some essential knowledge about concrete communities already at the beginning of the thesis. It should be noted that my Siberian materials were collected during 2014–2019 in multiple locations (Altai, Tuva, Shoriia, Krasnoyarski Krai). As a rule, I was visiting several Old Believer communities at one field trip, coming back to each region at least two times. Initially, the role of women was not my prior research focus. However, I gradually reached the conclusion that exploring gender aspects allows to achieve a better understanding of the social and cultural processes in these communities. In Estonia, I started doing field work since 2019 and continued it until 2021.

Regarding *Chasovennye*, I mostly concentrated on the region that can roughly be called Southern Siberia. Under this name, I refer to three large territories: Mountain Altai, Mountain Shoriia, and Tuva (the Sayan Mountains) together with adjacent regions of Krasnoyarsk Krai. In Altai, I conducted fieldwork in the place known as the Uimon valley where Old Believers settled in 18th century. It seems that they belonged to *Chasovennye* faction from the foundation of first settlements in Uimon. Predominantly, I conducted fieldwork in three villages: Upper Uimon, Multa, and Zamulta, but I visited other places, such as Ust-Koksa (the regional center) and Tikhonkaia.

Old Believers settled in Tuva and Krasnoyarsk Krai much later than in Altai, only in late 19th and early 20th century. People were migrating there looking for more land. Although Tuva was not part of the Russian Empire at that time, the tsarist government encouraged the migration of people there because of its strategic interests in the region. A lot of Altai Old Believers moved to Tuva along with settlers from the Urals and other parts of Siberia. In the beginning, religious diversity was more prominent than it is now: Old Believers belonged to *Chasovennye*, *Belokrinitskie*, *Pomortsy*, and allegedly *Stranniki* factions. Today there is a small community of *Belokrinitskie* Old Believers only in Kyzyl, the capital of Tuva. Other places are occupied by *Chasovennye* and there are many more factions in Krasnoyarsk Krai, but this direction was not my priority.

Geographically, the Republic of Tuva belongs to the Upper Yenisei area. Currently, most of the Tuvan Old Believer communities are concentrated in the

region called the Upper Reaches (full name: Upper Reaches of the Little Yenisei), albeit in the past their settlements were scattered among a vaster territory. The Upper Reaches are situated in the area that is sometimes referred to as Kaa-Khem¹⁵ (Little Yenisei in Tuvan). Mostly, I worked in a settlement called Erzhey, paying sporadic visits to several others, such as Sizim, Uzhep, and Choduraalyg. In addition, there are communities of *Chasovennye* Old Believers that are situated closer to Kyzyl, the capital city of Tuva. They include, first of all, Saryg-Sep, Balgaazyn, and Kyzyl itself. Administratively, Saryg-Sep, which is a regional center, and Balgaazyn belong to Kaa-Khem, same as settlements in the Upper Reaches. Nevertheless, I have to distinguish between these two subregions due to some cultural differences that I am discussing in Chapter I. Namely, although the villages external to the Upper Reaches were founded by Old Believers, nowadays their communities are very small, consisting mainly of older women.

Krasnoyarsk Krai can also be referred to as the Lower Yenisei area. Old Believers of Tuva often call this territory “the North”, or “behind the Sayans”. This direction creates a geographical extension to the region of my fieldwork, because only southern regions of the Lower Yenisei area can be assigned to Southern Siberia (including such communities as Roshchinskoe, Taskino, Irba and others). However, I could not omit this extension, because an important spiritual center, Dubches monasteries, is situated there. I visited not only monasteries but also a couple of villages in the vicinity: Bezymyanka and Andryushkino.

Mountain Shoriia is also a territory of recent Old Believer colonization. According to memories of my interlocutors, *Chasovennye* started massively settling in the region in late 1920s, trying to escape consequences of collectivization and persecutions. There are *Pomortsy* living in the area, but I have not been in contact with their community. *Chasovennye* of Shoriia are split into two rival groups, *Sokolskie*¹⁶ or *Tsuvstvenniki* (lit. Sensuals) and *Kilinskie*¹⁷ or *Dukhovnye* (lit. Spirituals), whose basic difference lies in the understanding of the nature of Antichrist (see Boiko and Litvina 2005; Litvina 2016; Rygovskiy 2019). *Sokolskie* belong to a mainstream *Chasovennye* teaching, while *Kilinskie* form their own smaller community. However, I do not provide a lot of information about their spiritual disputes because this distinction is not significant in this work. I almost do not use materials from *Kilinskie* faction, except for two interviews with two women from Kilinsk (community center) and Yakunisk. Sites of my fieldwork in Shoriia, to which I refer in the thesis, also include such places as Tashtagol and Chulesh (all *Sokolskie* communities).

This kind of multisite ethnography was possible because I did not stay at one place for a long time but travelled from place-to-place, meeting with the locals. Sometimes I was accompanied by my colleagues, who were either asking the

¹⁵ Kaa-Khem is the administrative unit of this area.

¹⁶ The name originates from *Sokol*, the central settlement of the community.

¹⁷ The name originates from *Kilin*, the surname of one of the faction founders.

same questions as me (as it was in Altai in 2015) or worked on their own research program (as in Tuva and Krasnoyarsk Krai in 2017, 2018, and 2019). This cooperation was especially meaningful and crucial during the visit to Dubches monasteries. During other visits, I interviewed Old Believers alone (Altai 2014, Shoriia 2017), which was a common approach for students having received the Russian anthropology and folklore scholarship like I had. I provide names of interviewers in the list of interlocutors along with other data on interviews.

Here, I should explain why I opted for multisite ethnography and how exactly I performed it, i.e., how I chose my interlocutors, how long time I spent in every location, how successful or unsuccessful our communication was. *Chasovennye* is indeed a large community scattered across the vast territory of several Siberian regions. From the beginning, I was interested in observing the entire community as I hoped to unravel something new or at least to present some of their traditions from a different perspective if I gain comparative knowledge. Multisite ethnography, of course, is risky since a researcher cannot delve into specifics of a particular location and might miss some important details. However, some aspects of the Old Believer lifestyle and my initial contact with *Chasovennye* led me to multisite ethnography.

One of the reasons that framed my choice was the restrictedness of the *Chasovennye* community. *Chasovennye* do not register their congregations, nor do they post identity revealing signs at the gateway to their villages. Besides that, not all congregations live in complete isolation. Old Believers are mingled with other inhabitants of a village, and that only plays into their hands as they can hide from unwanted attention. Not only should a researcher know in what village *Chasovennye* live, but also, they must figure out specific households in this village. So, to perform fieldwork, one is supposed to possess an insider's knowledge of every particular congregation.

Another problem that I faced was the difficulty of staying in one community for a long time. *Chasovennye* are quite hospitable people, and they normally would help a person in trouble or just someone travelling around. When it comes to a person with specific interest towards them, *Chasovennye* become more restricted. First, they question the nature of a researcher's interest in them. Second, a stranger always poses a threat to the purity of a congregation. Old Believers have multiple rules regarding ritual purity that affect many everyday practices such as eating, drinking, washing the dishes, etc. Hopefully, my observation of these rules in Chapter III helps to understand why a quick visit is sometimes better than a long stay in terms of engaging with Old Believers.

Given all that, I turned to the approach of choosing interlocutors based on snowball sampling method. Snowball sampling is used in sociology to work with the so-called hidden populations, i.e., those with indefinite boundaries or stigmatized. By definition, snowball sampling implies the following:

A randomly chosen sample serves as initial contacts, though in practice ease of access virtually always determines the initial sample; these subjects provide the names of a fixed number of other individuals who fulfill the research criteria. The researcher approaches these persons and asks them to participate; and each subject who agrees is then asked to provide a fixed number of additional names. The researcher continues this process for as many stages as desired (Heckathorn 1997: 174).

That is exactly what I did. I usually had a couple of contacts beforehand that my colleagues or acquaintances shared with me before, and then I was asking for more names from the locals. These questions led me to break the initial geographical frameworks: I was interested in congregations in Southern Siberia, i.e., in Altai, Mountain Shoriia, and Tuva since they represent one wave of immigration. The first *Chasovennye* settlers in Altai spread later to Mountain Shoriia and Tuva. However, I also went to Krasnoyarsk Krai up to Dubches region, which is located far in the North and certainly does not belong to Southern Siberia. I decided to go there because I heard multiple times about connections of *Chasovennye* in the South there and the importance of Dubches monasteries.

I tried to spend from one to three weeks in a region during a visit, given the specifics of interaction with *Chasovennye* and limits of funding of my field-work. During a single visit, I usually was able to stay in several places. I could drive through the networks of recommendations and record interviews with the Old Believers willing to cooperate with me. The table below gives an overview of my visits to different Old Believer locations in the table below:

Region	Locations	Time
Mountain Altai	Multa, Zamulta	August, 2014
Mountain Altai	Verkh-Uimon, Multa, Oktyabrskoe, Tikhonkaia, Ust-Koksa, Zamulta	August, 2015
Mountain Shoriia	Kilinsk, Chulesh, Tashtagol	February, 2017
Mountain Shoriia	Beryozovaia Rechka, Chulesh, Karagol, Tashtagol, Yakuninsk	August-September, 2017
Tuva	Erzhei, Kyzyl	August, 2017
Tuva	Verkhni Choduraalyg, Erzhei, Kyzyl Nizhni Choduraalyg Sizim, Uzhep	January, 2018
Tuva and Krasnoyarsk Krai	Tuva: Balgazy, Kyzyl, Saryg-Sep, Sizim, Uzhep Krasnoyarsk Krai: Taskino, Roshchinskoe	March-April, 2018
Krasnoyarsk Krai	Andryshkino, Bezmyanka, Vorogovo, Dubches monasteries	August, 2018
Krasnoyarsk Krai	Idrinskoe, Innokentyevka, Roshchinskoe	September, 2019

My initial research goals in Siberia were significantly different from the current project. I was interested in Old Believer identity. When I first came to Altai, I expected that Old Believers were certain to which faction they belonged. To my surprise, they were rather calling themselves by vague names like ‘Christians’, ‘Old Believers’, etc. Only by means of multisite ethnography I was able to establish that Old Believers in all the Siberian regions mentioned in the table above belong to the same faction. It just happened so that due to the lack of strict hierarchy and vast territory they might not know about the existence of their co-religionists in other regions.

Although Old Believers would not use the same names as researchers to identify themselves, they definitely were able to distinguish between factions. They just used other ‘language’: usually, they were describing rituals, practices, concepts shared by the rival group, exposing their ‘heresies’ alongside. *Chasovennye* would more often remember *Pomortsy* as their counterparts. *Pomortsy* were simultaneously very different from and very similar to *Chasovennye*, as the latter often claimed. Eventually, I came up with an idea to continue my research in a place where *Pomortsy* predominantly and compactly live, such as Estonia.

There was another reason to come to Estonia. Namely, my earlier research was centered around the question of ritual purity, which I describe in detail in Chapter III. Maintaining ritual and physical purity in the *Chasovennye* household belongs to women. Within the course of my research, I noticed that women were agents of protection of traditions and agents of change in *Chasovennye* community. Regarding this, I realized that I cannot avoid gender aspect in my further research. Estonia happened to be a place where women play a significant role in life and survival of Old Believer congregations.

My work in Estonia was in a way different from the work in Siberia. I also used interviews as a reliable method of interaction with the community members. Furthermore, I opted for a more engaged approach, working as a volunteer in a local folklife center (Visitors center of Prichudie in Malye Kolki¹⁸) and in an Old Believer children’s camp in 2020 and 2021. Children in the camp were from local Old Believer families. Tutors working in the camp were either locals or from Latvian Old Believer community. Therefore, I gained an opportunity to become temporarily a part of this group. In Estonia, I focused only on a few places for doing my fieldwork. These were four villages: Bolshie Kolki / Suur Kolkja, Kasepel / Käsepää, Voronja / Varnja (all three *Pomortsy*), and Malye Kolki / Väike Kolkja (*Fedoseevtsy*). They are situated in the same vicinity, which in terms of distance feels like one place. Of course, each community has its own specific features, which I was glad to discover. Additionally, I established close ties with the congregation in Tartu, the city where I lived most of the time during my doctoral studies. I also spoke to members of an Old Believer congregation in Tallinn. The Old Believer community in Tallinn was

¹⁸ While this work was reviewed and edited, the center changed its title to the Heritage center of Prichudie.

interesting to me, because for some time, it was run by a woman, but recently they found a man who agreed to become a leader. At the time I visited the congregation in Tallinn, this man was still trained to become a *nastavnik* and he was later initiated to this role.

There is another aspect that makes my involvement in this research special. I myself belong to one of the Old Believer communities, *Belokrinitskie*. I would not call myself a very faithful practitioner, however, my spiritual experience is mostly connected with the Old Belief. On the one hand, certain concepts in the life of Old Believers are quite familiar to me and I did not have to ask my interlocutors about rudimentary things. On the other hand, I have never been strongly involved in the life of my own community and do not therefore pass as a real insider ethnographer. Nevertheless, my belonging to Old Belief was important during fieldwork. *Belokrinitskie* are rivals of *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* but my interlocutors were often interested in me as an Old Believer researcher. That opened many doors which was important especially in Siberia, where *Chasovennye* communities were usually quite strict and closed for strangers.

In recent years, several books about the folklore of Estonian Old Believers have been published, e.g., *Chudnoe Prichudie* (A Wonderful Peipsimaa) and *Belaia Lestovka* (White Lestovka). Given that these works were compiled relatively recently (in 2007 and 2017 respectively) and some of the interlocutors who contributed to the publications have already passed away, I could not ignore using their valuable insight in my own research. I have also found quite a few ethnographic and folklore records that blend perfectly into the line of my reasoning in the collections of Estonian National Museum (ERM, Tartu), Russian State Archive of Ancient Documents (RGADA, Moscow), and Tuvan Institute of the Humanities and Applied Social and Economic Research (TIGPI, Kyzyl). It is possible to find a full list of the documents from the mentioned archives that I quote in my thesis in the Sources section.

In the end of this section, I would like to make a quick note on references to my fieldwork materials. First, I usually provide some significant information on the personality of an interlocutor, their community, time, location of the interview and other details inside the text. Second, in parenthesis, the reference is accompanied by the phrase ‘field notes’, a place name, a date of an entry in the field diary, and a gender of an interlocutor. However, sometimes, details are reduced.

Research of documents on Old Believers and Old Believer manuscripts

Apart from the conversations with the interlocutors, I delved into the history of Old Believer communities by researching documents in state and local archives, museums, private and congregation libraries. These various types of Old Believer documents and texts have different implementation, e.g., councils’ resolutions, manuscripts, and even journals. In some cases, I managed to gain

access to the original documents and hold them in my hands. Besides that, there are materials that have already been published by previous generations of scholars. I provide a list of the most important documents that I quote in my research work below in the Sources section.

The last two chapters of my thesis are mostly based on the analysis of Old Believer writings. First, a significant part of Chapter IV is dedicated to the journal *Rodnaia Starina*, which I used as an epigraph for the introduction of this thesis, and which I consider a project aimed at mastering the religious and national identity of Old Believers in Latvia and Estonia. Second, Chapter V is entirely devoted to the observations of women writing practices in a Dubches monastic community of *Chasovennye* faction as it is unfolded in two manuscripts, *Povest Chudesnykh Sobytiĭ* (A Tale of Miraculous Events) and *Rodoslovnaia Obiteli 'Novoselie'* (A Genealogy of a Cloister 'Novoselie'), that were created by local monastic Old Believers.

Why do I give so much attention to the written works of Old Believers? The religious reform of the middle 17th century that triggered the formation of Old Belief was basically a review of liturgical books. In that respect, Old Belief is indeed a tradition of book, or, more precisely, of Church Slavic book. Old Believers kept old books at homes, read them, wrote them, and lived according to the examples and rules given in them. The Russian research term that is used to describe this attachment of Old Believers to the book is *knizhnost*, which is hard to translate into other languages. Literally, it means 'bookishness', however, all the importance of a book in life of Old Believers as well as specifics of literary and reading practice are lost in translation. Mostly, Old Belief is studied from the aspect of *knizhnost* (see Bakhtina 1999; Crummey 1993; Guryanova 1988, 2007; Markelov 2004; Morozova 2009; Pokrovskii 2005; Pokrovskii and Zolnikova 2002; Yukhimenko 2002a, 2002b, and many more).

My research is different from this scholarship because I do not study Old Believers' books, and when I have included them for consideration in the present thesis, I do it for different purposes. Namely, I am interested in manuscripts as ethnographic sources that allow to get a look inside the utmost restricted group, such as Dubches monastic community. I also focus on social aspects of reading, writing, and interpreting the written text. Russian scholarship is engaged with this approach as well (see Guryanova 2017), however, it rarely involves field materials.

For me, the most appropriate approach comes from the Western scholarship with the work of Brian Stock (1983) about medieval heresies and interpretation of biblical texts. In particular, I mean the implication of the term 'textual communities' into my research. Stock, who studied 11th century dissenter groups, noticed that one common feature that united them all was the usage of text. These groups were united around an individual, who "having mastered the text, then utilized it for reforming a group's thought and action" (Stock 1983: 90). The term 'textual communities' was introduced into the studies of Old Believers by Robert Crummey, who used it to explain why Old Belief avoided the social divide into elite and simple folk, including through cultural separation. For him,

the first Old Believers, who personally opposed Nikon's reforms, represented the textual community. This was a circle of the learned men, "conservative intelligentsia", who succeeded in disseminating a "limited repertoire of recondite writings" what "both distinguished them from and united them with the ordinary peasant believers whom they led" (Crummey 1993: 707).

Crummey's approach was criticized by Russian scholar Aleksandr Lvov who claimed that the Crummy statement was in "glaring contradiction with the initial point of Stock, because in his opinion, dissenting groups shared a common understanding of text and level of literacy" (Lvov 2011: 57–59). I do not agree either with Lvov or Crummey, because Stock mentioned that the leaders of such groups could be literates (Stock 1983: 91), but it does not mean that only early Old Believers meet the definition.

I prefer the term textual community because of its rather strong social component. Also, as Stock (1983: 91) said, "textual community was not only textual; it also involved new uses of orality". This implies that text was "reperformed orally" (ibid.). I argue that in case of Old Believers it goes even beyond the simple oral spread out of the text. Text gets the embodiment into practice, ritual, routine, semiotic ideology, etc. It defines the framework for interpretation of material world around the community. Originally, Stock did not imply this, however, I believe that it can be extended for the sake of analysis. In any case, Stock himself called his new concept "descriptive" (ibid.: 90) without assigning any strict meaning to it. My understanding of the concept is implemented on the basis of theoretical framework that I will describe in further chapters. Textuality might be considered as a succession of a vernacular literary tradition. Thus, for Nikolai Pokrovskii the real revelation was that the literary tradition of Siberian monasteries of *Chasovennye* succeed directly to the Uralic one (Pokrovskii 2005: 315).

Previous research on Old Belief

Early scholarship on Old Belief appeared at the time when Old Believers were persecuted by the Russian state and Russian Orthodox church as a religious dissenter group, and therefore first accounts on them were aimed at exposing a 'heresy' of Old Belief, rather than understanding their traditions. The iconic example of this kind of literature was *Rozysk o Raskolnicheskoi Brynskoï Vere* (Inquiry of the Schismatic Brynsk Faith), a work by metropolitan Dimitrii of Rostov, where he focused on groups of Old Believers situated in the territory of his diocese, in Brynskie forests (now Kaluga Oblast). This book was finalized in 1709 and withstood several editions¹⁹. Dimitrii of Rostov consequently addressed heresies, fallacies, and atrocities of Old Believers, which was a common attitude among the secular and spiritual elites at the time. His work was meant for a broader audience with a goal to prove that Old Believers should

¹⁹ For example, the present thesis focuses on the fifth edition published in 1855 (i.e., more than 100 years after the book's first release).

not be considered Orthodox, but rather that they are criminals and fornicators. In particular, by enumerating 15 factions of different dissenting groups in Brynskie forests the Rostov metropolitan emphasized that there was no divine truth in Old Believer church, because they were divided into multiple groups (Dimitrii 1855: 65). He also mentioned that a role of Old Believer women was to be a subject of passion for community leaders:

Peasants of Zaozulskaia and Tolokontsovskaia Volosts²⁰ bring their daughters, sisters, and female cousins-in-law to Brynsk forests to holy fathers (the schismatic teachers are called 'holy fathers'). They hand them in there for 'Christ's love', but actually for fornication. These anathematic fathers are so blinded by a demon that not only they do not condemn fornication, but they also justify it as a virtue. They consider it as Christ's love. At the same time, they call lawful marriage illegal and slave work. When those girls get pregnant, the schismatics bring them to their original place of living, from where they were taken (Dimitrii 1855: 596–597).

Metropolitan Dimitrii also mentioned that women performed some rituals but given that he was rather showing 'insanities' that Old Believer teaching contained, it would be hard to consider it as an ethnographic description. Apart from that, it would not be possible to recognize what faction he was writing about:

As they say in Rostov, at the time of Iona, a previous metropolitan of Rostov, there was one maid of a schismatic, misbeliever assembly. She came to a village not far from the city on another side of the lake and stayed in a hiding at one peasant's place. She secretly performed some heretical liturgy, confessed people, and gave communion to them, not only the simple folk, but priests as well, because some insane priests covertly attended her confession (Dimitrii 1855: 75–76).

Among clerical authors, a special place is occupied by former Old Believers, who for some reasons decided to quit their religious group and join Russian Orthodox Church. In general, conversions to Orthodoxy were not rare²¹. This was also happening to highly literate and respected members of Old Believer communities, who were often joining the clergy ranks after conversion. Accounts on Old Belief by these converts were especially valuable because they obviously knew the inward life of this group very well. However, the narrative they produced after conversion was still aimed at discrediting Old Belief and condemning its 'heresies'.

A prominent example of a convert author was Andrei Zhuravlev (1751–1813), a former member of *Fedoseevtsy* faction, who created *Polnoe Istori-*

²⁰ Counties.

²¹ This could not be confirmed with statistics because government officials failed to collect reliable data (see Paert 2006).

*cheskoe Izvestie o Drevnikh Strigolnikakh*²² i *Novykh Raskolnikakh, Tak Nazyvaemykh Starobryadtsakh* (Full Historical Report on Ancient Strigolniki and New Raskolniki, the so-called Starobryadtsy), which withstood several editions since 1794 (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 109). Contrary to metropolitan Dimitrii, Zhuravlev provided a more logical and coherent classification of Old Believer factions, where he divided all of them into *Popovtsy* and *Bespopovtsy*. Zhuravlev did not pay attention to women performing rituals or been community leaders, but he, in particular, made an ethnographic remark about division of a Preobrazhenskaia church in Moscow²³ into female and male parts.

That way, Fedoseevtsy in Moscow founded their monastery under the guise of a cemetery. When the plague was over, they rebuilt it according to their taste. They built a huge mansion for praying with porches and two choir galleries. It is already made of stone, church-like, with a head and a bell tower, where the women's half is separated with glass doors. Entry there is denied for strangers, i.e., everybody, who does not belong to their faction (Zhuravlev 1855: 20–21).

Although this note by Zhuravlev concerns only a center of *Fedoseevtsy* faction in Moscow, this pattern has been observed in all factions of Old Belief till nowadays. I observe the gendered division of space in Old Believer prayer houses in section 1.8 of Chapter I.

Zhuravlev's classification of Old Believer factions inspired the first official categorization. In 1842, Russian Holy Synod divided all groups of Russian dissenters into three categories: 1) particularly harmful sectarians (all groups such as *Molokane*, *Dykhobory*, *Khlysty*, *Subbotniki*²⁴, and others that were closer to Protestantism or Judaism rather than to Orthodoxy; and priestless Old Believers, who did not pray for the tsar and did not recognize marriage as a sacrament, i.e., this concerned *Fedoseevtsy*); 2) harmful sectarians (priestless Old Believers, who prayed for the tsar and recognized marriages, e.g., *Pomortsy*); 3) less harmful sectarians (all priestly Old Believers, e.g., *Chasovennye*) (Ershova 1996: 26–27).

In the middle of the 19th century, a further development of a public narrative about Old Believers was marked with politization of their movement. Authors saw a political opposition to the state in them and tried to confute previous

²² A dissenter movement of *Strigolniki* was one of the earliest in Russia. It appeared in the 14th century in Pskov and extended to Novgorod. Andrei Zhuravlev saw a continuation of an older *Strigolniki* heresy in contemporary Old Believer movement.

²³ Preobrazhenskii center of *Fedoseevtsy* Old Believers in Moscow appeared in 1771, in the middle of the plague pandemic of 1770–1772. The center was aimed at treating the sick people and burying the plague victims, for what this place used to be called Preobrazhenskoe cemetery. However, Old Believers used this moment as an opportunity to establish a monastery on the territory of the cemetery.

²⁴ These groups are part of Russian dissent but have to be distinguished from Old Belief, since their practice and beliefs have gone too far from the conventional Orthodoxy. In this regard, *Molokane* and *Dykhobory* are close to Western Protestantism. *Skopty* (Castrates) and *Khlysty* (Flagellants) seized to exist.

critique of Old Belief that recognized its factions only as religious regimes. One of the supporters of these views was Ivan Liprandi (1790–1880), a Russian military general, statesman, and historian of Spanish and Italian descent. In his 1853 publication, *Kratkoe Obozrenie Sushchestvuyushchikh v Rossii Raskolov, Eresei i Sekt kak v Religioznom tak i v Politicheskom Ikh Znachenii* (A Brief Review of the Schisms, Heresies, and Sects Existing in Russia both in Religious and Political Sense), he claimed that at least some factions of Old Believers should be considered in political context. Liprandi wrote this book while being an official investigator of Old Believer affairs, who gathered all information on the instructions of the government. It should be considered that, accordingly, Liprandi's way of presentation of his knowledge was meant for use by other officials.

Liprandi divided all contemporary Russian dissenters into two communities: one was completely religious and was “waiting for bliss in the thereafter”, and the second one, which he considered political, “expected the triumph of their false doctrine in this life” (Liprandi 1853: 10). According to Liprandi, all *Popovtsy* Old Believers and *Fedoseevtsy* belonged to the first community, while the rest of the factions – to the second one. The religious community “did not change in the matter of conscience”, while the political community consisted of factions based on either “free interpretation of spiritual literature and traditions of their own founding fathers” or “prophecies” (ibid.: 10, 15). The latter, in its turn, was divided into three groups: 1) hostile to the state and the government *Bespopovtsy*, 2) based on random fanatical addiction *Dukhobortsy*, *Ikonobortsy* (Iconoclasts), etc., 3) based on misconceptions that lie far from Christianity, such as *Khlysty*, *Skoptsy*, etc. (ibid.: 52).

It was not a coincidence that Liprandi's classification resembled the official division of Old Believers into harmless and harmful sects. Liprandi wanted to distinguish between the factions that most closely resembled contemporary Russian Orthodox Church and the factions most different from it. Of course, *Popovtsy* fit most with the first category. The author even claimed that “*Popovtsy* were not any different from the approved by the government *Edinovertsy*: same old books, same icons and utensils, same rituals” (ibid.: 11). *Fedoseevtsy*, of course, were different and that affected the Liprandi's classification of Old Believer factions. Eventually he lost the consistency and observed *Fedoseevtsy* among the factions of the “second type”: “Fedoseevtsy <...> belong more to the second community because it became a breeding ground of multiple harmful sects” (ibid.: 17). Liprandi also paid attention to the social background of the second community: it should be considered political, as it included merchants, educated people, and other representatives of the social elite, who could “prophecy” for the people's mass (ibid.: 46). However, the most important feature of those groups was, according to Liprandi, a denial that “the Church was a Mother, and the Tsar was the head of the state” (ibid.: 57). In his work, Liprandi imagined a resemblance of these groups with “a religious-

confederative republic, similar to the German Confederation²⁵, Switzerland, or the North American states, where every separate part has its own undertones in the forms of internal governing. Altogether they were one whole that pursued the same goal” (ibid.: 50).

Liprandi was not the first author who suggested that Old Believers (at least, some of their factions) posed a political threat to the state. His vague definition of the political nature of the Old Believer movement was, actually, based on an assumption that some of the dissenters’ groups commonly believed that their leaders were an embodiment of a tsar. Royal impostors who lead peasant rebellions and mass movements in Russia belonged mostly to 17th and 18th centuries. However, decades later Russian elites believed that a presence of the royal impostor legends in some of the groups could still pose a threat to the state. Even educated people with the opposite political views were thinking the similar way. In 1845, almost ten years before Liprandi, Nikolai Nadezhdin (1804–1856), a Russian historian and an associate of the Minister of Internal Affairs Lev Perovskii (1792–1856, served as the minister in 1841–1852), claimed that identification by *Skoptsy* of their leader, Kondratii Selivanov, not only with Christ but also with emperor Petr III (1728–1762)²⁶, made them an extremely dangerous political power (Panchenko 2004: 18–19). In fact, both Nadezhdin and Liprandi dealt with one of the manifestations of a cultural phenomenon known as royal imposture. Various royal impostors played a significant role in development of Russian history since 1605, when False Dimitrii²⁷ stormed Moscow. After his short reign and sudden death, Petr III had probably the largest number of impostors²⁸. In the 17th and 18th centuries, legends about the ‘real tsar’ hiding among his people waiting to come out one day to claim the thrown and make life of the peasants better was a popular form of resistance. One of these popular leaders was Yemelyan Pugachev (1726–1775), who took charge of one of the biggest peasant rebellions (1773–1775) in the 18th century. As Boris Uspenskij rightly argues, appearance of royal impostors on the historical stage in Russia was connected to the sacralization of the monarchic power and the figure of tsar (Uspenskij 2012: 114).

Some authors of the second half of the 19th century tried to understand deeper the views and motives of Old Believers, but nevertheless continued considering them religious renegades, who were dangerous for civil society. The most famous of such authors was a writer and researcher of Old Belief, Pavel Melnikov²⁹ (1819–1883), who served as a clerk for special assignments.

²⁵ An association of 39 German-speaking states and free cities in 1815–1866.

²⁶ Petr III ruled only two years, 1761–1762, and was overthrown by his wife, Yekaterina II.

²⁷ Grigorii Otrepyev (ca 1581–1606), a fugitive monk, who posed as an allegedly surviving prince Dimitrii (1582–1591), the youngest son of Ivan the Terrible (1530–1584), who died under unclear circumstances.

²⁸ Although it was more important that Petr III was a pretender to the throne, who was not known to many people, but in whom people placed their hopes for fair changes in their lives, as Kirill Chistov (2003: 170) claims.

²⁹ Mostly known as Pavel Melnikov-Pecherskii.

In particular, his activities were connected with gathering information on Old Believers and, at the same time, persecuting them as he participated in a closure of Old Believers in Nizhnii Novgorod Governorate. Apart from publishing reports, memorandums, and research works, Melnikov applied his knowledge to write fiction and proved to be a profound expert in the topic. Melnikov's dilogy *V Lesakh* (In the Forests; published in 1871) and *Na Gorakh* (In the Mountains, 1875) is based on his reports he put together as a clerk. He even used names of real people for some of the characters such as mother Manefa, an abbess of one of the Old Believer monasteries in Nizhegorodskaiia guberniya.

What distinguished Melnikov from most of the authors and experts in Old Belief was his involvement in private matters of Old Believers. He did not rely on reports provided by someone else but preferred first-hand experience, which made him almost a contemporary ethnographer in the field of Anthropology of Religion. As he pointed out:

It is necessary to face it [the Old Belief – D.R.], to live in the schismatics' monasteries <...> to study it in its living manifestations, in tales and believes that are not handed over to paper but sacredly preserved by entire generations (Melnikov 1976: 13).

However, Melnikov's personal experience with Old Believers did not make him their advocate. He assumed that only *Popovtsy* could be considered schismatics as such, while the rest of the factions are harmful one way or another. According to Melnikov, a recognition of a church hierarchy by *Popovtsy* made them "basically not dissimilar to an Orthodox Christian" (Melnikov 1860: 195). As he put it in another place, *Popovtsy* "were of the same mind with us (followers of the state church – D.R.)" (ibid.: 174). At the same time, *Bespopovtsy* and other groups went too far in denial of social order and legitimacy of Russian government. For example, *Fedoseevtsy* considered tsarist powers as theomachists and *Pomortsy*, as a more loyal faction, treated them just as ungodly. Given that, in his *Zapiska o Russkom Raskole* (Note on Russian Schism) quoted here, Melnikov called only *Popovtsy* Old Believers, while the rest remained "sectarians" and "fanatics" (ibid.: 195–198). He also titled *Popovtsy* as "purely Russian Raskol", who were "strictly committed to old customs and Russian nation, follow all regulations of the Orthodox church regarding the private life" (ibid.: 170, 174). In *Pisma o Raskole* (Letters about the Schism), Melnikov nevertheless admitted that both *Popovtsy* and *Bespopovtsy* belong to Russian nation: "Both *Bespopovtsy* and *Popovtsy* sects appeared on Russian soil. They don't have the smallest impurity of anything foreign. They were constructed from the elements of the nation. This is the Russian schism in the full sense of the world" (Melnikov 1976: 56).

In the second half of the 19th century, it was important what political role different authors gave to Old Believers. For Melnikov it was passive, apolitical. He thought that they were not able to form any political party or become a popular force because their views were fixed on the past: "Ideal civil consti-

tution existed for them only in the distant, irretrievable past <...> In the future, there was only Antichrist” (ibid.: 59). At the same time, Old Belief seemed attractive for adversaries of tsarism – revolutionaries, such as Vasili Kelsiev (1835–1872), who thought that Old Believers would become, on the contrary, a social basis of the future revolution. He considered them as “representatives of freedom, who did not have awareness but preached and spared nothing for preaching” (Kelsiev 1860: IV). Kelsiev was part of an expat revolutionary circle of Aleksandr Gertsen (1812–1870) and Nikolai Ogarev (1813–1877) in London, when he undertook a study on Russian Old Believers upon a request from the former. As a result, Kelsiev published a two-volume work in 1860 and 1861 titled *Sbornik Pravitelstvennykh Svedenii of Raskolnikakh* (A Collection of Governmental Reports on Schismaters) compiled from multiple materials by other researchers (mostly government agents) or Old Believers³⁰ (Kelsiev 1860, 1861). In the foreword to the first volume, Kelsiev showed that he was quite informed about Old Believer factions, however, he concluded that polemics within the groups of Old Believers and between them and the state church was not important compared to some ‘principles’ that Old Believers did not express directly but “were able to suffer for” (Kelsiev 1860: XXVIII). These principles turned out to be a Kelsiev’s interpretation of some Old Believer regulations, such as their attitudes to passports or officials (see ibid.: XVIII–XXX).

Imagining Old Believers as natural adversaries of tsarism who lack political guidance, Kelsiev made several fruitless attempts between 1862 and 1865 to agitate political upheaval among them for which he secretly travelled to Moscow and Moldavia. He also published a newspaper *Obshchee Veche* (Popular Assembly) in those years that was targeting common people, in particular, Old Believers (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 137–138). It turned out that they, nevertheless, were not quite interested in starting a revolt against the Russian royalty and existing order. Kelsiev overestimated the revolutionary spirit in Old Believers. But in spite of this huge misunderstanding, he was one of the first authors who insisted on interaction with Old Believers on equal terms. In particular, he criticized Pavel Melnikov for claims that most of Old Believer factions, with the exception of Popovtsy, were harmful in terms of civil life (Kelsiev 1860: XXXVII–XXXIX). For him, there was no difference between Catholicism, Orthodoxy, various branches of Protestantism (ibid.: XIX–XXV). Therefore, he suggested that branches of Old Belief could also be treated on the same footing.

Afanasii Shchapov (1831–1876), a Russian historian and anthropologist, was also one of the famous experts in Old Belief in the second half of the 19th century. He saw remnants of *zemstvo*, a Russian form of civil society and self-governance, in Old Belief. Shchapov linked the appearance of this movement with social and economic protests emerging at the time of tsar Aleksei Romanov (1629–1676), because the latter “instead of *zemskoe stroenie* [civil

³⁰ In 1863, Kelsiev also published another two-volume work *Sobranie Postanovlenii po Chasti Raskola* (A Collection of Acts on the Part of the Schism).

construction], in popular spirit <...> handles business at his whim” (Shchapov 1862: 22–23). Therefore, he characterized the movement as “powerful, dreadful community opposition of the taxed *zemstvo*, the popular masses against the entire state order <...>” (ibid.: 28). Contrary to his contemporaries, Shchapov tried to avoid evaluative statements about Old Believers. Although his historical-ethnographical speculations about the origin of religious practice of Russian dissent look very naïve, as he explained it by mixture of “Finnish-Slavic shamanism” and Orthodox practice, they are still valued by some researchers (Panchenko 2004: 29–30).

Specific ethnographic research on Old Belief appeared only in the late 19th and early 20th century. However, it was not systematic, mostly published in two forms: 1) ethnographic diaries or notes as a part of activities of the Imperial Russian Geographic Society, or 2) literary essays that employed some ethnographic materials. For example, works by Boris Gerasimov, Solomon Chudnovskii, and Mariia Shvetsova on Old Believers in Altai, or Aleksandr Adrianov on communities in Southern Krasnoyarsk Krai (Adrianov 1904; Chudnovskii 1890; Gerasimov 1911; Shvetsova 1899) belong to the first category, while Georgii Grebenshchikov’s essays belong to the second (e.g., Grebenshchikov 1914).

In this period, there are only a few studies that target female leadership in Old Belief. Nikolai Varadinov’s publication of legal records on Old Believers gives an overview of how government officials explained the spread of dissent. Judging by their reports, they were sure that Old Belief was mostly disseminated among women (Varadinov 1863: 63). Moreover, they blamed “ignorance of the populace, especially women” (quote by: Beliakova 2011: 135).

Petr Smirnov (1861–1933), a pre-revolutionary Russian scholar, compiled the most comprehensive works on the topic. He was convinced that women played a crucial role in the proliferation and perpetuation of Old Belief. Smirnov claimed that in order to propagate anti-schismatic views, church missionaries must give sufficient attention to female practitioners: “Being genuinely sincere in her beliefs and actions, a woman fosters sincerity in others. <...> However, sincerity is unprejudiced and leads to unprejudiced pursuit of truth” (1902: 350). Among many things, Smirnov mentioned that women have always been more numerous than men, highly educated (in terms of religious knowledge), guiding services, and protecting boundaries of a group. To some extent, credits to successful dissemination of Old Belief belong to those zealot women.

As a historian, Smirnov was interested in causes that led to such a high importance of women in the religious life of Old Believers. He tried to explain this through conceptualizing religiosity of women, thereby creating quite a straightforward approach to female agency in religious communities. The four aspects of Smirnov’s concept are:

1. Women are subject to sensuous temperament that affects their religious impulses: “With her heartfelt impressionability, a woman not only catches teaching of faith faster, but along with this, she accepts actions of faith deeper <...> It was basically the same in Russian Raskol. A woman was

- weaker in terms of creation and systematic acquisition of doctrines but proved herself energetic in applying them to the real life” (Smirnov 1902: 340–341).
2. Before Peter the Great, women had only two options: family or monastery. The latter could give opportunities for personal development and individual responsibility that was lacking in a family. Old Belief provided that, too: “While a man had the right to live a social life and delve into community interests, there was no place for a woman to appear in public and it used to be shameful. Instead, monastery and family were focus of her activity <...> Monastery <...> attracted her because it pulled her out from the underaged state and provided with opportunities to meet her demands” (ibid.: 341–342).
 3. Since Old Belief is a ‘denomination of ritualism’, it opened up greater opportunities for women in control of home prayer and provision of private services: “Fulfilled by a ‘need’ in right-minded clergy, <...> Raskol acknowledged women to provide public prayers, as well as laity men, and even to sacraments” (ibid.: 346).
 4. Old Believer women were also allowed to educate children and therefore propagate their religious views (ibid.: 349–350).

Another historian, Ivan Zabelin (1820–1909), infers in the same vein that even tsarinas were destined to have an exclusively domestic lifestyle before Petrine reforms³¹ were introduced. Social relations were only for men. The only exception would be the so-called *materaia vdova* (maternal widow), i.e., a widow with sons, who would fulfill a male role, until her sons grow up (Zabelin 1992: 6–7). Even some grand princesses used to be in this position (ibid.: 54). In Russian peasantry, social activity also increased with ageing or gaining new public status. In this regard, the social structure of a traditional Russian society was all the same, more flexible and gave a bit more opportunities for women than Smirnov argues.

Provided that Smirnov pointed out how Old Belief, consciously or not, explored “female nature” and “inclinations”, it should not be a surprise he believed in a special status of women in this group. Some scholars went even further, like Vasilii Andreev who saw sources of alternative Russian democracy in Old Belief. For him, women in Old Belief “were standing high” and that was what made it a success among Russian people. Andreev considered gender equality not as just another Western influence but as an inheritance of “Slavic race” kept by Old Believers who were standing for “Slavic olden times” (Andreev 1870: 251, 257).

Varvara Yasevich-Borodaevskaia (1861–1920), an ethnographer and legal scholar, provided an innovative approach for her time. Basically, she spoke in defense of Old Belief arguing against the rooted stereotypes about ignorance and insignificance of this religion. Her arguments were based on the principles

³¹ A set of government reforms undertaken by Peter the Great of Russia (1672–1725) directed at modernization of Russia.

of religious freedom. She called monastic communities of *Pomortsy* faction in Vyg and Leksa a “people’s university” and claimed that for the first time the question of equal rights for women was posed in Leksa:

Here, a woman, although she had to voluntarily give up her personal life, took over an honorable place of an enlightener of a populace, an ardent supporter of old customs; here she established her public and civil rights, acting not just a helper, but often becoming an independent energetic leader of a public matter <...> (Yasevich-Borodaevskaia 1912: 327).

Soviet scholarship was also ideologically biased towards Old Belief. However, one of the first big works on this group was an ethnographic research performed by two representatives of an early Soviet Leningrad ethnographic school, Evgeniia Blomkvist and Nadezhda Grinkova. They covered many aspects of the life of Old Believers of Bukhtarma valley (Altai), including a local group of *Chasovennye*. This included their origin and religious specifics, clothes, folk art, buildings, dialect, and ways of life (Blomkvist, Grinkova 1930).

However, to a greater extent Soviet scholarship included works aligned with the state antireligious policy that criticized Old Belief as a historical and social phenomenon. In this case, Soviet authors were not juxtaposing ‘heretical’ and ‘wrong’ religion of Old Believers with ‘right’ Russian Orthodox Church but pointing out to ‘fanaticism’ and ‘backwardness’ of Old Believers. This is exactly how Pavel Maslov described female monasteries and lay Old Believer settlements in then independent Republic of Tuva (Maslov 1933). A lot more works of this kind appeared under the supervision of Institute of Scientific Atheism, a research organization created by the Central Committee of Communist Party of the USSR. Among the authors affiliated with the Institute were, for instance, Vladimir Milovidov, who in several books pointed out that the number of Old Believers was declining, or a journalist Aleksandr Shamaro, who visited Old Believer monasteries of different factions in Tomsk Oblast and Krasnoyarsk Krai and published a series of articles in the famous Soviet antireligious journal *Nauka i Religii*a (Science and Religion; see: Milovidov 1969, 1979; Shamaro 1959, 1963, 1968, 1971). In summer 1965, the editorial board of the journal organized a trip to Old Believer settlements in Tomsk taiga, headed by the mentioned Milovidov and accompanied by Shamaro (see: Shamaro 1968: 17).

Propagandistic genre required inclusions of fictional texts into documentary for the sake of constructing a more credible story. As a consequence, there were a number of essays based on facts about the life of real Old Believers with infusions of authors’ clear speculations. For instance, Aleksandr Shamaro described in detail the reaction of monks from the Dubches *Chasovennye* monasteries when they noticed a plane flying over their settlements. He cited the dialog that happened among two monks and how they were scared (Shamaro 1963: 21–22). It is assumed that the Dubches monasteries were discovered by accident by a pilot performing a geodesic survey of the area – an event that was

followed by a raid of Soviet forces in 1951. Nevertheless, it is obvious, that Shamaro could not witness the dialog between the monks, nor is it likely that he actually spoke to the inhabitants of the monasteries. As further comparison of his article with documents of the investigations showed, Shamaro based his story on these documents (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 265). Similarly, an author of revelatory essays about *Chasovennye* in Tuva, Aleksandr Yemelyanov, extensively used then classified documents as well as personal data he acquired while working as an antireligious propaganda official (Tatarintseva and Storozhenko 2015: 117–118; see Yemelyanov 1984).

As examples provided above show, both Imperial and Soviet research on Old Belief was mostly extremely biased and often relied on predominant ideology of the state and personal views of the writer. It was quite usual to create vivid narratives that seemed to give the readers a clue inside ‘the mind-set’ of Old Believers. However, the ethnographic reality of this religious community was misrepresented and treated arbitrarily rather than thoroughly analyzed. I cannot but agree with the following characteristic of such literature by Aleksandr A. Panchenko:

The ‘sectarians’ issue’ was actively exploited both in prerevolutionary Russia and in Soviet times by politicians, theologists, historians, and writers for construction and reproduction of contemporary social, cultural, and religious mythologems. *Khlysty* and *Skoptsy* were seen by fundamentalists as followers of secret foreign heresies of the destructive type; by government officials as conspirators, threatening the throne and public peace; by modernist writers as carriers of a special folk and mystical knowledge, a source for a new understanding of religion, corporality, and gender; by *Narodniki*³² and Marxist revolutionaries as emergent communards, an organizational basis for peasant revolution; by Soviet scholars of the religion during Stalin’s period as kulaks-exploiters (Panchenko 2004: 15).

This kind of state of affairs is less typical for contemporary research and reproduction of various mythologems have moved to opinion-based journalism or ultra-nationalist ideologists such as Aleksandr Dugin³³. The foundations of this change were laid in the late Soviet period when some historians, philologists, and linguists started to express interest in Old Believers as keepers of old manuscripts. Multiple expeditions were launched to predominantly Old Believer regions. Siberian *Chasovennye* and Estonian *Pomortsy* and *Fedo-seevtsy* became a center of interest of Field Archaeography, a discipline that is aimed at collecting and studying old manuscripts and rare books. This highlighted an alternative viewpoint on Old Believers that existed in Soviet scholarship. It was also marked by a series of historical monographs that

³² A movement of Russian intellectuals during 1860–1910s that sought philosophical and political connections with ‘the people’.

³³ Dugin, in particular, positions Old Belief as an “inoculation by the old ways” that could help the renewal of the Russian Church (Tovbin 2014: 50).

depicted Old Believers as strict opponents of tsarist Russia (see Guryanova 1988; Mamsik 1978, 1989; Pokrovskii 1974).

As a discipline, Old Believer manuscripts' studies did not appear in Soviet times but much earlier, since clerical authors tried to refute Old Believer arguments against the state church presented in their manuscripts already in the 17th century. Old Believers themselves can be considered archaeographers, because they had to collect ancient books to fight against the state clerics. However, the first scholarly publication of an Old Believer manuscript was issued in 1877 and it was followed by many others including but not limited to *Materialy dlia Istorii Raskola za Pervoe Vremya Ego Sushchestvovaniia* (Materials for the History of the Schism of the Early Period of Its Existence) in 1878–1890 by Nikolai Subbotin, *Pamiatniki Pervykh Let Russkogo Staroobriadchestva* (Written Monuments of the First Years of the Russian Old Belief) in 1912 by Yakov Barskov, *Pisaniia Ruskikh Staroobryadtsev* (Writings of Russian Old Believers) in 1912 by Vasilii Druzhinin (Bubnov 1995: 16–23). Nevertheless, Old Believer manuscripts were not welcomed by the general public. For instance, Pavel Melnikov ridiculed their writings calling them “a newly made nonsense” (Melnikov 1910: 247).

In early Soviet period, the study of Old Believer manuscripts was almost stopped for ideological reasons, but not completely as some of the publications of sources, such as writings of protopop Avvakum, continued even in that period (Bubnov 1995: 24). However, the full potential of Field Archaeography was unlocked in the 1950s, especially after the restoration of the Archaeographical Committee that was initially founded in 1834. Then, field trips to Pomorie, Siberia, and other regions allowed the researchers to collect, analyze, and publish many old and recent manuscripts by Old Believers, and eventually to boost interest towards their tradition in general. Further progression of Old Believer research was inextricably linked to foundation and development of regional archaeological centers in Novosibirsk, Ekaterinburg, Tomsk, etc.

A growing interest towards Old Belief in the second half of the 20th century can be explained within the framework of retrospectivism – an intellectual movement that appeared in late Soviet Union and regarded religious art as national and spiritual heritage (Kormina, Shtyrkov 2015). It included not only manuscripts but also medieval architecture and art that indeed happened to be predominately religious (i.e., churches, icons, etc.). It is not a coincidence that Aleksandr Belousov, a Tartu semiotician in Soviet Estonia, wrote in the opening to his thesis on Old Belief that “literature of Old Rus is not only a historical phenomenon, <...> but also a cultural value” (Belousov 1980: 2). He also pointed out that Old Believer culture “was receding under an impact of new spiritual and material interests of people” (ibid.: 34). This dichotomy was common among late Soviet scholars; there were cultural and national values that were preserved thanks to Old Believers, but their religiosity was fading away and did not really matter in the light of more important things such as old manuscripts and a living form of an Old Rus literature.

Appreciation of cultural values proved to be a deep concern for Soviet propagandists. Even specifically antireligious journal *Nauka i Religii* (Science and Religion) published a short note about altars of Rogozhskoe cemetery (a center of *Belokinitskie* Old Believers), mentioning ancient Russian icons that were sealed in the altars for almost 49 years. The author admitted that this was devastating for Russian icon art (Zapechatannye Altari 1971: 37). Although the note was published anonymously, the author was probably the mentioned above Aleksandr Shamaro, who later included an extended version with clear textual parallels about sealed Old Believer altars and the tragic loss for Russian national art (Shamaro 1984: 173–187). Western scholarship also paid attention to Russian Old Believers at this period, which, for instance, resulted in publication of a monograph by Robert Crummey on history, worldview, and writing traditions in the Vyg monastic communities of *Pomortsy* faction (Crummey 1970).

In fact, both Soviet lines of research of Old Belief, atheistic and retrospective, co-existed and sometimes encountered with the same materials independently of one another. Thus, *Uralo-Sibirskii Paterik* (Patericon of the Urals and Siberia)³⁴, a 20th century writing of *Chasovennye* Old Believers that I analyze in Chapter V was first mentioned in the derogatory article by the same Aleksandr Shamaro, who even published a photo of one spread from the manuscript³⁵ (Shamaro 1963: 27). By a strange coincidence, Novosibirsk archaeographers who found and published *Patericon*, had learnt about Shamaro's article from *Chasovennye*, who asked them to make a copy of a picture of father Simeon, a founder of Dubches monasteries (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 264–265). Allegedly, Shamaro took this photo from the materials of the criminal case against the father. Later, it reappeared in another Old Believer manuscript, but Simeon's photo was copied by hand and a monk's hat was added on his head (pic. 4–5).

Therefore, late Soviet research approached Old Belief as a complex, rich cultural phenomenon, which was deeply connected to national art, literature, history, and identity in general. Here, I mostly traced the shift in attitude towards Old Believer writings from “newly made things” articulated by clerical authors or such experts like Pavel Melnikov to manuscripts and preservation of Russian medieval literary tradition by a small religious group. Besides that, late Soviet authors were interested in popular antifeudal movements, which somehow coincided with the state ideology of their time.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, research into Old Belief has become so multiple and diverse that in some respects it forms a separate discipline of Old Believer Studies. This includes publications of Old Believer writings, historical monographs, sociological and anthropological analysis of Old Believer culture and social life, comprehensive accounts on Old Believer dialects and

³⁴ Also known as *Povest Chudesnykh Sobytiĭ* (A Tale of Miraculous Events).

³⁵ Novosibirsk archaeographers launched their expeditions in 1966 by first visiting Tuva (Pokrovskii 2005: 13). They obtained a full copy of the manuscript at the beginning of 1990s (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 321).

literary language, and many more. In some regions complex³⁶ expeditions to Old Believer settlements have been completed (Pozdeeva 2020). However, co-operation between several disciplines is quite rare, despite the subject being the same – Old Believers.

I feel that even a brief overview of recent works on Old Belief would be too lengthy and unnecessary, and therefore, I prefer to focus on the most relevant for my research. Mostly, this concerns representatives of the Novosibirsk archaeography school, most of whom discovered an Old Believer writing tradition in Siberia in Soviet times. These are, of course, Nikolai Pokrovskii and Nataliia Zolnikova, who published numerous documents created by *Chasovennye* and other factions of Old Believers living in Siberia in a three-volume series *Dukhovnaya Literatura Staroverov Vostoka Rossii* (Spiritual Literature of the Eastern Russia Old Believers; Pokrovskii 1999) and *Povest Chudesnykh Sobytiĭ* (A Tale of Miraculous Events), one of the biggest creations of Siberian *Chasovennye*, in two volumes (Pokrovskii 2014, 2016). History and development of *Chasovennye* polemical tradition was thoroughly studied in a joint monograph by Pokrovskii and Zolnikova, where it is especially important that the authors managed to observe writing practice of *Chasovennye*, including their editorial work (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 318–321). Apart from that, Zolnikova also published fieldwork diaries of archaeological expeditions in Tuva (Zolnikova 2016, 2018). Among the researchers of priestless Old Belief, I would like to highlight the contribution of Aleksandr Maltsev, Elena Yukhimenko and Gleb Markelov (Maltsev 1996, 2006; Markelov 2004; Yukhimenko 2002a, 2002b, 2006³⁷).

Since research of particular Old Believer communities has sufficient importance for my thesis, I should name at least a few relatable works. In this regard, communities of Siberian *Chasovennye* have become rather popular in the last 30 years among anthropologists and folklorists. Thus, Nataliia Shitova explores folk costume of *Chasovennye* in Altai (Shitova 2005) and analyzes contemporary writings in this group within the questions of religious identity and historical migration of Old Believers (Shitova 2013). She also distinguishes this group from the rest of *Chasovennye*, claiming that they form a unique, local faction (Shitova 2012, 2014). This is disputed by other authors (Tsvetkova 2021). History and contemporary tradition of the Tuvan *Chasovennye* has been vastly observed by Margarita Tatarintseva, Alena Storozhenko, and Aleksandr Kostrov (Kostrov 2021; Tatarintseva, Storozhenko 2015). Recently, folk art of the Yenisei *Chasovennye*, to which the Tuvan group belongs, have gained a lot of scholarly attention. In particular, this concerns the tradition of *lubok* (folk printed or hand-drawn picture) (Bykova 2021; Bykova, Kostrov 2019; Bykova,

³⁶ A ‘complex’ character of fieldwork means that a group of researchers consists of specialists with expertise in a variety of fields, such as archaeography, anthropology or ethnology, linguistics, etc.

³⁷ These publications of the above-mentioned authors are, of course, not limited to the given list.

Prigarin 2019). A few works on Shoriia *Chasovennye* have been published as well (Boiko, Litvina 2005; Litvina 2016). It is worth mentioning that *Chasovennye* communities in diaspora are also actively studied, which includes monographs on Canada by David Scheffel (1991), Oregon by Richard Morris (1991), and Sothern America by Olga Rovnova (2022). A piece on history of emigration is presented in the work by Yuliia Argudyaeva and Amir Khisamutdinov (2013).

Although an Old Believer community was settled in Estonia for a long time, it was barely studied before the country gained its independence in 1918. As Galina Ponomareva reports, a few writers and diarists mention them in their texts (Ponomareva 1998: 80). Nikolai Leskov reported on the state of education among Old Believers in Tartu County in 1863 (Leskov 1996: 425–438). In 1920s and 1930s, Estonian linguist and folklorist Paul Ariste (1905–1990) and a group of students started gathering Russian folklore in Prichudie, including from local Old Believers (Antropov 2022: 144–146; Pomomareva 1998: 81–82). This resulted in a huge collection stored in the Estonian Folklore Archives of the Estonian Literary Museum in Tartu under the code ERA, Vene. This work was sufficiently interrupted by the following Second World War and the Soviet occupation of Estonia. However, it was continued in late 1950s and new volumes and monographs on Russian folklore (Belousov 1976) and dialectology of Estonian Russians (e.g.: Nemchenko, Sinitsa and Murnikova 1963; Murnikova 1960) were published. One of the most serious ethnographic research on Russians in Prichudie was conducted by Elizaveta Rikhter. She paid a lot of attention to the local Old Believer tradition and carefully documented shifts in economic occupation, clothes, rituals, and other aspects of culture between the late 19th century and her own time (Rikhter 1976). Old Belief was also studied from the point of view of Tartu semiotics (Belousov 1979; 1980).

It is important to mention that Old Believers themselves were actively involved in the research work. Thus, Ivan Zavoloko (1897–1984), one of the leaders of Latvian *Pomortsy*, started collecting Old Believer folklore (in particular, samples of folk ornaments and spiritual verses) and manuscripts in Latvia and Estonia to promote the tradition among the Old Believer youth. Although he became a GULAG prisoner, Zavoloko managed to come back to Latvia and continue his research activities under the affiliation of the Institute of Russian Literature (Mekšs 1997: 94–96).

In current research of Old Belief in Estonia, collection of folklore and dialect still plays a crucial role in understanding the local tradition. However, there are almost no recent generalizing works, only research papers and publications of thematically divided excerpts from interviews can be observed. This regards folklore (e.g.: Kuvaitseva 2017; Morozova, Novikov 2007), dialectology (e.g., Kudryavtsev 2009; Külmoja 2007, 2012³⁸; Rovnova and Külmoja 2008), and

³⁸ Irina Külmoja leads a group of researchers working on compiling a dialectological dictionary of Prichudie Old Believers and collecting a dialectological and ethnographical database of Old Believer tradition at the University of Tartu.

history (e.g., Ponomareva 2005, Ponomareva and Šor 2006; Ponomareva and Šor 2008). Regarding the writing tradition of Prichudie, although archaeological expeditions were organized to this region predominantly in 1960–1980s, some work has been done in this direction recently (Ageeva 2008). Later, history of Old Believer writing tradition in Estonia has been summed up by Nadezhda Novikova (2009). Besides that, Estonian Old Believers actively participate in preservation of their traditions and initiate research processes. This is especially true about Pavel Varunin, a chairman of the Union of Old Believer Congregations in Estonia³⁹ (Rovnova and Külmoja 2008: 282–283).

Although the above-mentioned works do not focus on women's role and female religiosity in Old Believer communities in Estonia, they still provide materials on these topics. It is also necessary to remember that most of the informants, especially in recent research, have been women. This happens due to demographic disproportion in Old Believer villages. In a way, it has been a study of female religiosity for at least 30 years, but it has not been provided with specific tools to point it out.

That said, I should observe those few but nevertheless important recent works that observe female religiosity in Old Belief. This is particularly true for a monograph *Old Believers: Religious Dissent and Gender in Russia, 1760–1850* by Irina Paert (2003). Her work is, perhaps, the first serious research on this topic after Petr Smirnov's, who exercised his scholarly activities in early 20th century. Irina Paert, thus, questions if *Fedoseevtsy* "reassertion of celibacy was an expression of a claim for social authority" (Paert 2003: 8). Eventually, she comes to conclusion that *Fedoseevtsy* did not create specific forms for manifestation of female religiosity. Women remained inferior in their society and could become seen as virtuous only via obtaining qualities of a masculine spirituality. As Irina Paert phrases it, "the categories of 'female' were used instead of 'weak', 'sinful' and 'lustful' and male for 'reasonable' and 'self-controlling'" (ibid.: 137).

Besides Irina Paert, Cheperke Tikas' doctoral thesis (later published as a monograph) focused on the role of women in priestless Old Believer communities during 1850–1905 (Tikas 2011c). I should also notice an important publication entitled *Zhenshchina v Staroobryadchestve* (A Woman in Old Belief) published in 2006 after a conference dedicated to 300th anniversary of Leksa female monastery of *Pomortsy*. The publication provides useful historical and ethnographical material on women in Old Belief, in particular, observing women in *Chasovennye* monasteries (Zhuravel 2006) and daily routine of Old Believer women in Altai (Douling 2006).

Valerii Kerov is one of the contemporary historians who claims that women in Old Belief in fact owned high positions. Kerov suggests that this situation

³⁹ Pavel Varunin is mostly known as an artist and an icon-maker. He has illustrated almost all significant works about Russian Old Believers in Estonia and has often been responsible for the creation of these publications. Needless to say, I have conducted fieldwork in Prichudie thanks to Pavel Varunin's support.

was possible due to the development of the ethical principle of “individual responsibility for one’s own and community affairs” (Kerov 2011: 170). This principle flourished in a hostile environment of persecutions by the authorities and intensification of apocalyptic mood. As a consequence, everyone who was working for the sake of communal wealth was worthy to be honored, including women. With that said, Kerov speaks about the matter of female leadership in Old Belief without appropriate consideration of ethnographic or archival material. Similarly, Elena Beliakova comes to conclusion that “Old Belief has introduced significant changes to status of women in Orthodoxy”; given that the state was persecuting the dissent, female religiosity struggled against the state (Beliakova 2011: 162–164). The author even argues that the state fight against the Old Believer matrimonial culture have undermined the foundations of the entire institution of marriage and that “Old Believer women had persistence in faith in Stalin’s labor camps and became a model for many wrongfully convicted women” (ibid.: 172).

Although claims that Old Belief challenged and reshaped female religiosity and social position of women are based on the factual materials, they sound romanticized and missing the controversy of women in Old Belief. Cheperke Tikas points out that a lot of female Old Believer leaders in mid-19th century were under the police surveillance and that the attitude to them among Old Believers themselves was still controversial (Tikas 2011b: 88–89). Therefore, repressions against women did not make them more authoritative among men, albeit locally and temporarily there could be shifts in religiosity favoring women.

Douglas Rogers traces one of the possible scenarios of women gaining authority via ethnographic materials from Verkhokamie – a *Pomortsy* region in the Urals, famous for its home libraries of manuscripts (see Pozdeeva 2020). During Soviet times along with exacerbation of collective labor and collateral ethical challenges, a demographic of active members of Old Believer congregations shifted to female only participants. Rogers calls this process “feminization of the Old Belief”. However, it was happening side by side with “geriatrification”, i.e., “pastors⁴⁰ were more and more likely to already be members of the eldest generation” (Rogers 2009: 176). The fact that elders could no longer be mediators between younger and elder generations is reflected in memories of Rogers’ informants, who recall secret night services in which they could not be involved because of the age (ibid.: 178–179).

Besides the pressure from the state, Old Believer women have had to deal not only with religious demands but also fit to social expectations. Thus, Natalia Litvina figures out several possible social categories for women in formally marriageless⁴¹ Old Believer communities in Verkhokamie – they could be

⁴⁰ Here, Rogers means elders.

⁴¹ By formally marriageless, I mean communities that historically compiled to *Fedoseevtsy* doctrines but then officially or practically shifted to marriages. Contemporary *Rabskie-Fedoseevtsy* in Estonia certainly belong to this type.

Sobornaia (lit. of a council), *Neputyevaia* (Wayward), *Podruga* (Girlfriend). The first one has dedicated her life to the religious community and refused to marry because of that⁴². The second term can be applied either to a non-married woman with sexual experience or left alone because of disabilities. Mistresses of a married man would be called *Podrugi* (Girlfriends) (Litvina 2021:88–92).

Most researchers highlight that female religiosity in Russia has changed in the 20th century mostly due to a drastic decrease of male population that has been happening since 1930s. This included dekulakization and other forms of repressions, the Second World War, etc. (Smiljanskaja 2013: 91; Vorontsova 2018: 108). Exploring cases of female leadership in *Fedoseevtsy* and *Filipovtsy* communities in Southern Vyatka and Kuban, Elena Vorontsova brings out the importance of the development of a pension system in the 20th century that facilitated the rise of women as religious specialists in Old Belief (Vorontsova 2018: 108). This was true not only for Old Believers but for some other religious communities, like the one in Potma village in Ulianovs Oblast brought up by Svetlana Adonyeva and Laura Olson, where “the women persist in conducting church services <...> in their homes” (Olson, Adonyeva 2012: 294).

As various ethnographic materials show, Old Believer communities have been dealing with the lack of men differently. In case of Karelian Old Believer women⁴³, male elders were substituted by *knizhnitsy* – women, who were able to read Church Slavic and had a strong spiritual authority (Fishman 2003: 259–286). In Verkhokamie, it was customary to read *proshchenie* (lit. forgiveness) by asking from an elder for forgiveness before the beginning of the service. In the absence of men, local women started reading it in front of the icons of male saints (Smiljanskaja 2013: 96–97). A shift to female practice in this community has coincided with folklorization of a book knowledge. Thus, Verkhokamie eldresses are not sure anymore how strong the penance should be, nor do they appeal to written texts but to oral apocrypha when talking about the scripture story (ibid.: 98–109). In general, *Pomortsy* faction has recently made more efforts to empower their women. As reported by Dronova, in 2006, Saint Petersburg council of Old Orthodox Church⁴⁴ officially introduced the term *staritsa* (an eldress) for women running a spiritual community. Nevertheless, they are neither allowed to hear confessions nor burn incense without the blessing of their spiritual father (Dronova 2006: 11).

Summing up this observation into the history of research of Old Belief, I want to once again highlight why I think it is necessary to study female religiosity and practice together with the discourse emerging around the Old Belief. First of all, the subject of the research, i.e., Old Belief itself, is a result of public attention to certain groups. It appeared as an imagined internal ‘enemy’ within

⁴² In fact, Verkhokamie used to be a marriageless *Fedoseevtsy* region, until it recently shifted to *Pomortsy*. However, marriageless background has seriously affected social norms in the region (see Khristoforova 2013).

⁴³ In this case, this is a group of ethnic Karelians speaking Karelian and Russian.

⁴⁴ An official name for *Pomortsy* Old Believers in Russia.

Russian nation that broke its unity and continued as a “myth of a schismatic second Russia” (Kravchuk 2015: 41). Second, Old Believers themselves have either been influenced by these narratives or take active part in their production, because it allows them to maintain a certain status in society. It can be seen in the example of late Soviet and partially contemporary archaeography. As Douglas Rogers puts it, “the archaeographers’ project was also, quietly and carefully, an exercise in the reclaiming of Russian national identity” (Rogers 2009: 171); something that will appear in its fullness later, after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It is also interesting that Rogers calls the close and warm relationships established between Moscow archaeographers and Verkhokamie Old Believers a “moral and a textual community” (ibid.: 169). It does not mean that it was a community of peers but it “was laced with inequality and power relations” (ibid.). For Old Believers, visiting researchers were not only warmly welcomed guests but also powerful patrons, representatives of the Soviet power and experts in Cyrillic books, whose activity definitely had an impact on the seemingly restricted community. I argue that a similar kind of relationship can be found between a depersonalized public imagination and an Old Believer community, whose religious practice, customs, religious and national identity are constantly scrutinized in one way or another.

Theoretical and methodological concepts and keywords

Old Believer women as a subordinate vs beneficiary minority

Why do religious groups pay attention to the role of women? Minoo Moallem argues that this happens in a certain regime of truth, which she defines as fundamentalism (Moallem 2001: 121). The basic feature of fundamentalism is, according to Moallem, its deep connection to God. She also notes that fundamentalism, being in dialogue with modernity, has “become a site of the paradoxical desire for the expression of the freedom to be ‘unfree’” (ibid.: 122). Women’s rights and representativeness of women in social, economic, and political life is one of the questions raised by modernization, so that religious field frames the matters in terms of traditionality and ecclesiasticism. Based on such characteristics, fundamentalism can be used as an analytical concept applicable to the discourse of Old Believer writers about women. Old Believers conceptualize ‘women’s issue’ in similar terms, albeit this discourse does not look radical. However, to a great extent it comes into terms with Moallem’s fundamentalism.

Modernized society with changing gender roles as well as social and economic relations required an ethical reaction from the Old Belief. The reason was that women often took over the religious responsibilities of men. Since the end of the 19th century, women became more represented as organizers of divine services, chorister, tutors and even leaders of communities. Although Russian Old Belief remained patriarchal, the overall trend has been towards increasing the role of women in conducting religious ceremonies and spiritual disciplines (see Smiljanskaja 2013). Female participation challenges and reshapes religious

field of Old Belief. However, it does not eliminate contradiction with predominant discourse that favors supremacy of men over women, and distinction between them in ceremonial and domestic labor. In fact, this indicates a conflict between imposed and actual female agency.

Discourse of Old Believers' fundamentalism is not independent from treatments of public opinion, which has had an extraordinarily strong impact to Old Believers as a subaltern group. Old Belief became a site of discussion on national identity, though the attitude of public intellectuals towards this extensively marginalized group was ambiguous. It was perceived as a group of progressively authentic Russian people, literate from one side, and backwardly scholastic and bookish from another. Scholars, writers, publicists, clerics, and other intellectuals appreciate the devotion of Old Believers to old books, their ability to resist conversions to official church and independence in religious thinking. Belonging to lower class, Old Believers have been identified as bearers of true Russian spirit, raised on the Russian soil, and holding democratic worldview different from the Western one. However, this appreciation only takes into account Russian identity, not beliefs and religious practices of these people. There has been a mutual tendency among early ethnographers and publicists to see a national ideal in Old Believers and to deny the importance of their religious specificity. As Pavel Melnikov-Pecherskii reported to the Minister of Interior of Alexandr II, Pyotr Valuev: "Despite its religious mispersuasion, a schismaters community has quite a number of bright sides, which every true Russian could barely not wish for himself, and for all Orthodox fellows <...> As for the revival of Russian spirit, an ancient life of ours, it is anyhow thanks to educated *Raskolniki*, who will not be *Raskolniki* anymore" (Usov 1897: 255–258). Here, Melnikov-Pecherskii emphasized the idea of 'bright sides' that Old Believers preserved, but religion was not one of them. Their concern of protecting rituals even from minor changes was not recognized as anything valuable. On the contrary, this was considered as misbelief, which cannot go deep inside of Christian faith. Some ethnographers, like Mariia Shvetsova, who visited Old Believers in Altai in 1898, pointed out that the schism in Russian Church appeared after the revision of liturgical books and small changes in rituals, because laypeople were badly educated, strongly engaged with pagan 'convictions' and because of that capable only for that formal, exterior form of Christianity (Shvetsova 1899: 41).

A special term has been employed for a long time to identify Old Believer engagement with rituals, namely *obryadoverie* (ritualism). Lately, this concept of *obryadoverie* has been reformulated as *vneshnee blagochestie* (external piety), a term that praises the fact that Old Believers care so much about maintaining their religious ways. In the eyes of scholars, protection from external influence remains a basic motivation of these people. So, there is not much difference from the ignorance of earlier ethnographers, just a U-turn in evaluations of their literacy. In further chapters, I will return to the concept of *obryadoverie* and try to explore it in more emic terms.

The position of women in Old Believer communities has been treated both as rightless and liberal, depending on the way the Old Belief has been publicly imagined. From one point of view, this spiritual movement has been considered as highly conservative, patriarchal, and even fanatical. For example, as Old Believers refused to conduct weddings by the priests of Russian Orthodox Church and to register marriages, such practice was considered as “seducement to Schism”. Officials assumed that if young girls who belonged to Orthodoxy were getting married to Old Believers, they were usually forced to accept Old Faith. Orthodox missionary Belikov specified that schismatic marriages led to cruelty and the deprivation of all rights of women (Belikov 1894: 14–24).

On the other hand, Old Believers were associated with democratic and liberal foundations of Russian society. Probably, these ideas were coherent to the image of more emancipated lifestyle of women in Old Belief. For instance, a historian of Russian *Raskol*, archpriest Smirnov perceived it in his works (e.g., Smirnov 1905). He was sure that women were not only active and independent disciples of Old Faith but played first fiddle in dissemination and maintenance of Old Belief (he gave historical examples of *boyarynya* Morozova and *knyazhna* Urusova, famous schismatic leaders of the 17th century⁴⁵). In excerpts from early works on Old Belief, Soviet historian Kartsov argues that the attitude towards women was dependent on belonging to *Popovtsy* or *Bespopovtsy*. The former treated women in “patriarchal-feudal” sense, while the latter gave them freedom and emancipation. Lack of marriage as a sacrament, or even any formal ceremonies, equalized women and men of priestless Old Belief in self-sufficiency and religious authority, claims Kartsov. In particular, he mentions highly appreciated *keleinitsy* (lit. anchoresses), who performed ceremonies, prayed, read books, taught children, and even spread the word about *Raskol*. Occasional religious services, scribing old books and other activities that required high competence gave good income to priestless women, he concludes (Kartsov 1971: 88–95). Kartsov also mentions that literate women were basic tutors for children in Old Belief (ibid.: 95). Hereby, all these narratives have had a strong influence on the 19th and the 20th centuries and contemporary ethnographies. The traces of these disputes have remained even in the works of contemporary scholars (e.g., Kerov 2011; Beliakova, Beliakova and Emchenko 2011).

How are fundamentalist discourse and public imagination intertwined with practitioners’ knowledge and identity? They create a framework of references that become actual in certain periods of time. For example, in order to explain something about Old Belief to an outsider, references to folk customs might be useful. Also, they somehow shape ethical scenarios of the community. External circumstances force Old Believers to rethink their attitude towards practices, identity, and social ties (Rogers 2009). This discourse of public intellectuals, however far it was from contemporary Old Believers, links them with larger society. As I have already mentioned, the basic turning point in these discussions is the concept of Russianness. The case of *Chasovennye* Old Believers

⁴⁵ See more about them in Chapter II, pages 103–107.

illustrates this concept well. About 10 years ago, Russia launched a repatriation program that included Old Believers living in the countries of Southern America. Brazilian *Chasovennye* became an iconic example of fellow countrymen going back to the motherland that was left by their ancestors more than 70 years ago. The Russian identity of Old Believer repatriates was a crucial aspect in the negotiations between the state and the community, and in its representation to the general public. Siberian *Chasovennye* are also often described as true Russians living freely in the harsh land, same as Estonian *Pomortsy* are known, first of all, as the Russian population of Prichudie. It should be noted that such attitude to Old Believers as bearers of the true Russian identity has been generated and elaborated by intellectuals such as historian Smirnov, whose works I quoted before, and other researchers and public figures to whose work I will turn in the due course.

The idea of Russianness was something that both national imagination of public intellectual and fundamentalist discourse of Old Believers has had in common. For both of them religious identity equals national identity and vice versa. However, this only touch point does not trigger contingency or simple mutual understanding. Besides that, both discourses almost ignore another logic – a practical approach, which coincides with the sensory knowledge of practitioners. To a large extent, I am more interested in this, rather than in fundamentalism or nationalism. It is just barely possible to tire all three, apart from the analysis. Performing rituals causes reflection of the practitioners and requires certain skills. In this context, it should be noted that Old Believers are not only a religious group (or groups) but a number of people, united by relatively close relationship and personal acquaintance. Therefore, succession of religious practices in Old Belief comes from bodily experience of children raised in the families. Their notion of rules and practical orientation in dogmas is embedded in daily routine.

Not only significant rituals, like baptism, holy communion or liturgy are important for Old Believers, but also other more routine practices, e.g., keeping tableware in order, receiving pension, or wearing certain type of clothes. Such daily practices support other seemingly representational rituals (see also Brady 2011 discussing cooking as a site of knowledge). Elizabeth Perez (2016) defines such small, blurry actions as micropractices. She claims that micropractices play a major role in developing a religious subject and maintaining religious tradition, as opposed to “rites of passage and capital R rituals” (ibid: 212).

In case of Old Believers, micropractices include a huge variety of forms, such as ritualistic gestures (e.g., the sign of cross), reciting skills, and even forms that stand on the borderline of routines and religious activities. The so-called ‘external piety’ is of a great importance for all factions and, as I presume, serves as some sort of habitus structure, to use the terminology by Pierre Bourdieu (1990). Saba Mahmood explores an Aristotelian tradition of habitus that comprises “model of ethical pedagogy <...> in which external performative acts (like prayer) are understood to create corresponding inward dispositions” (2012: 135). As Mahmood explains further, moral virtues are crafted through

“coordination of outward behaviors (e.g., bodily acts, social demeanor) with inward dispositions (e.g., emotional states, thoughts, intentions) through repeated performance of acts that entail those particular virtues” (ibid.: 136). She argues that Aristotelian pedagogy has been largely adopted by Christian and Islamic authors. Another important perspective regarding habitus in non-Bourdieuian sense, Mahmood adds, is a focus on pedagogical process, on how exactly habitus is learned, while Bourdieu “elucidates how supraindividual structure of society comes to be lived in human experience” (ibid.: 138–139). In her explanation, such understanding of ethics confronts the commonly adopted Kantian tradition that “conceives of ethics as an abstract system of regulatory norms, values, and principles” (ibid.: 119).

Quite often micropractices are associated with female religiosity while a sphere of rituals and dogmatics is assigned to men. Pokrovskii and Zolnikova, for instance, distinguish between “harsh asceticism of male high-principled law-making” and “female aesthetic principles” arguing about rules and practices of wearing belts in *Chasovennye* tradition. They mention that wearing belts has been regulated (the council of 1956 in Priangarie, Siberia, stated that wearing leather belts over clothing was allowed only to monks, while laity could have only braided belts), however, women making these belts would often decorate them with inscriptions, sometimes of romantic nature (Pokrovskii, Zolnikova 2002: 91). It is true that due to a traditional division of labor, Old Believer women shape the visual representation of Old Belief, which concerns not only belts but other wardrobe items. However, I do not tend to think that such opposition between male law-making and female aesthetics can be drawn – Pokrovskii and Zolnikova’s example of belts rather illustrate that law-making can be shifted by vernacular micropractices. Therefore, the latter has its power over the former.

Micropractices comprise a number of habits, practices, and bodily techniques. A common practice in most Old Believer communities is that men are supposed to wear uncut beards and have their hair cut, while women, on the contrary, must not touch their hair and cover it with a scarf. An ordinary pose, like standing, or simple action, like bowing, turns out to a series of tiniest movements, gestures, and inclusion of other objects, like *lestovka* (see pic. 6)⁴⁶ or *podrushnik*⁴⁷ in the context of Old Belief. For example, standing for prayer Old Believers keep their hands criss-crossed and legs closed with *lestovki* hanging down the arms⁴⁸. The bows are divided into waist bows and prostrations. Each has its own time and manner to be performed. Besides that, men and

⁴⁶ An Old Believer type of prayer beads. The word originates from the Church Slavonic *lestvitsa* (the stairs), which represents steps of devotedness to God. *Lestovka* consists of *bobochki* (beads), each of which corresponds to a certain prayer, depending on the size of the bead (on different types of *lestovkas*, see Kostrov 2021: 120–136).

⁴⁷ A tailored rectangular piece of cloth that serves as a mat for prostrations.

⁴⁸ Although I took pictures from a manual published by *Belokrinitskie* Old Believers of Moscow, those techniques of standing and bowing bear resemblance to *Pomortsy* and *Chasovennye* practices.

women are supposed to be properly dressed, as indicated in all the three pictures: men in long-flanged kaftans, women in floor-length skirts, their heads covered with headscarves pinned, but not bundled up, under the chin.

Usually, these restrictions are interpreted from the symbolic side. As Sedakova points out, they are related to the so called ‘immortal’ parts of the body – hair, bones, nails, teeth – that are gathered within the life to be put into the grave (Sedakova 1983: 60). The symbolic approach which Sedakova adheres to, can probably explain the origins of at least some of the rules of Old Believers that seem ‘archaic’, i.e., that they predate Christianity from the point of view of the scholars. However, I argue that regardless of the background, i.e., whether it is a presumably preserved and transformed ‘pagan’ practice or an actual Christian practice that only looks like ‘pagan’, Old Believer rules fulfil not so much a symbolic need, but they developed in Old Belief a practice of embodiment of dogmas. From this point of view, the sense of the practice is prioritized rather than the form, albeit it is the form that is first and foremost visible.

Female agency in Old Belief

Saba Mahmood states that agency should be considered through certain historical and cultural settings: “If the ability to affect change in the world and in oneself is historically and culturally specific <...>, then the meaning and sense of agency cannot be fixed in advance <...> what may appear to be a case of deplorable passivity and docility from a progressivist point of view, may actually be a form of agency – but one that can be understood only from within the discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of its enactment” (Mahmood 2005: 14–15). That said, I have included into my analysis a concept of gender contracts that allows to take into consideration particular social, political, and cultural processes in Siberia and Estonia regarding the Old Believer communities. This concept presumes that society produces unspoken expectations from men and women, including their role in the labor market and social reproduction (see Hirdman 1991; Pateman 1988; Temkina and Rotkirk 2002; Zdravomyslova and Temkina 2007).

Another important note is that agency is framed by discourse. Moreover, I would say that agency is negotiated within a local tradition and these negotiations should be considered in the first place. This can be compared to Adrienne Rich’s ideas on policy of location. Rich explains how her identity, or in homage to her language, identity of her body might be viewed through the optics of different locations, real and potential, or, rather, overcome (Rich 1989). Here I see an intersection with the idea of Mahmood that “discourses and structures of subordination that create the conditions of <...> enactment” (Mahmood 2005: 14–15). From this point of view, debates on female agency in Old Belief, or more precisely, in given communities of Siberian *Chasovenkiye* and Estonian *Pomortsy* unfolds around the perspective that women are subject to particular subordination that they need to overcome.

For this reason, the Old Believer women as a group are conceptualized as subordinates struggling for independence and subjectivity. As I will show later, they were either considered as the basis of this struggle (as in Imperial Smirnov's project) or double victims of the bigger oppression and of minor communal family subordination (as in most Soviet projects). In any case, the language of resistance is always embedded in the discussion.

A similar problem is unfolded in cases of Karelian Orthodox women, as represented in the works by Marja-Liisa Honkasalo (2015), Voitto Huotari (1991), and Marja-Liisa Keinänen (2003). Honkasalo and Huotari focus on cross-marriages of Karelian Orthodox women with Lutheran or Atheist Finnish men. Those families become places of contestation and struggle for identity for these Karelian women. Keinänen explores the survival of religious life of Karelian women under Soviet power. She points out that despite the removal of clergy and the elimination of ritual space, the community was already used to practicing faith on a domestic, self-sustained basis. Of course, Soviet policy resulted into the expansion of female leadership and strengthening the role of "indigenous rites of passage" that they were responsible for (Keinänen 2003: 104). Honkasalo bases her work on Karelian Orthodox women on Ernesto de Martino's concept of dehistoricification. De Martino places a crisis of presence, that aggravates the existence of an individual within the history of civilization, in the center of his research. For de Martino, this loss of presence in history, or, how he calls it himself, dehistoricification, is a universal process that is surmounted by magic or religion (de Martino 2012). In Honkasalo's work, history becomes a private matter as it concerns abandoned identities of Karelian Orthodox women within their own families. In this case history should be understood as a multiplication of personal narratives that deserve to share some space on a shelf with grand historical narratives, to put it metaphorically. Honkasalo is particularly interested in passive forms of resistance, e.g., even practicing a mere domestic prayer allows Karelian women to return to their own place in history (Honkasalo 2015: 71–73). This contrasts with narratives of women in contemporary Old Belief, at least as it has been demonstrated by the communities I visited, who on the contrary, actively proclaim ownership of their stories and insights. Like, in the case of Catholic Christianity presented by Laura Leming, where women demand to speak in their own words, not just in an approved or scripted formula. This exemplifies how women want to 'perform' Catholicism, rather than simply 'practice' it (Leming 2007: 83).

Although Marja-Liisa Honkasalo focuses on passive forms of resistance (Honkasalo 2015: 87), she still employs the perspective of routine resistance (Scott 1990). It is important for Honkasalo and for Scott to claim that 'passive' actions belong to the domain of resistance along with 'active' forms. Because resistance gives a major focus of agency, whether it is active or routine. Basically, they both call to vindicate passive forms of resistance, whereas passive-active dichotomy itself prioritizes objectified notions of agency to vernacular practices of self-embodiment. Scott suggested that routine resistance effectively counteracts various modernization projects (especially of state),

while Honkasalo sees involvement in passive religious exercising as a push towards owning a place in history. It is hardly surprising that Old Belief has been always conceptualized in Russian historical discourse as a movement of passive resistance. As Pokrovskii formulated this, “Soviet historical studies consider emergence and dissemination of Old Belief in the 18th century as a specific form of antifeudal protest” (Pokrovskii 1974: 3).

I argue that resistance, or an attempt to gain a place in history in de Martino’s terms is not a major concern of Old Believers, in spite of them being a subordinate group. As Saba Mahmood points out, a focus either on resistance or on subordination omits “projects, discourses, and desires that are not captured by these terms” (Mahmood 2012: 15). Mahmood explores a piety movement among Muslim women, and I argue that in case of Old Believers a focus on similar subject might be helpful in finding a proper theoretical language. Of course, here we should talk about salvation. Old Believers are supposed to keep up with bodily regimes, i.e., praying, fasting, following a lot of domestic precepts, in order to be saved. Those prescriptions have actually been less understood by public intellectuals, who have pursued to discover a place of Old Believers in the grand narrative of Russian history (e.g., Andreev 1870; Shchapov 1862; Smirnov 1903, etc.). Therefore, Old Belief is not shaped by ‘Russianness’ but by micropractices and bodily techniques, while suffering and struggling only benefit the salvation of the soul. This gives an intriguing perspective on the relationships between Old Believers and the state, where the repressive state turns out to be an important mediator of Christian concepts of martyrdom and salvation.

There is another concept that allows to capture a meaning of female agency in a context of Old Belief. That is semiotic ideology introduced by Webb Kean. As Kean puts it, semiotic ideology “refers to people’s underlying assumptions about what signs are, what functions signs serve, and what consequences they might produce” (Keane 2018: 64). It can also be understood as a system of ideas about relations of society and signs.

The concept of semiotic ideologies suggests that the accepted methods of interpreting signs in one society can differ substantially from the explanatory mechanisms in another, which becomes particularly clear, in Webb Keane’s view, at the moment of conflict between two interpretive frameworks. Moreover, the sign itself is unconventional in the sense that the symbolic meaning can be ascribed to the subject by some and can be rejected by others (the author notes this in relation to iconoclasm) (ibid.: 81). The gender order also relates to the domain of semiotic ideologies as a reflection of the agency. An iconic Kean’s example of early Protestantism reveals that debates on agency bring polarized views into high tensions (Keane 1997: 60–67).

In Old Belief, human agency gains priority in a path for salvation. God, as *Chasovennye* say, refused to force humans to follow his will. So, people can choose which way to follow, but salvation requires strict abidance by godly rules. In this construction, one of the principal agents is Antichrist, whose activity in the world was assumed by Old Believers in violation of the divine

order and appearance of dangerous, soul corrupting objects, including various innovations and technologies (Rygovskiy 2020a). In one of the *Chasovennye* etiological legend, God was talking to Antichrist, admitting that many Christians were going to fall apart from the church, but he would not interfere because he wanted the people to decide for themselves (Field notes, Erzhei 2017a, man). From this point of view, God remains idle, inactive, while humans and Antichrist are free in actions. But what makes humans truly free is indeed obedience to God's will which is expressed in rituals and micro-practices.

Pomortsy also promoted the idea of positive human agency. They actively defended the idea that the holy communion was destroyed by Antichrist. In one of the brochures, they express an opinion that this has happened because true Orthodox priesthood ceased to exist. Having accepted the Nikon's heresy, the Russian clergy became a part of the Antichristian body, "this is them, the abomination of desolation performing a service in the holy place, i.e., in the altar" (Vlasov n.d.: 19). A temple loses its status of a holy place because "an angel that guards every Church retreats it for impiety" (ibid.: 22). That is why a sacrament of holy communion is nothing more than "an act in a theater play" (ibid.: 23). However, the question of salvation without visible communion remained open. And that is how a personal agency is enhanced: "Therefore, this is not the communion that has the power to save a human, to deter him from crime – first of all, it depends on a Christian himself, the one who is defined by habits, by good deeds, not by criteria of communion" (ibid.: 31). This can be approved by the example of Judas Iscariot who received communion directly from Christ's hands but nevertheless betrayed him. On the other hand, the robber who had never taken the sacrament got to heaven. That means that a zealous desire of the sacrament substitutes it. As a result, priestless Old Believers can receive it spiritually (ibid.: 34–35). Therefore, a valid path to salvation lies through the performance of the Orthodox life cycle as it was understood by Old Believers.

When it comes to the agency of the gendered body, then Old Believer thinkers tended to favor male agency over female. As in the writings by *Fedoseevtsy* on gender roles and gendered religiosity examined by Irina Paert. Although Feodosii Vasilev (1611–1711), a founder of the faction, claimed the sacrament of baptism makes men and women equal, *Fedoseevtsy* considered manliness as a role-model of Christian-like behavior: "The accounts of the life of the Old Believer martyrs, Morozova, Urusova, and Danilova emphasizes the heroism and manliness of women who 'overcame female weakness'" (Paert 2003: 110–112). *Fedoseevtsy* preachers had to revert common social roles and present marriage and family as "full of grievance". As Irina Paert shows, the preachers were addressing men and women separately, mostly referring to the troubles of everyday life. Thus, she quotes one of Sergei Gnusin's (1756–1839) writings:

When a baby appears in the world and when he starts crying, then new concerns about his health and upbringing follow. Parents are always anxious: a wife

worries about her husband and about her children. The more the branches [of the family] extend themselves the more troubles marriage brings to her” (Paert 2003: 120–121).

To a certain extent, this sounds like a feminist critique of marriage. However, Old Believer authors put it into a Christian context by application to the virtue of virginity, which was according to Irina Paert, a specific way to address the teaching to women (ibid.: 121–124).

Given that, when I speak about female religious agency, I still understand agency as “the capacity to act with discernment – that is, the capacity to choose a path of action and understand, according to the cultural norms of the day, the consequences of one’s actions” (Patton 2012: 369). However, I do not question the agency of my interlocutors, nor am I trying to say that they have more agency than anybody else. Instead of this, I focus on the attitudes of the participants of this complicated process called religious life, including the attitudes of Old Believer women toward their own agency.

Theology of material forms

In this section, I want to discuss more extensively the issue of external piety and its significance in creating the religious identity of Old Believer communities. If micropractices are rules embodied in everyday actions, as I pointed out above, then external piety might be considered as a conceptual framework, a theory of practice, that exists also in an everyday context, but could be assigned to a level of generalizations. The latter I associate with the teaching of a faction, considering that it might not be consistent, because a rule might be applied in multiple ways, which goes already for the former – a vernacular context of a particular community. What clothes are appropriate to be worn at home and in the church, how to greet other Christians and strangers, when and how to light a candle during the service – such rules vary from faction to faction, region to region, and community to community. Sometimes they have an individual character, when different people in the same community adhere to the slightly dissimilar set of rules. In other words, external piety makes sense why micropractices are important, and why they have to be those as they are.

Micropractices, and therefore external piety, are gender-specific. I could even say ‘external pieties’ encompass gender and the sets of rules dependant on the group diversity. So, external pieties of Old Believers dictate that the way how men and women look like should be differentiated. They must wear suitable clothes for praying – it is a Russian shirt and a belt or a *kaftan* (it is called *azyam* in Estonia) for men and a *sarafan*, a long skirt, and a headscarf, for women (pic. 7, 8). The mentioned items cannot be bought at the shops. There should be a local seamstress who, in some places, would fulfil the demand not only for prayer clothes but also for handmade regular outfits. If *Pomortsy* in Estonia accept wearing mass-produced clothing, then for many Siberian *Chasovennye* it can only be handmade, even if the material has been

manufactured. Since such items as a *sarafan* or an *azyam* are too specific, they cannot be simply bought from a local store but are rather sown by women. Thus, it is good to note that the visage of Old Belief is shaped by women's hands.

In his 1881 novel⁴⁹, Pavel Melnikov mentions "disputes about doctrines of the faith" among Old Believers:

Old Believers from across Russia gather then at the stalls of rich zealots of old piety as well as at the stands where icons, old books, and *lestovkas* are traded. They share their news, personal hardships, common anxieties, and in the end, engage in endless, however fruitless, disputes about doctrines of the faith, such as: what kind of *lestovka* is required for praying, a leather or a canvas one (Melnikov 1957: 235).

It is clear that he tries to ridicule the doctrines of Old Believers concerned with the issue of appropriate material for *lestovka*. However, it alludes to the fact that Russian Orthodoxy is not consistent in its attitude to minor ritualistic forms and material objects used for praying. I am going to prove it in further chapters, showing how the Old Believer logic works and why the question of *lestovkas* or other material forms was probably not so trivial as Melnikov assumed. As I presume, the Old Believers' approach encompasses strict correlations between religious texts (including the liturgical ones), iconography, and ritual practices. Different groups of the Old Belief can be more or less flexible in establishing these correlations, but the principle remains the same. I will illustrate this statement with the following example from my fieldwork.

In one of the encounters with *Chasovennye*, I met an old lady in Mountain Shoriya, who mentioned one detail that she considered an important feature of her faith. As she said, *Chasovennye* faith was very similar to *Pomortsy*. According to her, they both had the same service, but *Pomortsy* did not believe in the Holy Spirit. To prove this, she pointed out the old rood cross standing in her 'red corner'. "Look, can you see the dove above the Lord's head? This is the sign of the Holy Spirit. *Pomortsy* do not accept icons with a dove, because they deny the Spirit!" – she told me (Field notes, Chulesh 2017b, woman). I continued to hear the same story from many other *Chasovennye* during my fieldwork.

This sign of a dove, which is called a *titla* in the Old Believers' dialects, has been a subject of debates within the Old Belief for centuries. Of course, it is an exaggeration that *Pomortsy* do not believe in the Holy Spirit. The clash of opinions originates from *Pomortsy* who doubted that the rood crosses with a dove had Orthodox origin. Therefore, *Pomortsy* indeed believe in the Holy Trinity, including the Spirit. What they cannot accept is the material form, i.e., these certain type of rood crosses. Though they cannot prove it, *Pomortsy* presume that the rood crosses with a dove have been fabricated by some false

⁴⁹ I used a later edition of the novel *Na Gorakh* (In the Mountains).

teachers, who have only been pretending to be Orthodox, yet with a single purpose to raise doubts in Christians.

This dedication of Old Believers to external pieties made some scholars such as Inna Naletova and Vlad Naumescu conclude that they represent a kenotic tradition⁵⁰. Kenotism, according to Naumescu, takes “the humility of Christ on the cross” as the life model for humanity (Naumescu 2013: 91). By paying attention to trivial activities, clothes or appearance, Old Believers imitate the humility of Christ. It is a common parlance of Old Believers, both in Siberia and Estonia, that their faith is in decline, and anyone would hardly ever turn to them. *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* gave up most sacraments, they lack priests and bishops, and often cannot provide a full circle of divine service. However, this feeling of a constant lack or need becomes itself meaningful. “The true church should be persecuted”, I used to hear in Siberia. If not real persecutions, then material discomfort occupies the space for this ‘passion play’ (see Naumescu 2013).

The Old Believer kenotic idea is reflected in the language. Religious rules, especially those implemented in the daily routine⁵¹, are in oral discourse more commonly named *dogmaty* (dogmas), which should be considered as a vernacular term for ‘rules’. The verb which usually goes along with the word *dogmaty* in *Chasovennye* parlance is *dyerzhat* (‘to hold’; as in saying *on / ona dyerzhit dogmat*, meaning ‘he or she holds the dogmas’). A normative verb would be *priderzhivatsya* (as in *priderzhivatsya pravil*, meaning ‘to abide by the rules’). It is quite remarkable since the dialectal form brings a much stronger flavor of essentialization of a rule than it goes in the common speech. The rule or the practice is something that a person holds like a material object – here I cannot avoid an association with holding a shield, which is not a coincidence. Old Believer articulation of micropractices has a lot of references to military language⁵², e.g., a man’s belt is sometimes compared to an ancient warrior’s belt.

As distinguished from *Chasovennye*, Old Believers in Estonia do not have any particular ways to speak about external pieties. It seems also that currently they do not follow as many rules as *Chasovennye* do now or their ancestors used to have in their time. Therefore, the Estonian Old Believers are not so focused on implying regulations to their everyday life, albeit the remaining are still important for maintaining religious identity and community bonds.

In a sense, such lifestyle resembles a constant pilgrimage. Inna Naletova explores Orthodox pilgrim groups as kenotic communities. Naletova puts kenosis into the center of religious life of the Russian Orthodoxy. As she states

⁵⁰ The word kenotic derives from kenosis, i.e., a doctrine according to which Christ relinquished his divine attributes and became entirely receptive to God’s will. Therefore, kenotic traditions in Christianity are connected to self-emptying of believers in imitation of Christ’s road to Calvary (Golgotha).

⁵¹ Here I mean, for example, a refusal to use bank cards, or wearing headscarves.

⁵² I think the most common comparison is that of a believer with a warrior, which can be found in many Christian (and not only Christian) traditions.

it, “kenotic community denotes a religious congregation centered around a holy place, the members of which participate in ascetic and communal practices intended to resemble Christ’s self-sacrifice and love for humanity” (Naletova 2010: 254). This introduces specific ethics, based on humility, appreciation of poverty and devotion to hard work. According to Naletova, pilgrimage makes up conditions similar to Turner’s *communitas*, which allows participants to adjust to the sense of cohesion, i.e., “brotherhood and togetherness, and also national pride” (ibid.: 242). Therefore, Russian Old Believers tend to see their lives in terms of a life-long examination by God and ascetic practices are deeply rooted in everyday life (incl. wearing certain clothes, fasting, and mastering other patterns usually contraposed to a secular behaviour) that scholars often define them as “sacralization of the daily” (Kerov 2006: 11–12). Talal Asad considers inseparability of inner and outer expressions of faith as a trait of medieval church. As he wrote, “there could be no radical disjunction between outer behavior and inner motivation, between social rituals and individual sentiments, between activities that are expressive and those that are technical” (1993: 63, quote from: Naumescu 2013: 87). In this sense, the very idea to separate inner faith from its display is recent. Some authors put all the blame on the Protestant Reformation (e.g., Kerov 2006: 5–6; Naumescu 2013: 87–89).

Old Believers are not the only community who demonstrate a strong dedication to external piety. Nadezhda Beliakova and April French focus on biographical interviews of Evangelicals, who describe their religious experience in Soviet times. For this community, the issues of external piety (or how the authors neatly call it ‘theology of decorum’) had a crucial significance because they served as a means of contrasting with atheistic Soviet society. The authors point out that the topic on how women were supposed to look like and how they should carry themselves in a church were mostly discussed within the community compared to requirements imposed on men. This included three mainstream issues: 1) covering female hair, 2) length of skirts and sleeves, proscription of wearing pants as male clothes, 3) decorations and make-up (Beliakova and French 2018: 166). It can be said that the same issues are totally relatable to Old Believer tradition. The difference lies, first of all, in the fact Old Believers practiced theology of decorum much longer than Post-Soviet Evangelicals, and second, in the implication of various specific attributes for praying (e.g., *lestovka*, *podrushnik*, etc.) or clothing items (e.g., *shashmur*⁵³ for *Chasovennye* women, etc.).

The number of rules that constitute Old Believer external piety is extensive. As the rules concern very diverse categories of items and actions, it is hard to find an appropriate uniform definition for them. The term ‘micropractices’ that I previously applied catches an important bodily aspect of those rules. External piety is something that should be practiced and mastered day by day. Elizabeth Perez also points out on the existence of rules. Chatting while cooking is not just chats and cooking. One has to acquire the art of appropriate cooking (here I

⁵³ A headdress of a married woman. Here it refers to *Chasovennye* tradition.

should note that Perez writes about cooking for Orisha gods) and the chats are partially about passing on the rules of cooking and guiding the apprentices (Perez 2013: 2–3, 143–198).

Apart from instructing the believers, it should be explained why Christians do something, what is the purpose of these actions and how it corresponds to their teaching. Old Believers were indeed great masters of the reasoning of the rules. Their writing tradition developed to a great extent due to the necessity to explain why Old Believer rite was correct. This includes, first of all, the knowledge of the holy scripture and the writings of the founding fathers. In addition, this is obviously a culture of quoting that belongs to a public domain of mastering the identity. It brings trivial actions to another level of generalization, which allows a small religious community to be established as belonging to a bigger tradition. In this sense, the expression used by Beliakova and French (2018), theology of decorum, sounds quite precise in relation to Old Believers.

External pieties and micro-practices are overlapping concepts that nevertheless have significant differences. I would define external pieties as a set of discourses and practices that conform to the semiotic ideologies of the religious group, and that define a virtuous look and behavior of a true Christian. It makes them instrumental in empowering or overthrowing certain agencies. A discussed-above case of *Fedoseevtsy* who were promoting a male body as an appropriate bearer of Christian agency, while the female body carries dangerous agency and thus must be reshaped as a male body, serves as an example of this. Usually, external pieties are represented in a textual form as a set of rules, for instance, as resolutions of Old Believer councils.

I already defined micropractices as minor actions that are aimed at shaping the religious identity of a person. Micropractices can be considered as a realization of external pieties but are not reduced to them. In Chapter III, I observe micropractices related to ritual purity. There is a rule that a Christian (i.e., an Old Believer) is forbidden to share their tableware with strangers. This rule is a part of Old Believer external pieties, however, it includes practices such as keeping, using, and cleaning the tableware that comprise a set of micropractices that this rule involves.

Structure of the thesis

Chapter I observes Siberian and Estonian settlements of Old Believers as sites of disputed traditionality. Employing the concept of gender contracts, I show how Soviet modernization extensively impacted the current state of Old Believer tradition. In particular, it means that certain territories associated with the exploitation of natural resources required a division of labor very similar to the traditional gender contract. Therefore, while Soviet antireligious policy was fighting religion, there used to be sites where traditionality was preserved, which allowed religious communities to keep up with their practices.

My focus in Chapter II is female leadership and the transfer of ritual knowledge to current leaders. In addition, I analyze discourse about women in Old Belief and its correlation to actual processes occurring ‘on the ground’, i.e., how female participation in life of Old Believers has been growing. I argue that Russian scholarship has largely been affected by romanticized ideas that Old Belief granted women more freedom than the official Orthodox Church. My materials show that this question cannot be assessed this way. Female leadership is always a matter of debates within the Old Belief. Moreover, the increase in female leadership is the result of certain social and economic changes. Apart from actual leaders, there are plenty of women who perform certain duties in their communities.

Chapter III will be devoted to micropractices, i.e., ritualistic forms that are important in terms of interiorization of Old Believer values. I adopt the approach of Saba Mahmood who considers such practices as an extension of Aristotelian ethics into world religions like Islam or Christianity. Also, I pay attention to how discourse of identity is produced from rituals and micropractices.

Chapter IV is centered around the implications of external pieties regarding Old Believer women. Mostly, I observe projects on national and religious identity building by Ivan Zavoloko (1897–1984), an Old Believer from Riga, Latvia. His journal, *Rodnaia Starina* (quoted at the beginning of this work) was an attempt to combine practical religious knowledge developed in Old Belief with external narratives. I am also exploring various normative text from Estonia and Siberia, whose authors tried to facilitate their teaching using the written word in order to impose multiple rules of this kind on their congregations.

In Chapter V, I go back to the concepts of textuality and *knizhnost*, focusing on the written works by women in *Chasovennye* monasteries on the river Dubches. This chapter is based on the two works of *Chasovennye* Old Believers, both of which I have already mentioned (see p. 19). These two texts, dedicated to the lives of women, were composed in Dubches monasteries in Eastern Siberia in 20th century with a considerable contribution made by women living in those monasteries. Thus, I am going to observe the phenomenon of female writing in Dubches monasteries and analyse these stories as a source for narrativization of women’s biographies.

CHAPTER I. WOMEN IN OLD BELIEVER COMMUNITIES IN SIBERIA AND ESTONIA: LOCAL GENDER CONTRACTS AND PRODUCTION OF TRADITIONALITY

1.1. Old Believer traditionality in public discourse

In the opening article to *Inventing Religion: Desecularization in Post-Soviet Context*, Zhanna Kormina and Sergey Shtyrkov demonstrate that the renaissance of Orthodoxy in Russia at the beginning of 1990 was vastly influenced by movement and ideology of *retrospectivism*. This movement required returning to national and spiritual heritage that was associated, first of all, with religious art (Kormina and Shtyrkov 2015). Taking into account that Old Believers produced manifold styles of icon painting and preserved a tradition of writing in Church Slavic, for the general public they seemed to be possessors of Russian national culture and as such sparked interest among intellectual and power elites since the second half of the 19th century. For instance, Georgii Grebenshchikov, an early Siberian writer, sketches Altai Old Believers in a way as if a real Old Rus tradition had been preserved with them. Compared to the 2011 story by a blogger Sitnikov who visited one community in Shoriia, this excerpt provides an idea that the patterns of public imagination of Old Believers have barely changed.

- 1) Entering Bukhtarma, you are unwillingly carried away to olden times of Moscow Rus, when life of Russian Slavs was based on religious foundation, when religion was the meaning and target for being <...> Not once was religion a true governess of Moscow tsardom: it commanded tsars and rulers, and its voice was heard by the whole yet ungathered Rus. It also controlled the civil life of Russian people, and because of that the Middle Age Rus was a giant shrine inhabited by millions of austere people searching salvation (Grebenshchikov 1914: 5).
- 2) And then, as if answering my silent question, an odd-looking, tiny, bent, old, as if she has appeared straight from the First Testament, woman comes round the corner, with a toothless, sunken mouth, covered in multilayered rags of the 19th century, in a double head scarf tied in an old-fashioned manner, crosswise across the chest and back. <...> “A refugee from the 19th century,” I thought. “Or rather, from the 19th century right to the 21st. Isn't it a dream? Am I watching some old history movie?” (Sitnikov 2011).

The metaphor of time-travel is vastly exploited in the description of Old Believers. For instance, this applies to numerous professional documentary films and amateur blogs where authors express their fascination with dipping into preserved old Russian tradition. “It feels like a faraway Russian past when you end up here” announces the off-screen voice in a documentary about one settlement of Old Believers in Siberia (Saralidze and Baranin, 2012). “Due to their faith and culture, the masters of taiga (i.e., the Old Believers – *D.R.*), who

were persecuted⁵⁴, didn't want to communicate much with us at first <...> But when the time to go back home arrived, we were surprised by the watchful Old Believers, who bid a sad goodbye, gave us farewell gifts and their kindest wishes" (Sudets 2018) echoes a journalist in another story⁵⁵.

In general, people know very little about Old Believers. Mainly, that they are deeply religious, live somewhere far in the woods and mountains, and focus on protection of old ways of life, whatever it means. They wear traditional Russian clothes and refuse to exploit modern technologies, even such basics as the Internet or cell phones, if they feel a threat to their religious ways. It is no surprise that the journalists quoted above describe Old Believers as if they were self-isolated Robinsons, who barely see people from the 'civilized' world. That is, probably, why every Old Believer story begins with a re-discovery pattern of their mere existence, which the quotes I gave above are supposed to telegraph. On the other hand, Old Believers spark interest as the epitome of true Russian-ness. With their devotion to peasant-like lifestyle, old spiritual books, and traditional family, they seem to exemplify the moribund alternative for Russian development: its own path without Western values. As in the above-quoted extract by Sitnikov, the author claims to encounter a civilization untouched by rotted modernity. Certainly, this image of Old Belief as a time-machine or, rather, a historical and ethnographic museum is not only the domain of journalism and blogging. There are quite a few academic publications based on similar grounds: "Aimed persistently to preserve the old piety, the faith in the ways before Nikon's reforms, Old Believers tried to keep this antiquity in their routine and maintain it in life. Old Believers' conservatism was that main 'instrument' used to protect, canonize not only religious antiquity but mundane too. And today there are more archaic elements in their material, the spiritual culture, which was less affected by later influences than other segments of Russian society". (Tatarintseva 2015: 73). This statement means that Old Believers praise old things along with the old rituals and old understandings of Orthodoxy, things that are often called 'the old piety'. It is perceived as a location of a transfixed time. Although some elements of tradition might change, its core remains resistant to any kind of modernization. For Russian public imagination Old Believers often represent some sort of alternative history: 'Russia that we lost' or 'Russia that we could have'.

These ideas coexisted in Russia with the rising interest towards national identity. Many public intellectuals expressed hope in Old Believers as people who might be able to combine Western achievements with Russian spirit as well as values and create an entire new country. Pavel Melnikov, a prominent novelist and researcher, put it exactly this way.

⁵⁴ This refers to the history of persecutions of Old Believers by Russian tsarist and official Church authorities.

⁵⁵ Cases reported here cover journalists' encounters with the same group of Old Believers I worked during my fieldwork.

In any case, I see the main stronghold of Russia in Old Believers, who won't be schismatics because a schism of Old Belief wouldn't stand the fire of enlightenment <...> And the renaissance of Russian spirit, the old ways of our life, will actually be initiated by educated Old Believers, who would have stopped been schismatics by then (Usov 1897: 255–258).

It is hard to underestimate the contribution of Melnikov-Peterskii on the formation of the public image of Old Believers in Russian public discourse. It happened not only because his novels, *V Lesakh* (In the Forests) and *Na Gorakh* (In the Mountains), became bestsellers. He created impressive characters, especially female ones, acting in severe settings of suppression, which has been quoted many times in literature and used for inspiration in art (e.g., see M. Nesterov's paintings of Old Believer women).

In fact, Old Believers were not all the time eager keepers of Russian old *byt'*⁵⁶. That is why this approach to include Old Orthodoxy in historicizing discourse did not gain much support among them. Father Aleksii Zhilko, an elder of Riga *Pomortsy*, presents his counterclaim in a very vivid manner.

Some authors represent *Starovertsy* [Old Believers – D.R.] to their likeness merely as keepers of some conservative cultural and historical forms. In their terms, *Starovertsy* are either keepers of one of the types of Russian national folklore or keepers of antiquity and archaic ways, who remind the public about the deeds of forgone past. The thing is that a single Russian shirt, a single manuscript book, and single elements of routine life do not constitute and cannot constitute a concept of Old Belief. I am deeply convinced that the concept of Old Belief is constituted exactly by faith only, its living statement, and organization of life based on this statement (Zhilko 2005: 22–23).

Father Aleksii used a remarkable term for Old Believers, *Starovertsy*⁵⁷. He chose it intentionally to get rid of negative connotations that bear the most popular names, *Staroveri* (Old Believers) and *Starobryadtsy* (Old Ritualists). Especially the latter has a background of a pejorative given by the official Russian Church to Old Believers, meaning that the whole point of Old Belief is but a dead vague ritual, an empty form without faith and dedication to God. The usage of *Starovertsy* supposedly eliminates such an unfaithful definition.

If quotes from journal reports, academic articles, and words of Aleksii stand for two opposing discourses, then it is obvious that they disagree in relation to time. Public imagination incorporates Old Believers in the national narrative and provides it with national idea and identity, whereas Old Believers them-

⁵⁶ This term embraces tradition, spiritual value and social order, and at the same time means material things, environment, particular conditions of living.

⁵⁷ It is hard to translate this word in English as it literally means 'Old Believers', i.e., *Starovertsy* is supposed to be a synonym of a more common *Staroveri*. According to Zhilko they are the emic and the etic terms respectively, therefore, the former is more preferable. In fact, it is seldom used by most Old Believers.

selves prefer to stay away from historization. Time-machine metaphor is not really appreciated by them.

Of course, there are always exceptions. Take the development of father Zhilko's thoughts as he concludes that Old Belief, has actually kept the shatters of abandoned idea of the Third Rome. Zhilko emphasizes that this only means unreformed and undistorted apostolic faith (2005: 23). However, the image of the Third Rome used to be a basis of the imperial Russian project which is hard to unparallel with Zhilko's considerations of faith. Another remarkable example is an attempt of Romanian Old Believers (officially called "Russian Lipovan of Romania") to put together Old Belief with big Russian culture. Thus, in 2011 Old Believers of Tulcea, Romania, opened a bust of Sergey Yesenin, a Russian poet. Being a national minority of Romania, Lipovan Old Believers chose Yesenin to represent their culture. The matter is Yesenin did not belong to Old Belief at all. The only thing that unites him with Old Believers is an infamous legend about his origin, probably highly untrue. It seems that Tulcea Old Believers realized those contradictions but remained confident in their choice:

Yesenin was born and educated in a patriarchal and religious family. Since boyhood he grew up, was brought up, and developed in line with the Orthodox faith, that is the same way as us, Russian *Lipovan*. Sergey used to study in a parochial school, same as many of us, Russian *Lipovan*. As we have, so did Sergey Yesenin embraced very well not only the language of Orthodoxy but its spirit while growing up in the family and the parochial school. Almost all his poetry is overwhelmed with Christian ways of attainment about the beauty of the world, Russia, and humanity (Kirile 2011: 4).

Those attempts to participate in a bigger culture should be considered as extremely contradictory in Old Belief. They represent ambitions and beliefs of individuals, rather than demonstrate trends in self-positioning of the movement or any factions within it. When the public has been imagining Old Belief, it replaces the context of local traditions and multiple identities. That, in fact, is an obliteration of any identity to Old Believers. On the other hand, when Old Believers borrow elements of that public discussion for their needs, they give it too much context of local identity. So that those elements can serve local communities and factions but fall into disuse of nation. Like a portrait of a young Old Believer woman by M. Nesterov that was published in *Rodnaia Starina* (see pic. 1). This is one of the Nesterov's women inspired by female characters of Melnikov-Peterskii. Taken from the original Old Believer context, the female image does not exactly represent Old Belief for a larger audience. It is a portrait of piety, of Russian womanhood but not just of an Old Believer woman – she loses her identity. Being in the context of an Old Believer journal, the portrait somehow fights back its original identity. This is again an Old Believer woman standing for all the virtues of the community. The margin between bigger national narrative and local community story is entirely thick.

1.2. Traditionality as resistance

The situation with Siberian Old Believers to a certain extent resembles Zomia, a highland region in Southeast Asia, whose ‘anarchist history’ became a subject of desperate consideration by James C. Scott. Zomia is a vast territory between several states, however barely controlled by any and for this reason often considered by lowland inhabitants as ‘living ancestors’. Notwithstanding these popular accounts, James Scott considers stateless lifestyle of Zomians as self-intended, or, as he himself puts it, “their subsistence routines, their social organization, their physical dispersal, and many elements of their culture, far from being the archaic traits of a people left behind, are purposefully crafted both to thwart incorporation into nearby states and to minimize the likelihood that state-like concentrations of power will arise among them” (2009: 8). Off-lying regions of Siberia, such as Southern Siberian highlands or Northern taiga forests are quite suitable for fugitive populations, such as Old Believers, seeking an escape from state projects. In spite of its essentiality, this kind of strategy should not necessarily be constant. As an example of Siberian Old Believers shows, fugitive groups can seek protection from the state⁵⁸. Old Believers were not only resisting but looking for mutual interests with the state, and, in some cases, allowed to be integrated.

The general idea of this chapter is that traditionality exists due to things more complicated than mere perseverance, despite the fact that Old Believer settlements are usually portrayed as sites, where tradition has been protected by the inhabitants in its highest expression possible. However, this expression appeared as a sum of multiple social and economic factors, which affected, first of all, local gender order. Employing gender theory, namely, a concept of local gender contracts, I observe how traditionality is produced and transformed. In more specific terms, Siberian Old Believers became more restricted during Soviet times and closed as a group than they used to be before the 1917 Revolution. It happened due to the growth of informal economic relations that paralleled the building of official Soviet society⁵⁹. The so-called traditional gender division of labor in taiga villages, where women were supposed to keep the household while men were providing resources (e.g., furs, fish, etc.), was a great part of that informal, horizontal economy. It was mostly shadowed by Soviet ideology, but, in fact, even the official economy was in need of those resources. Those informal relations also met the demands of the Old Believers, to whom it corresponded both to religious commitments and to normal working

⁵⁸ I will uncover this story further in this chapter in section 1.5.

⁵⁹ Usually, informal Soviet economy is referred to as infamous *blat*. In a detailed historical and sociological account on *blat*, Alena Ledeneva describes it as a system of favors mainly aimed at satisfying consumer needs (1998). It seems that Old Believers were not attracted to the useful networking itself, but rather they preferred the opportunity it provided to become invisible for the state. Given that it was not the prior goal of this research, a further study would make it possible to define in what kind of informal economic relationships Old Believers were mostly involved.

routine. In its turn, Old Believer settlements in Estonia developed differently. Already in the 19th century, economic growth led to drastic changes in the tradition connected to *otkhodnitsestvo* (seasonal work), where both men and women were involved. These changes were marked by a shift in religious identity. Being previously known as *Fedoseevtsy*, who denied the sacrament of marriage, most of the Estonian Old Believer communities started to identify themselves as *Pomortsy*, whose ritual and everyday restrictions were less harsh and seemed more appropriate for a flexible, capitalistic society. This meant a higher level of women's agency, especially for younger women. Interestingly, in terms of gender contract, lifestyle in Old Believer villages in Estonia became more traditional compared to the interwar period of 1918–1940, i.e., when the Republic of Estonia was founded and before it was occupied by the Soviet Union. However, reasons for this, as well as consequences were different than in Siberia.

In this chapter, apart from my own interviews with the Old Believers and field diaries, I extensively use accounts of earlier authors, who were writing about Siberian and Estonian Old Believers. In particular, this concerns Dmitrii Belikov, an Orthodox missionary in Siberia of the Russian Empire, and Aleksandr Yemelyanov, a Soviet ideology worker in Tuva (Belikov 1894; Yemelyanov 1984). As for the Estonian community, I found a monograph by Estonian ethnologist Elizaveta Rikhter extremely valuable (1976).

Since the way I use the concept of gender contract is connected to specifics of local economies, I need to describe them briefly. Hereafter I proceed with Siberian communities. An extensive account on the local economy in Prichudie is given below in the relevant section of this chapter.

Among the above-mentioned communities of *Chasovennye* (see pages 16–20 in the Introduction), that of Mountain Altai is the oldest one. *Chasovennye* settled there in the 18th century⁶⁰ as *kamenshchiki*⁶¹, a word that could be roughly translated as highlanders. *Chasovennye* were living across the whole Altai region, including two prominent sites, such as Bukhtarma and Uimon valleys. Both sites were suitable for agriculture and cattle-breeding, and these industries remained leading in Soviet and Post-Soviet times. In this chapter, I am analyzing materials from Uimon, where I conducted fieldwork.

Starting from the 1860s, several settlements in Tuva were founded by *Chasovennye* moving from Altai (Tatarintseva and Storozhenko 2015: 25–27). It was a period of Russian colonization of the region, and Old Believers used this as an opportunity to set themselves free from the pressure of Imperial administration, and, on the other hand, to improve their wealth at the cost of the appropriation of lands. Mostly, *Chasovennye* were concentrated in the region of Kaa-Khem, which means 'Little Yenisei' in Tuvan. They still live there, and this region became another site for my fieldwork. However, it should be noted

⁶⁰ Tamara Mamsik points out that the Russian colonization of this region started later compared to more northern areas of Siberia, since 1720s (Mamsik 1989: 4).

⁶¹ The word originates from Russian *kamen* (stone), a vernacular name for the Altai Mountains.

that at least two subregions emerged in Kaa-Khem in Soviet times. One of them is more conservative, with several villages almost solely occupied by Old Believers. This subregion is called Upper Reaches (Verkhovia) and the people living there were filmed by the journalists (Saralidze and Baranin 2012) I mentioned in section 1.1. The second subregion does not bear a specific vernacular name. Its difference from Upper Reaches is that *Chasovennye* population is negligible there, although most of the settlements in the subregion were also founded and earlier inhabited by Old Believers⁶².

From all the numerous *Chasovennye* communities in Krasnoyarsk Krai, I will focus on the settlements on the Dubches river, a tributary of the Podkamen-naia Tunguska, which is itself a tributary of the Yenisei. This area is famous for a group of *Chasovennye* monasteries scattered across a huge territory in taiga. They were founded quite recently: in the late 1930s by *Chasovennye* monks from the Urals, Western, and Southern Siberia, who were trying to escape persecutions from Soviet power (Pokrovskii and Zolnikova 2002: 31–49). There are several villages of lay people centered around the Dubches monasteries, or sketes in the vernacular language. Besides, I mention *Chasovennye* settlements in Mountain Shoriia that were also founded in 1920s–1930s.

1.3. Gender contracts

In this section, I address the concept of gender contract that describes established principles of gendered divisions in the spheres of labor and social reproduction⁶³. The term gender contract is traced back to Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract* (1988). This late immersion into the theory of social contract was motivated primarily by the ignorance of the theorists that “half the story of the original contract is missing” (ibid.: 3). To simplify Pateman's thought: if the social contract was about freedom, then why did women become less free? Introduced in sociology and anthropology, the concept of sexual or gender contract serves as a focal point of unspoken expectations in the society from men and women in terms of economic choices and social reproduction.

Needless to say, gender contracts have a conventional nature, what presumes that expectations for women and men exist on a grassroot level. Ivonne Hirdman calls this set of principles “irrefutabilities” or “obvious statements” about the order of things (Hirdman 1991: 190–191). Gender contracts can result not only as a convention within a society but be sufficiently influenced by the state. It is in this sense that Zdravomyslova and Temkina (2007) speak about Soviet etacrat⁶⁴ gender order.

⁶² Initially, Old Belief was represented by several denominations in Kaa-Khem but by now only *Chasovennye* are left.

⁶³ See an extensive overview of the concept in Temkina and Rotkirkh 2002.

⁶⁴ The term etacrat⁶⁴ refers to a political system, where state dominates in all spheres of social life.

Why do I think that it was the Soviet modernization project that sufficiently influenced the contemporary distribution of gender contracts in Old Believer settlement? It is true that gender order was reshaped after the collapse of the USSR. Temkina and Rotkirkh propose that the dominant Soviet contract of ‘working mother’ spawned the variety of contracts in contemporary Russia, including ‘housewife’, ‘working mother’⁶⁵, job-oriented, and sponsorship contracts. The authors also suggest that contemporary gender order in Russia is massively successive to the Soviet one, although the succession should not be perceived straightforwardly (Temkina and Rotkirkh 2002: 11–13).

Regarding the Siberian Old Believers, I could name at least two reasons for putting an emphasis on the Soviet gender order. The first one is generational, i.e., post-Soviet active believers were socialized in Soviet time. From this point of view, post-Soviet means a continuation of Soviet models after the collapse of the whole construction. This is a sophisticated move, but existing traditionality in gender relations emerged out of late Soviet demand that developed as a semi-formal type of social relations. The second reason is the drastic social and economic changes that were caused by Soviet modernization. Indirectly, this influenced the distribution of gender contracts in the Old Believer population.

Soviet ideologists pitched the idea that participation of women in a ‘construction of socialism’ was a great achievement of the country in ensuring gender equality. Nevertheless, actual reasons for women to be employed were different. Svetlana Aivazova emphasizes that due to the Soviet economy not meeting the needs of an average family, both members of a married couple had to work to provide for themselves, regardless of whether they had small children or not. It is this need that was making women opt for a waged job rather than an abstract opportunity created by the state. At the same time, women had to look after children and provide domestic labor, which significantly increased their burden (Aivazova 2002: 298–299). Following this argument, Aivazova concludes that gender relations in Soviet Russia were defined by a “contract of a working mother”. However, Anna Temkina and Anna Rotkirkh (2002: 8–11) distinguish between official, routine, and illegitimate Soviet gender contracts. According to them, the gender contract of a working mother belonged to the official sphere (while in Aivazova’s logic it should rather be placed in a semi-official, shadow zone of Soviet gender order). At the same time, a routine gender order, i.e., in families and in private life, resembled a traditional one, where women were more engaged in social reproduction, caregiving, and motherhood, as Temkina and Rotkirkh put it. This situation was prompted by housing improvements and consequent privatization of family life in the late Soviet period, and by necessity to overcome the underdevelopment of the service sector (*ibid.*: 9).

Gender contracts can be addressed on a local level too (see Caretta and Börjeson 2015; Kalabamu 2005). Going back to the territorial groups of the

⁶⁵ Temkina and Rotkirkh use the same nomination for a Soviet and a post-Soviet contract but obviously they distinguish between them.

Chasovennye, we may observe small but significant differences in distribution of gender contracts that eventually define local lifeways. For example, in Altai and partially in Kaa-Khem region in Tuva, *Chasovennye* communities are mostly represented by older women. This means that they are active practitioners, while younger generations dedicate their time for work and family. Interestingly, younger generations in these territories may be very familiar with the religious tradition and actively support the older one to provide them with everything they need to practice the Old Belief. Therefore, the younger generation is deeply engaged in production and family matters and perceives its elders as only true representatives of local tradition. The age of active community members also explains the gender distribution because it hews the average distribution of age and gender in Russia.

Other places, which I here mostly define as taiga and mountain settlements, such as Mountain Shoriia and Upper Reaches in Tuva, represent a completely different picture. Here all the generations are actively involved in the religious life of the community, although these are still elders who control it. As well as in the previous case, women in taiga villages engage in kitchen gardening and housekeeping, but to them having a waged job takes a significantly smaller place. Another nuance that defines women's contract here is a deeper involvement in religious practices in all ages, which includes not only serving as singers, reciters, or just mere participants in masses but following the Old Believer conduct in everyday life. In Russian, this conduct is referred as *zakon*, i.e., 'law'. Regarding women, it mostly means wearing certain types of clothes and following rules of religious purity⁶⁶. These small differences in local gender contracts produce two rather contrasting pictures: in the first case tradition seems to be in decline, while in the second it deploys in its prime. Further, I will call them a modernized and a traditional gender contract respectively.

1.4. Frontier marriages and group boundaries

It was mainly fugitive peasants who accounted for first Russian settlers in Southern Siberia. Tamara Mamsik distinguishes between five different types of fugitive population in Mountain Altai, including soldiers and criminals (Mamsik 1978: 52–72). Since the second half of the 18th century, they were infiltrating the valleys of Bukhtarma and Uimon, which did not belong to any country at the time. Many of these outlaws belonged to the Old Belief or joined it later on (Grebenshchikov 1914: 9–12). They returned to the citizenship of the Russian Empire by courtesy of Ekaterina the Great in 1791 and gained the status of *inorodtsy*, which literally means 'the foreign-born' (Mamsik 1989: 6–7). As a rule, only indigenous population who was not dealing with agriculture was assigned to the category of *inorodtsy*. No taxes except for *yasak*, a tribute to the state paid in furs, were imposed on *inorodtsy* as well as their conscription

⁶⁶ Here I refer to a practice of keeping a separate set of tableware for Old Believers and strangers (see: Morris 1991: 75–76; Scheffeld 1991: 178–179; Rygovskiy 2019: 64–66).

was forbidden. In this sense, Altai Old Believers carved out an exception in the sedentary population of the Russian Empire. It is not a surprise that, according to Mamsik, trapping was the predominant type of activity among these Russian peasants (ibid.: 21). From the very beginning, a lack of women turned out to be a problem for the runaways. Grebenshchikov reports about numerous bloody disputes in the early population that happened because of that (Grebenshchikov 1914: 15–18). The demographic situation remained difficult thereafter.

The Russian Old Belief is commonly known as a closed community, which, with only a few exceptions, forbids to pray and share food with strangers, as well as marry outside the community. Although those features constitute a seemingly irrevocable image of ‘authenticity’, I argue that group boundaries have not always been so strict and impermeable but have been constantly fluctuating from openness to restrictedness and back. History of marriages may provide some material to prove this claim.

As I have already mentioned, Old Believers marry only from their own faction. If there is a match with someone from another community, one of the partners has to be converted. The declared rule implies that men do not change their faith, while women should follow their husbands, but of course in reality it depends on many circumstances. Nowadays, *Chasovennye* marry mostly within their community, claiming that outsiders will not be able to adjust to numerous religious rules. As *Chasovennye* commonly think, one has to be born in a practicing *Chasovennye* family to become a full member. On the other hand, those who dare to join are still perceived as strangers for *Chasovennye*, who think that surely no one would really be attracted by such a difficult faith. Similar logic is applied in terms of choice of marriage partners. One of the Tuva Old Believers told me that he married a girl from the city. However, he emphasized: “But she was from our own, she just lived in the city. So, when I proposed to her, I asked beforehand if she agrees to do everything *po zakonu* (‘by law’). It was okay for her, so we got married” (Field notes, Erzhei 2018b, man).

The expression ‘by law’ in the previous example refers to a religious set of rules of Old Believers. In terms of marriage, this, first of all, concerns the fulfillment of a traditional gender contract in its local implications. In the case of my interlocutor, who married a city girl, this meant that his wife had to move to a village and be ready to keep the household, especially at times when her husband would go away for months to hunt in taiga. However, this situation when marriages can be performed only within the community has not always been the same. In the past, and here I mean before the 1917 Revolution, the Old Believers used to take wives from the official Orthodox Church. This topic was vastly explored by an Orthodox missionary Belikov, a member of an anti-*Raskol* brotherhood in the Siberian city of Tomsk. Belikov was a prominent opponent of Old Belief and concurrently a prolific Siberian writer at the end of the 19th and early 20th century.

In tsarist Russia, an interfaith marriage between an Orthodox and an Old Believer partner was strictly prohibited, unless the latter would join the official

church. In spite of these restrictions, Old Believer families were taking brides and grooms from other Orthodox communities of Siberia quite often. Mostly, these were Old Believer men who were marrying Orthodox women. A missionary Belikov addressed this issue in one of his works, which was based on criminal cases mounted against Old Believers. Belikov described six detailed cases of interfaith marriage from the second half of the 19th century, all of which ended badly, because they were connected with deception, kidnapping, and a following battery of young women. Belikov selected cases where Orthodox women were deceived by Old Believers, who would not reveal their religious identity or would give a false promise to the women to get married in an Orthodox church. These actions pursued no other goal than to make a young woman, who could probably refuse to become an Old Believer and, therefore, reject the wedding proposal, to join the family. They were expected to convert *de facto*, since marriage to a patriarchal family would obviously reduce their freedom of choice. However, further attempts to persuade daughters-in-law only led to severe punishment of the latter, including physical assault⁶⁷. These materials mention different factions of Old Belief in the region, but I am not narrowing them to *Chasovennye* for they describe the situation in general and allow to explain the background of further historical trends.

Belikov's account is just the tip of the iceberg of marriage history in Siberia before the Revolution of 1917. He himself reports that interfaith matrimonial relations were rather widespread in the region:

Being familiar with the case of Varvara Vaneeva, you automatically come to think about how many other Varvaras have been left voiceless by Raskol. How much abuse and mistreatment towards Orthodox women, who have been swept away by schismatic families, is hidden in the dark depths of rustic life without seeing the light of day (Belikov 1894: 21).

Of course, not all of the interfaith marriages were developing this dramatically. Curiously, in spite of all evident difficulties connected with this form of marriage, Old Believers would not refuse getting an Orthodox bride. Presumably, this reveals a problem of lack of women at the Siberian frontier, which existed in the late 19th century too. It is highly likely that the gender imbalance appeared due to specializations in different religious communities, i.e., Old Believers proved themselves as colonizers of the Siberian frontier. Old Believers also formed a significant part of a peasant runaway movement (see Mamsik 1978).

⁶⁷ In one of the cases, obedience did not help in escaping battery: "Stepanida neatly followed the schismatic ways. However, the Shaposhnikovs did not like their daughter-in-law, they often beat her, and badly, so cruelly <...> They were pulling her by the hair, stomping on her (when she was pregnant), whipping, not only punching, but hitting with a log, and finally <...> kicked her out of the house dressed only in a shirt in the winter cold" (Belikov 1894: 22).

Belikov's choice of materials and phrasing was attributable to the idea that Old Believers hated the Orthodox. As he assured, Orthodox would be dehumanized, unless they got converted to Old Belief. Belikov referred to the interfaith marriages as *sovrashchenije v raskol*, a term widely used in the official language, which literally meant 'a seduction to a schism'. Even if conversion to Old Belief was consensual, it was still a crime of 'seduction'. Marriages performed by Old Believers outside the official church used to be called *svodnye*. The term, *svodniy* marriage, can be translated as 'civil', but it also bears negative connotations of pimping. However, the Old Believers did not feel guilty.

In the context of *svodnye* marriages, I should mention that marriage was not only a practical matter for the Old Believers. Pressured by local administration and Orthodox officials, Siberian Old Believers mainly opted for their own, i.e., persecuted rituals, although they required official records to avoid problems with inheritance. The Old Believers could strike off by sincere devotion to *svodnye* marriages, which were considered as much stronger and faithful than the church ones. In Siberia, there were also actively circulating rumors that such marriages were in fact legalized and authorized by the Tsar himself. The idea of the *svodnye* marriages remained so strong at the frontier that in some regions, like Altai, *svodniy* marriage is still used as a vernacular term. Local Old Believers are even sure that there is a special book called *Svody*, which contains prayers and psalms for the ceremony (in fact, this book is called *Potrebnik*, a Book of Needs).

It is possible to understand these transformations regarding the group boundaries through the microhistory of marriages. Belikov's materials give a clue for that. It should be asked, anyway, why then do Old Believers not follow this strategy now? One of the circumstances that allowed Old Believer men to choose non-Old Believer wives was that they were all sharing the same peasant background. Basically, gender contracts in the Old Believer and in the Orthodox communities were the same. These women were brought up to take care of the household, they were used to working at farms and doing all related physical labor. Then, the Soviet modernization project brought drastic changes in available gender contracts and those qualities of a peasant woman moved to another level, from common average skills to moral virtues of a particular religious group. In the following section I will elaborate on how this transformation happened under the development of Soviet modernization.

1.5. Traditional and modernized local gender contracts

Soviet modernization project was supposed to bring drastic changes into traditional lifestyle of local people. Along with a struggle over winning hearts and minds, Soviet power launched an industrial development of vast Siberian territories, which constantly demanded a sufficient labor force, especially for the extraction of its resources. Mining regions turned out to be attractive for Old Believers who were eager to escape collectivization of agriculture. Mountain

Shoriia that provided ore for KMK, Kuznetsk Iron and Steel Plant (one of the giants of the First Five-Year Plan) became one of those regions. Besides that, Shoriia appeared to be a gold bearing zone. As Litvina reports, at first, gold-mining was based on manual labor. *Chasovennye* started moving to the region from Altai in late 1920s. Litvina mentions that production increased in 1970s, when several dredges were installed (Litvina 2016: 60). *Chasovennye* settled in Shoriia mainly around the sites of goldmining that would later become prominent Old Believer villages. Although goldmining is currently in big crisis in Shoriia, its remnants are still visible. Pieces of Soviet production ended up as perfect settings for exercising Old Believer traditionality.

Other sites were even more closely connected to the Old Believer ways of living in taiga. This refers to the former Soviet fur outpost Sandakches, situated in the vicinity of Dubches sketes, the main spiritual center of the *Chasovennye* in Siberia. The sketes were founded at the end of 1930s. Zolnikova indicates that along with migrating monks, a lot of lay people were moving the same direction to Dubches (Zolnikova 2014, 380–381). Eventually, these lay Old Believers settled in the fur outpost. They knew it was relatively safe to stay there and provide furs because Soviets were for some reason interested in taiga resources. So, it was not just a coincidence that Old Believers used Soviet facilities. Such places remained in the shadow of ongoing modernization. This is especially intriguing in the light of the fact that the First and Second Five-Year Plans were aimed at dealing with religion. The First Plan had been even referred to as ‘godless’. (Smolkin 2018: 46–47).

Therefore, we can speak about geographical division between sites of Soviet modernization and sites of Soviet ‘wilderness’, associated with extraction of natural resources or exploitation of traditional industries. In this sense, the area of Old Believers in Upper Reaches, one of the centers for fur hunting in Tuva, was contraposed to the rest of the region of Kaa-Khem, situated between Tuvan capital Kyzyl and Upper Reaches, which as well as the latter used to be a territory of Old Believer settlers. This territorial division is reflected in a Soviet documentary novel on *Chasovennye* of Tuva called *Ot Mira ne Uiti* (One Cannot Escape from the World) by Aleksandr Yemelyanov, first published in 1978. Publication of Yemelyanov’s novel had a bombshell effect on the local public and reached out to the audience in metropolises. Yemelyanov was not just a writer: for many years he was responsible for the so-called awareness-building in the Upper Reaches of the Yenisei, disseminating atheism among Old Believers of the region. He had access to classified data on criminal prosecution of these people (Tatarintseva and Storozhenko 2015: 117–118). On top of that, Yemelyanov actively exploited personal data he was gathering during his propaganda journeys around the country. This means that Yemelyanov based his novel on stories of real people, using their real names, and characters, but interpreted them in his favor. He also employed stories of several Old Believer women who were stuck between requirements of religion (often impersonated in demands of husbands and close relatives) and manifold opportunities of new era:

Many Old Believer women, like Gaeva, live in such unbearably hard, insulting conditions, sanctified by religion, however they barely escape the family. They are bottled up by the habit of acquired order, they are blocked by fear and lack of faith in their own strengths. How would life go on, especially if there were kids? And with minor exceptions kids are always there. They are blocked by their own relatives or in-laws. They are blocked by religion. They are blocked up by a persistent urge to save a marriage by any means, to sacrifice themselves and their life. If only children had a father and lived how they were supposed to live (Yemelyanov 1984: 140).

Soviet industrialization, and collectivization of agriculture “undermined the traditional peasant household as an institution in which ownership of land enhanced the power of the family as a social unit” (Lapidus 1978: 248). This shift is reflected in the story of Agrippina Shaburova also published by Yemelyanov. Agrippina married Grigorii Shaburov, a Sizim Old Believer, when she was 16. Many years later, she became interested in a new culture introduced in the Kaa-Khem region by Soviet power: books, cinema, education. She was also willing to explore new economic opportunities, i.e., having waged work. Unfortunately, she met objections of her husband who preferred to lead a more traditional lifestyle. He was constantly beating his wife, even after they eventually moved from Sizim to the village of Saryg-Sep, a regional center of Kaa-Hem (Yemelyanov 1984, 119–129). It is quite remarkable that one of the principal requests of Agrippina in her pursuit of a new life was to move to Saryg-Sep. Although apparently there was no big difference between the two villages, located just around 35 km from each other, access to better schools, medicine, opportunity of waged work, and closer proximity to Tuvan capital Kyzyl could reshape the whole lifestyle of people⁶⁸.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to figure out what exactly motivated Agrippina to opt for moving to Saryg-Sep, and how she really felt after living there for some time. What is important in this story is this geographical distinction between developed and outwarded places and the following fluctuations of gender contract. Gender order was not stable even within one Kaa-Khem region. On the contrary, it was divided into an ‘island’ of a more traditional mode of life, associated with farming and exploitation of taiga resources, and the modernized ‘mainland’, which was based on professionalization in agriculture or other labor spheres. Sizim, a place that Agrippina left, was located on the boundary of the two. At the time of Agrippina’s attempt to escape the patriarchal networks, Sizim belonged to the former, while nowadays it reminds more of the latter.

⁶⁸ In her research on the language shift in bilingual Austrian-Hungarian Oberwart, Susan Gal focuses on such markers as social networks, occupation, religious commitments, and even settings of yards to distinguish between peasant and urban social categorization in towns (Gal 1979, 24–34). Here the line goes between a modernized and a traditional rural lifestyle.

Agrippina's husband spoke against the official job. These attitudes to Soviet structures were widespread among *Chasovennye* Old Believers. In that time, all Old Believers who entered workmen's cooperative associations or other Soviet organizations were excommunicated from their communities. Such a state of affairs lasted until the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s. Rules of non-cooperation with Soviet power were reflected in local councils' decisions:

If non-professional hunters pay membership dues, they have an epythemy of 12-bows for this sin, since they constantly have the permission ticket. <...> If one of the two Christians [a married couple – D.R.] work on application, the one who eats at their place⁶⁹ should pray 300 bows for forgiveness <...> Those working on application with the deduction of membership fees, should resolve this, i.e., to refuse from membership fees, when they learn about the deduction They should do it immediately, even if they have not applied for the fees. And that who keeps silent while knowing this all, hoping, it goes on against his will, that one should be considered as *profsoyuznik* (member of a trade-union). Do not share either meals or pray with him (Pokrovskii 1999: 391–392).

Membership in trade-unions or any other official organizations was virtually obligatory in Soviet times, which was making *Chasovennye* assured in forthcoming Doomsday. Father Simeon, one of the leaders of Dubches sketes in 1930s, compiled a big essay *Na Soyuzy* (On Unions), where he circumstantially presented his position about “artels of unions <...> what lawlessness they have and how they spoil a person” (Pokrovskii 1999: 159).

It should be also mentioned that in Soviet period exogamic marriage partners were not considered as appropriate anymore, as it used to be in Imperial times. Another Tuvan case, as it was reported by Koltsov⁷⁰, provides an example of domestic violence towards a newly married non-Old Believer woman, whose name was not mentioned by the author. This time, however, no attempts to convert her were made. Moreover, a man who married her also suffered from physical assault. Presumably, this woman was lacking suitable background and therefore, considered as a breaker of a local order rather than a potential candidate for a community member:

An Old Believer Aleksei Mamaev fell in love with a ‘worldly’⁷¹ girl and married her. His mother and elder brother were against it. “Why did you get yourself caught up with her, an atheist”, said his mother, reasoning into getting rid of her. The elder Aleksei's brother, Gennadii, was fistfighting him, “You defiled us ...

⁶⁹ *Chasovennye* Old Believers were proscribed praying and eating from the same table with people who do not belong to their denomination.

⁷⁰ N.V. Koltsov was a Soviet history professor and lecturer in atheism based in Kalinin (historic name of Tver). He extensively used press reports about the infamous cases of suicides and domestic violence in the Tuvan Old Believer community to prepare materials for atheistic propaganda against Old Believers. His work is available in Tallinn as a manuscript marked by year 1964.

⁷¹ Wordly (Rus. *Mirskoi* / *Mirskaia*) is a specific Old Believer term applied to all outsiders.

I'll kick you out of here like a dog". Intimidations worked and the pregnant young woman was expelled, and Lenyka⁷² didn't even say a word (Koltsov 1964: 27).

Actually, mixed marriages between Old Believers and atheists were quite common in Soviet Tuva outside the region of Upper Reaches, i.e., in Kyzyl and the 'mainland' Kaa-Khem. Several small communities consisting mainly of older women remain there up until now. They are not recognized by Old Believers of Upper Reaches, although currently those women are trying to follow necessary regulations and perform religious services. This demarche of Upper Reaches is particularly motivated by the fact of mixed marriages, in which some of those women remained until their husbands passed away. The status of a widow does not serve as an excuse for harsh taiga Old Believers of Upper Reaches, unless the deceased managed to get baptized. Interestingly, one of those women, whose father was an elder in Soviet times, in our time appeared to be the most appropriate candidate to lead a religious service. Nonetheless, since she used to be married improperly, she was only allowed to correct others who were actually performing a service.

Modernized gender contract developed already in late Soviet time. Ideologists were emphasizing that a vast majority of Old Believers were represented by the older women (Braslavskii 1984: 19; Milovidov 1979: 56). In Milovidov's materials, women accounted for 70–80% of Old Believers in different regions of the USSR. Furthermore, most of these women were of older ages, widowed (as a result of the Great Patriotic War of 1941–1945), illiterate or poorly literate (Milovidov 1979: 56–58). A percentage of interfaith marriages was also growing, as Milovidov points out elsewhere (Milovidov 1969: 108). Interestingly, he marks Tuvan Upper Reaches as one of the most conservative and less modernized regions, where men were more numerous than in other places (Milovidov 1979: 56).

Although Soviet accounts represent a rather adequate picture of active performance in Old Belief, community structure could have been much more complicated than they assumed. Modernized gender contract required individualization of religious practices and values. Therefore, younger generations engaged in production could opt for temporal abandonment of religious practices in order to avoid problems. While older generations were not pressured on the same level by authorities due to their exclusion from labor and active social secular life. Eventually, gender specialization became a way of social reproduction itself.

1.6. Old Believer communities in Estonia

According to *Brief Historical Guide*, Old Believers appeared in Estonia in the late 17th century (Ponomareva and Šor 2006: 11). It is generally accepted that

⁷² A colloquial variant of the name Aleksei.

the first communities were established in the vicinity of Rāpina manor and in Kūkita village. By the beginning of the 19th century, the number of communities had grown extensively. As everywhere across the Russian Empire, Old Believer prayer houses were closed between 1848 and 1883. When the restrictions were rolled back, it turned out that governmental attempts to convert Old Believers into official Orthodoxy or *Edinoverie*⁷³ failed. Their number reached 3,000 in nineteen villages in Prichudie. By the time Estonia gained independence, Old Believers were thriving as their population increased to 10,000. The total number of registered communities was twelve. Ten of them belonged to *Pomortsy* faction (Kallaste, Kasepel, Kikita, Mustvee, Zhekachek, Mezha, Raja, Bolshie Kolki, Tallinn, Tartu, Voronja) the rest two (Raja, Malye Kolki) were *Fedoseevtsy*. These communities formed a Union of Old Believer Communities in Estonia that held fourteen conventions from 1923 to 1939 (ibid.: 11, 16–17, and elsewhere). The same number of communities remained after the Soviet occupation, while the population declined. Building upon the 2000 Population Census in Estonia, Plaat estimates the number of adult Old Believers in Estonia at 2,515, of whom 1,497 were women and 1,089 were men (Plaat 2005: 24–25). There is however a popular opinion among Old Believers that around 5,000 of them currently live in the country.

Compared to Siberia, the development of gender contracts in Estonian Old Believer communities ran differently. The western coastline of Lake Chudskoe / Peipus has been a long-settled territory, where economic growth led to changes in local life already in the 19th century. Numerous ethnographic accounts (Moora 1964; Rikhter 1976; Ränk 1934, etc.) highlight upheavals in religious behavior consequential to economic one in several generations in a row since the second half of the 19th century.

Initially, Old Belief in Prichudie was represented by *Fedoseevtsy* faction. The fundamental difference between them and *Pomortsy* was a lack of marriage as a sacrament and proscription of marriages as a practice. As a priestless faction, *Fedoseevtsy* assumed that without a proper Orthodox priesthood marriage simply cannot be legal in a Christian community. Therefore, marriages should be defined as fornication. However, proscription was not total. Married couples were not completely excluded from the community. They were allowed to be present at the divine services, albeit standing still behind the unmarried congregants without permission to pray overtly. Rikhter's account confirms that such order existed in *Fedoseevtsy* prayer houses in the entire region (1976: 245). Also, married congregants were not allowed to sing in the choir. Nowadays, when many prohibitions have been loosened, married and unmarried

⁷³ This term stands for a special branch of official Orthodox church, which united Old Believer communities under direct control of Orthodox priests and bishops, where liturgy was performed according to the old rite. *Edinoverie* was supposed to attract Old Believers, but it hardly became an organic part of the church. Therefore, despite the attempts to diminish ritual and dogmatical cleavage between the official Church and the Old Believers, it was not trusted by the latter.

congregants are allowed to pray together as well as join the choir, as it goes, for instance, in Malye Kolki community.

It turned out that the *Fedoseevtsy* faction was split into two parts: the unmarried who represented the core of the community and the married who were considered as sinners. A prohibition of overt praying with the congregation was used as a punishment for marriage. In Estonia, *Fedoseevtsy* are still known by the name derived from the previous expression, *Rabskie* (lit. Serves, like in serf labor). This probably refers to *Raby Bozhii* (Lord's Servants): "Rabskie means Raby Bozhii" (Field notes, Kasepel 2020, woman)⁷⁴. The married in their turn had the name *Mirskie* (lit. of the world)⁷⁵. Eventually, the split occurred to be generational, since *Raby Bozhii* mainly included children and older people. Aged 60, *Mirskie* spouses were supposed to have a sort of divorce, which would allow them to gain full membership in the community and permission to pray in a prayer house. Therefore, only unmarried, divorced, and widowed took part in the divine service.

In the 19th century, *Fedoseevtsy* identity was drastically shifting and most of the communities opted for *Pomortsy* order, where marriages were not regarded as a theological and practical problem. Supposedly, the shift was based on the economic development of the region, when peasant Old Believer communities became largely involved in seasonal working type labor. Prichudie inhabitants had to switch to seasonal working when the foundational activity of the local economy, fishing, started to decline (Rihkter 1976: 39). Women were also actively involved in seasonal labor. Rihkter reports that in the 19th century Prichudie young girls specialized in brick cutting, fishing, and fruit and vegetable gardening. Their working places were situated quite far away from their homeland, like in the outskirts of St. Petersburg, Pskov, or Valga. A lot of female seasonal workers continued earning after marriage until the birth of a first child. In the interwar period, women were hired out to clean fish, to work in Latvian gardens, to serve as farmhands or housemaids (ibid.: 48–49).

Women were spending the earned money mostly on their dowry, especially clothes. Although they had to give up a part of it for the family, an opportunity to buy some new fashionable clothes was a great motivation to partake in seasonal work (ibid.: 137–138, 167). This even affected life-cycle rituals, such as weddings. For example, a bride was giving manufactured clothes as presents to her groom's parents in order to show her ability to earn money. Her sewing skills were not inspected (ibid.: 211). Of course, all these processes contributed to changes in local gender contracts in Prichudie. Young women gained more independence, although they had to be subordinate to their parents' families until they got married. They had a relative freedom in choosing occupation and

⁷⁴ Unmarried *Fedoseevtsy* are similarly called *Rabskie* or *Raby* in Latvia: "In Lipushki, Nazarievich (local nastavnik – D.R.) accepts the married for confession and they pray together (with non-married – D.R.), but *Raby* bow first, then the married". (Nikonov 2008: 40).

⁷⁵ See Chapter III for the meaning of the term *Mirskie* in Old Believer tradition and similar division inside the group in *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy*, namely sections 3.1. and 3.3.

buying clothes, which was an important step into adulthood. Sometimes, choices of young women were challenged by an older generation (see *ibid.*: 167). This anxiety notwithstanding, I argue that a bigger rupture between generations exacerbated in Soviet and Post-Soviet times.

Soviet modernization project brought other trends and agency of women in Prichudie changed as traditional seasonal work stopped. Women, who used to help men in fishing (see *ibid.*: 30–33 and elsewhere), ceased this activity, while the role of vegetable gardening increased. Old Believer women were dealing both with growing and trading onions. As reported by Rikhter and other authors, trading onions and other vegetables yielded a profit in Prichudie since the second half of the 19th century (Avdeeva 1842: 42, 46–47; Moora 1964: 293; Rikhter 1976: 49). Interestingly, the onion trade only increased in Soviet period. With a border between Estonia and Soviet Russia being ceased, big Leningrad markets became open for Prichudie onion. Local onion producers were sufficiently supported: a kolkhoz truck was assigned to make regular circuits in Prichudie villages to collect boxes of onions. Since locals were selling fresh green onion, it would be barely possible to make it to Leningrad markets with such a fragile produce without a kolkhoz truck. Every seller had her preferable market in Leningrad and her onions were delivered exactly at the required place. People were traveling separately by bus and used to stay in special “market dormitories” until the onions were sold out (Field notes, multiple interviews from Estonia).

This introduction of market economy seems alien to the socialist, kolkhoz system but it coincides to some extent with certain intentions of the state to bring comfort into the lives of Soviet citizens. So, perseverance of some local activities, such as onion trading, in that sense was intended. Scholars usually consider inoculations of materialistic values into socialistic life-cycle rituals. For example, Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby points out that Soviet wedding rituals were purposefully tied to consumerism as it helped to ensure a stable family as a social unit (2008: 122). Elizaveta Rikhter also argues that Soviet weddings in Prichudie absorbed consumerist values: “Weddings nowadays leave behind all other family celebrations in terms of number of guests, variety of foods and drinks” (1976: 195–196). This occurred notwithstanding the *Fedoseevtsy* marriageless background and a popular pre-Soviet opinion that “wedding is a waste of money” (*ibid.*: 203).

It should be noted that women dealing with onion trade were mostly grandmothers of the current Old Believer community members. One of my interlocutors, 69 years old at the time of the interview, remembers her grandmother, Fedosja Karmanova, as a person with a stern temper, who controlled the life of the family (her daughter, son-in-law, and grandchildren). Fedosja was *Rabskaia*, i.e., of *Fedoseevtsy* descent, native of the village of Raja. She was one of the onion sellers in Leningrad markets. At home, she kept all the supplies locked: “She had two skirts. There were keys to the entire storage in the bottom one”. For some time, family finances were also under Fedosja’s control but eventually she had to give it up to her daughter after a big quarrel. Rikhter singles out that

in Soviet time money was mostly controlled “by wives”, i.e., not by their grandmothers or mothers-in-law. Regardless of the fact that men were considered as heads of families, even they had to ask for money from their wives (Rikhter 1976: 221–222). But this means that the local gender contract changed since the era of seasonal work. Rikhter also infers that seasonal working migration led to the prominence of mothers-in-law in Prichudie families (ibid.: 233). Therefore, the conflict between Fedosja and her daughter over finances framed the struggle of novel and older gender contracts, whereas women’s position was quite strong in both. It is not a surprise for a person with a more conservative, *Fedoseevtsy* background, to stick to older ways.

Fedosja was also a harsh caregiver. She had very strict rules, especially towards her granddaughter. Fedosja was less severe with my interlocutor’s brother, because she believed that more freedom would be more appropriate for boys, while girls should be steady going. Otherwise, no one would marry them, as the popular thought went. Equally she was hard with her own daughter, who was supposed to run the house but had to keep patience: “All the family was sitting at the table, but my mom was at granny’s beck and call. Girl, stir the coals, close the shutter. But mom never opposed” (Field notes, Kasepel 2020, woman).

This strictness served as a valuable background for transmission of Old Believer identity to the granddaughter. Although Fedosja did not educate her family in a religious sense, routine regulations and bodily practices were very important in the process of maintenance of tradition. Fedosja considered the rest of her family as *Otpadshie* (fallen) or *Mirskie* (belonging to the world)⁷⁶. She was a practitioner but did not care much about the religious commitments of the family. My interlocutor eventually became not only a practitioner but a valuable guide into the Old Believer tradition for generations of scholars, including myself. For many years, she ran the museum of Old Believer culture in Kolki village. Her contribution to the exhibition and museum narrative was huge.

This goes against the picture of dying out religious tradition in Old Believer villages drawn by Elizaveta Rikhter. She distinguishes between several groups of practitioners in Soviet time: *Bozhi Lyudi* (God’s People), *Veruyushchie dlya Sebya* (Believing for Themselves), and *Khladnokrovnye* (Passionless). Only the first one abided by all religious regulations and regularly took part in divine services. Respectively, Rikhter concludes that this signifies a process of decline of religious tradition (1976: 280–281). However, she did not consider the role of seemingly non-religious rules that were still present in Old Believer houses.

⁷⁶ The meaning and social background of the term *Mirskie* is discussed in Chapter III. Significance of bodily practices in mastering religious identity is presented in Chapters III and IV.

1.7. Gender shifts: cases of Voronja and Malye Kolki Old Believer congregations

Allegedly, modernization in Estonia was more gradual and brought less drastic transformations as it was in Siberia, but it certainly affected local gender contracts. To some extent, local Old Believer communities were used to changes and tried to develop a vision of Old Believer living in a modernizing world. This attempt to protect tradition was more or less successful even in Soviet times despite the general proscriptive Soviet policies against religion. Post-Soviet economic situation made Prichudie inhabitants not only seek jobs abroad or in Estonian cities but settle for a long period of time away from their ancestor villages. These recent migration patterns reshaped the meaning of the community, i.e., notwithstanding their noninvolvement in local life and lack of religious practice, recent immigrants from the lake villages genuinely feel their belonging to the community through family ties and a sense of nostalgia.

This type of belonging is not something entirely new for Estonian Old Believers, since most current communities were preserved in a sort of nostalgic move: village natives resettled after retirement in their places of origin and rediscovered not only the rural life but the religion of their childhood as well. When they returned, village prayer houses were still functioning, occupied by congregants of older ages. In this sense, there was at least some transition period between the older and the current communities, until the returnees adjusted their routines to regular visits of prayer houses and finally realized that they are the only people who could preserve the tradition.

Along with generational transitions there used to be gender shifts as well. In some cases, Old Believer communities were previously run by male *nastavniks* and changed into women-only state. Others, on the contrary, gained male leaders after a long period of female *nastavnichestvo*. In this section, I observe examples that represent both variants of this transition. One is a village of Voronja, where a long-term serving man was replaced by a returnee woman. In the village of Malye Kolki, on the contrary, a 40-year period of women's leadership in *Rabskie* community ended up with two men taking over *nastavnik's* duties.

The concept of gender contracts assumes that economy and politics are quite important in distributing gender roles in local communities. Besides that, actual practices that emerge in local contexts often matter more than general processes. This means that generally Soviet modernization in Estonia was also challenging for Old Believers, but on a grassroot level they were involved in an almost capitalist economy. Individual land plots provided a good opportunity for households to get additional supplies and earn money (mostly, from selling onions). These economic relations strengthened social positions of women but, at the same time, gave a chance for religious communities to be preserved.

Another aspect which is important to understand how modernization affects gender contracts and performance of religious communities is labor migration. Although in Soviet time it changed its patterns, labor migration remained an important factor in the social life of communities in Prichudie. Many of my

informants remember how they had to move to other places when they were younger. They usually moved to other cities within Estonia, which allowed them to keep ties with communities of origin.

A story of Zoia Kutkina, a current female *nastvanik* at Voronja *Pomortsy* prayer house, illustrates these patterns of Soviet migration. She used to live in Voronja village until the 6th grade, when she moved to Tartu for educational reasons. There she stayed with her close relatives. After finishing high school and university, she was sent⁷⁷ to Setomaa in the vicinity of Pechory to serve as a medical worker. After getting married, Zoia moved together with her husband to the mining town of Kiviõli in Eastern Estonia. In 1979 they returned to Tartu as her husband's father became seriously ill and required special care. Zoia recalls working in Tartu for 10 or 12 years, eventually returning to Voronja when retired and after her mother was paralyzed. This was the time when she started participating in services in Voronja prayer house again (Field notes, Voronja 2021, woman).

Upon her arrival to Voronja in 1991 or 1992, that happened mainly due to family reasons, Zoia continued going to church as a simple congregation member. As she recalls, there used to be but 20 participants on average, although only one male *nastavnik*, whose name was Vasilii Remets, and one female helper who were conducting the whole service. Voronja *nastavnik* was often ill, and they had to cancel services because nobody else from the congregation could replace him. Eventually, he called for some people including Zoia to join the choir – a congregation's group of singers, whose role in conducting the divine ceremony is huge.

For Zoia, becoming a choir member turned out to be a crucial step towards her service as *nastavnik*. Choir members not only sing psalms but read certain liturgical texts. They are supposed to know the order of service to be able to pick up correct liturgical books and find a required part of a text. This is besides the ability to perform a *Znamenny Chant*, a characteristic manner of singing in Old Rite churches. Therefore, Zoia proved her expertise in dealing with liturgical texts and gained necessary knowledge through interacting with an experienced and well-respected congregation leader. Eventually, Zoia took over when Vasilii Remets passed away. Currently, Voronja congregation has significantly diminished, even compared to 1990s. There are only a handful of church-goers, including choir members and Zoia herself.

Zoia reasons about her service in terms of necessity. She was serving as a housekeeper in the prayer house together with Vasilii Remets. After Vasilii's death, it was crucial to find a person who would catch up after him, but older and more experienced congregants refused. Zoia did not want to close the prayer house even to the smallest congregation. Eventually, as far as she remembers, she had to take over *nastavnik's* duties herself, but she did not

⁷⁷ Allocation of young specialists to some remote workplaces was a common practice in the entire Soviet Union.

receive a blessing for this from any other leader, nor does she consider herself as a ‘true’ *nastavnik*:

I sometimes say like this – an impostress <...> It is just if we’d close the doors, it [the prayer house – DR] would be standing closed until nowadays. There was no other way <...>, and I was responsible for the church being working, but I do not call myself a *nastavnik* (Field notes, Voronja 2021, woman).

Interestingly, along with the disappearance of men as active congregants in Voronja, the spatial measurements of its old 1903 prayer house also changed. As a rule, Old Believer prayer houses in Estonia are physically divided by a wall into two sides, where the right one is supposed to be occupied by men and the left respectively by women. This wall is preserved in most of the prayer houses, but it was removed in Voronja. Apparently, the reasons for removal were not directly related to the gender shift in the community but had rather some technical explanations behind (the prayer house was under restoration for many years). However, my informant made a remark about the wall in the context of the shift. This can be compared to all-women *Pomortsy* communities in Verkhokamyë described by Elena Smiljanskaja, where eldresses started to enter the altar and approach icons from the left, ‘female’ side contrary to previous customs (Smiljanskaja 2013: 98–99).

The above-mentioned wall only divides the central room, which is specifically designed for praying. When a person enters, they face a wall with icons (iconostasis) and a *solea* (a platform in front of the iconostasis) with two choir wings on both sides (*kliros*). In Orthodox churches there would normally be an altar behind an iconostasis⁷⁸ but since *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy* belong to priestless factions, they do not build altars for their prayer houses. Icons are also situated around the room on other walls and on special stands. The dividing wall starts from the entrance to the central room and goes until the middle. The middle part of the central room is used for ritual purposes, i.e., in a required part of a divine service, choir members and readers gather there for singing or *nastavnik* reads the Gospel or other texts from this point. The central room is also equipped with a wood stove, which is situated in the middle of the room. Before the central room there is normally a hall with some additional rooms, so that congregants do not end up in the central room right away but have space to change clothes and leave their belongings before entering the sacred space with icons.

The Malye Kolki community demonstrates an opposite case of gender shift, from female to male. Being one of the two *Rabskie* (or *Fedoseevtsy*) communities in the country, Malye Kolki probably faced a lack of knowledgeable male candidates for *nastavnichestvo* earlier than the prevailing *Pomortsy*. Two men

⁷⁸ In *Chasovennye* prayer houses, there are no altars and there is often another room behind the iconostasis, which is used as a storage for liturgical books and other ceremonial items.

started their service around ten years ago (i.e., circa 2010), and my informants recall at least three names of women performing the duty before them.

Contrary to the rest of Estonia, *Rabskie* women were not only conducting religious services but provided essential rituals, such as baptism of children and hearing the confessions. For a long period, those women abided by the *Rabskie* law that proscribed the married people to pray overtly at the service and sing in a church choir. They themselves kept this rule demandingly, meaning that none of them stepped in being married. One of the current male leaders considers this as their virtue. However, these women realized that if the proscriptions had not been loosened, the congregation would have ceased to exist:

Twenty-one years ago, my mom passed away and my heart was bleeding so much, and I was so eager to pray in the church, but it was prohibited, we were frowned upon by older ladies. Then Varvara Sergeevna, thanks to her... “Auntie Varvara⁷⁹, I’d love to pray so much!” And she says, “Well, pray if you want”. And the second [woman – D.R.] turned around, “If anybody wants to pray, they can pray”. Not all the older ladies accepted it, but they understood that we wanted to pray. When you pray, it’s easier to stand, and it warms your heart, and we had permission (Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman).

It should be noted that a transfer to male leadership was implemented along with growing influence of *Pomortsy* religious center in Rybatskoe (a historical district of St. Petersburg). For many years Rybatskoe was sponsoring retreats for *Pomortsy* from all over Russia and other countries, where they would be gathering for several days to learn reading the Church-Slavic text, *Znamennoe* singing, service, and other practical and theoretical things necessary for organizing religious life in their congregation. Those retreats included not only current leaders or candidates but average members, as well as both women and men. It seems that the program reached its goals: most of my interlocutors – active practitioners – participated in the retreats and learnt a lot from the arranged classes. They admitted that it would be hard for them to continue holding services without being trained in Rybatskoe classes.

At the same time, this reveals the fact that current tradition has been sufficiently influenced by other *Pomortsy* centers, such as the one in St. Petersburg. In case of the Malye Kolki community this also shows that despite its *Fedoseevtsy* background, it is accepted by *Pomortsy*, which probably followed the renunciation of marriage restrictions, as well as a long-established practice of visiting the available services regardless of its belonging (like one of my informants, Anna Galaganova, was attending services in Tartu while she was living there). As my Malye Kolki interlocutors reported, the last female

⁷⁹ Auntie Varvara was a *nastavnik* in Malye Kolki, at the moment of interview already deceased.

nastavnik, Varvara, admitted that they were probably not right to commit themselves to performing baptism and hearing confessions⁸⁰.

1.8. Summary of Chapter I

Most of the *Chasovennye* communities I observe in my research are demographically very different from the Old Believer communities in Estonia. The latter were involved in the process that can be called “feminization of Old Belief” (Rogers 2009: 173–177). The difference between the two regions cannot be explained confessionally since there are examples of all-women or mostly women communities among *Chasovennye* in Southern Siberia as well. Therefore, I tried to explain how particular local conditions facilitated shifts in demographics and female religiosity, and what exactly was the subject of change.

As I point out, Siberian *Chasovennye* are often perceived as keepers of tradition. It is often said that life in isolation in taiga has allowed them to preserve Russian traditional ways, which includes strong religious devotion, farming, and patriarchal family. Of course, Old Believer religiosity itself is interpreted as an archival factor. However, this does not answer the question of how exactly place or religiosity help to preserve tradition.

I suggest that it is usually a local gender contract which is associated with a stronger or weaker state of tradition. Local gender contracts are not articulated but they can be traced in certain things such as gender division in labor, costume, etc. When economic conditions change, gender contracts follow up. It is not a coincidence that feminization of Old Belief and introduction of what I call modernized gender contract usually appears in the state farm economy. Here, I refer not only to the situation in Estonia or in some regions of Siberia (such as Altai), but also to the examples I have brought up in Introduction – Verkho-kamie, Kuban, etc. (see Litvina 2021; Rogers 2009: 107–189; Smiljanskaja 2013; Vorontsova 2018). According to memories of my interlocutors, modernized gender contract appeared in Estonia later than in most of the Russian regions, which is understandable because the country was occupied later and, therefore, changes came. Another important aspect about the Estonian situation is the influence of capitalist economy and open-borders policy on demographics in Prichudie. Since younger and middle generations often have to move out to other countries, they are almost not involved in religious lives of the communities.

⁸⁰ As Olga Fishman reports, when Karelian Fedoseevtsy women had to bless one another to pass duties of *nastavnik*, they used a formulaic phrase *blagoslovi, otche* (bless me, father), albeit feeling guilty for trespassing in the men’s domain (Fishman 2003: 280).

CHAPTER II. FEMALE LEADERSHIP IN CHASOVENNYE AND POMORTSY COMMUNITIES

In this chapter, I will focus on one of the crucial questions concerning women's role in Russian Old Belief – women as spiritual leaders (eldresses) of the communities. For some authors, the fact that women could serve as *nastavniki* (elders) along with religious autonomy from the state church, made Old Believers look like a highly progressive, democratic movement, where men and women were treated equally. On the other hand, Old Believers remain adherents of traditionality and follow more or less traditional gender orders (see Chapter I). In this regard, how the former (serving as eldresses) corresponds with the latter (women should not occupy roles meant for men)? When in the previous chapter I observed gender roles with a view to social structure, here I will focus more on symbolic aspect of the same subject, and also answer who the Old Believer eldresses have been this whole time.

2.1. Female leadership in Estonian and Siberian communities

Old Believer communities are spiritually guided by religious leaders. In Estonia both male and female leader is called *batka*, in spite of a grammatically incorrect usage of this term in relation to women⁸¹. In Siberia a distinction is made between a male leader *nastavnik* and a female leader *nastavnitisa* (here the grammatical gender is shifted). The high number of female leaders in Old Belief is sometimes considered by scholars as evidence that Old Believer women are more privileged and have more rights than in other religious communities (Kerov 2003). However, such impression is somewhat imprecise, because being *nastavnitisa* cannot be compared to female priesthood established in some Protestant churches.

As a rule, the activity of female leaders is limited to one community. That means a *nastavnitisa* conducts ceremonies only in her local community and is usually not supposed to go anywhere else. It is illustrative how until recently a few male leaders had to travel across Prichudie to hear confessions. Albeit most communities had their own leader none of them was neither supposed to hear confessions nor perform any other duties in other communities because they were women. These men had to take a tour around the country once a year to visit every community for hearing confessions. Since these men were limited in

⁸¹ Male nominations such as *otche* (father), *pop* (priest), *nastavnik* (elder) are also common for female-run priestless communities in Russian North and the Ural region (Fishman 2003: 280; Smiljanskaja 2013: 91; Vorontsova 2018: 109). It should be noted that in a context of priestless Old Believers none of this terms means a priest but a lay person who have not received a consecration via a ritual of a chirotony (imposition of hands), as it is accepted in Orthodoxy.

time, they asked all women and men of a community they were visiting to come together on a prearranged day:

<...> We [in Voronja – D.R.] have only one man on the entire coast, only one *batka*. And he has health issues, he can't come to everyone <...> Before that, men and women were separated [for confession – D.R.]. Now they come altogether, he simply won't cope, he can't [hear confessions from every person separately – D.R.] (Kuvaitseva 2017: 47–48).

The rite of confession in Orthodoxy and, respectively, in Old Belief is organized in that way that a priest recites sins from a list, while a confessant has to admit whether he or she is guilty or not. Confession is supposed to be an intimate and individual sacrament but in Estonia it used to be performed in a group for everyone together. It was not reasonable to separate men from women as there were not so many men in communities after all. Thus, this gender imbalance has caused a change in the rite, but still Estonian *Pomortsy* have not allowed women to take such tours or to take confessions from members of their communities.

In Siberia, women have rarely been introduced as leaders in Old Believer communities, yet it was a more common practice in Altai region during Soviet times. As far as I know, women were responsible for local communities, same as Estonian *Pomortsy* women, but they could take confessions. That means their responsibilities were more significant than in Estonia. The only thing is that after the collapse of the Soviet Union, traditional gender roles were re-established and nowadays there are only male leaders in Altai and all I know about women that have been *nastavnytsy* comes from memories of my informants.

One of the interlocutors in Altai remembers women conducting religious services in her village of Zamulta during 'the war', which in Russia is a common reference to the Second World War (1939–1945) or rather the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) as it is called within the framework of Soviet and Post-Soviet Russian ideology. At this time, a lot of men were drafted, and women had to bear their responsibilities including religious ones. For some reasons, the Old Believers of Zamulta did not accept a female lead despite the health issues of the old *nastavnik*:

[So, you don't have any priests?] No, we don't. Even the one who is our leader got ill. [Can't you take anyone else instead?] There is one N.I. He is illiterate, he doesn't know the order [of the service – D.R.]. <...> [Nobody can replace the old *nastavnik*?]. Correct. Nobody can. [How does the replacement usually look like? One dies and then you choose another?] Right. The blessing comes from the holy apostles. Holy apostles are disciploes of Jesus Christ. [Does the old *nastavnik* chooses a successor himself?] Well, you can't find anyone now. When the old one got ill, his son took him to Verkh-Uimon. It's only an illiterate N.I. now. [Did you choose him or is he like a substitute, the new one?] We had

nowhere to go. He can do candles and that's it⁸². [And he was asked to become a *nastavnik*, wasn't he?] Well, we had no choice. Younger people don't want to learn it and do not come [to the services – D.R.]. Men do not attend at all. [They don't want to?] They drank themselves to death. Such a life we have here. [Can a woman become a *nastavnitisa*?] We had women during the war. One woman was here for a long time. Old people pass away. [Why didn't you choose a *nastavnitisa* this time?] There is no one around, no one to choose (Field notes, Zamulta 2015b, woman).

As it comes from the quoted excerpt, a lack of knowledgeable practitioners is one of the problems of Old Believer communities in Altai. They cannot find an appropriate person who would take responsibility for conducting services. In other regions, women can sometimes replace men at least to some extent:

We, Old Believers, do not have holy communion. We only drink holy water after the Epiphany holiday. <...> We get the holy water from behind the Sayans. I don't know how holy this water is. Looks like it is untouchable. I got a blessing to give this water to the old ladies that we bury. This way we give them communion before they die. But I am a completely illiterate person. [Somebody came from behind the Sayans to bless you?] No, I was blessed by our *sobor*. [Do you have a *sobor* here?] Right. Those who gather to pray. It is a tiny *sobor*. Sometimes five people, sometimes two. We used to have a bigger *sobor*, but everyone left for behind the Sayans. Those who stayed were over 80 or even 90 years old. I am, too, 80 years old. Younger people go to work. We have some younger people from Balgazik⁸³. It was Zh., he was a strong [believer – D.R.]. He taught his own kids to read the Book of Psalms. But they did not marry in accordance with the rules. His daughter got married outside the rules, but she doesn't leave us. Her father was literate. She discussed it with him that she is allowed to be with us. We do not cross ourselves together with her, she does it after us⁸⁴. But she even conducts services because her father did. She works somewhere in a bank. We also had Val., her father was a *nastavnik*. He was not quite literate, but he could figure it out. I am 87 years old. All of us here are so old... <...> We don't have a big service, we only read the Book of Psalms. [So, you don't have a *nastavnik*?] No, we don't. We are all *nastavniki* [laughs – D.R.]. It's only Zh. who travels behind the Sayans to talk to the elders. She asks them for advice. She has asked for a blessing to correct us, because we do not read the Book of Psalms correctly. [Does she conduct the service?] No, she does not, she is not allowed. She tells us in what order to read psalms (Field notes, Kyzyl 2018a, woman).

⁸² Other informants also mentioned N.I. From their stories, we know what Ye.Z. meant: N.I. was blessed to lit candles and *zamolitstvovat*, i.e., start the prayers. He could not lead the service himself because he was not very proficient in it. This is what is understood by Old Believers under the term 'illiterate' (See: Field notes, Zamulta 2015a, woman).

⁸³ Balgazyn, a village in Tuva.

⁸⁴ See more about social divisions in Old Believer communities and women's role in them in Chapter III.

In case of the *Chasovennye* congregation in Kyzyl, services are conducted by women. A woman also administers holy water, which stands for holy communion. They, however, have support from another congregation referred by the respondent as “behind the Sayans” that gives their blessing to women in Kyzyl and provides with a supply of holy water. This all-female congregation includes another woman, Zh., who cannot participate in services at full scale because of her semiotic status. Her marriage to a non-Old Believer does not allow her to do that. Nonetheless, she helps her community thanks to her deeper knowledge of religious texts.

Elders bless not only community leaders to conduct services or administer holy water. I can conclude from my conversations with *Chasovennye* Old Believers in Siberia, that it is not uncommon, when women are blessed by elders to baptize their own children or children of their community members. For example, an older woman from a Shorian village Chulesh has told me about her own experience as a baptizer:

[Could you please tell me if it is really possible to baptize children without an elder or do you definitely need an elder to perform the baptism?] Forgive me for Lord’s sake, but I baptized all my grandchildren. [So, it is actually possible?] Well, you have a blessing from an elder, and I had a spiritual father. Now I won’t be doing it anymore, I am too old to baptize children (Field notes, Chulesh 2017b, woman).

Old Believer women in Altai also describe such female specialists who have skills and a blessing to baptize children:

[Is there a woman in the village who baptizes kids?] Yes. [And who blesses?] She does. How she reads, my aunt! She reads the Bible so much. She reads it when a person is born or dies. Then, they are baptized in a baptistery. Do you know how quickly she flips [the baby – D.R.] three times? Not like in a church. She can baptize only one child in the same water. And the water is brought from the river, from the warm strings that run from the underground. [So, where does the baptism take place? At the riverside?] In the summer it happens at the river. [And in winter?] In winter, they bring water to the baptistery, pour it, and baptize right away. [So, there is only one such woman in the village?] No, not in the village. Probably, in the area. When you come to her, you need to take a towel with you to cover the child afterwards. It should be new. <...> [And the god-parents?] A child should be one month old to be baptized, so that it won’t understand anything yet. Then, the old woman ducks it three times and flips it three times. She turns the child three times clockwise. It is ducked three times and flipped three times. [Does she flip the baby holding from the hands?] Right, she flips the child like this, then puts it right away in the baptistery, then flips again clockwise, then again in the water. You have to immerse the child completely, so that the crown of the head won’t be visible. You need to cover its mouth and nose. Then, you quickly pull the child back. You duck the child there in the blink of an eye. It is all pink in the cold water! [Does the baby cry?] No! Only groans. [Did you baptize children yourself?] No, not me, I am not allowed. You need to

know the Bible well. I can't read Latin. I am illiterate, only literate people can. [Is there a woman who does that?] No, not here. [Where do the locals baptize children?] In [Ust – D.R.]-Koksa. [Do they invite her?] Right, they bring her by car (Field notes, Oktyabrskoe 2015, woman).

The story of a woman from Oktyabrskoe contains a lot of details on how a child can be baptized. Among other things, she mentioned “flips” that are performed during the ritual. This technic is typical only for *Chasovennye* and is considered as the only correct one. A common feature for all Old Believers is also available, i.e., to fully immerse a baptized child (or any other person) into the water three times. In spite of several inconsistencies in the responses, such as the Bible is read during the ritual (it is usually the Book of Needs) and the Bible is written in Latin (it is, of course, Church Slavic), this story coincides with the stories of other interlocutors:

[How are children baptized here?] Well, in the river [laughter – D.R.]. [Who baptizes them? There is no church in here.] Well, there is a designated old woman who does that. [Not one but...] Just one. In the village, for instance. [The one and only?] Right. It can't be a random person. She must be one. [Do you have such a woman here?] Well, I don't know who baptizes now, I think there is no one here. My mom baptized the kids; she is long gone. [Do you baptize yourself?] No, I don't do that (Field notes, Tikhonkaia 2015, woman).

A woman from Sizim, Tuva, explains why in some cases old women perform a ritual of baptism, even when some male *nastavniki* are available in the area:

[Who can baptize?] <...> It can only be a spiritual teacher. However, young people live unmarried today, unjustly. So then old women do it as they can. These old women are, of course, Christian, not of the world. Young people do not join the brotherhood, they live in the world, but they want to baptize a child. So, their grannies do that. Without a blessing. [Do you mean that old women baptize the children?] It should be a teacher. People live weakly now. A teacher won't baptize if parents are not in the brotherhood. He trims beard, she doesn't wear a headscarf. Such people won't be accepted. Then, old women or some aunts do it. [Would such child be accepted in the brotherhood later when they grow up?] Well, it was not their fault. Of course, they will be accepted. It is important to be baptized correctly. To be immersed three times, clockwise, and that a phrase “in the name of Father, Son, and Holy Ghost” is split. It should not be read all at once three times. Also, you need to read certain prayers. You need to read a denial of Satan (Field notes, Sizim 2018a, woman).

Another important issue that should be taken into account is how leadership is ritually framed. Usually, women are blessed by men to serve as leaders, or what happens more often, to perform certain duties, like baptizing children. Sometimes such women are represented as *nastavitsy* in local narratives, while they have only a particular duty. I cannot confirm with my materials any cases, when a woman would be blessed as a full-fledged eldress:

[Can a woman be a *nastavnik*?] *Nastavnik*? No, it should be a man anyways. I think women do not have such right (Field notes, Chulesh 2017a, woman).

My research in archives led me to another type of domestic blessing, i.e., a blessing from parents to their children, that used to be as important as the blessing from elders. I suppose that in 19th century Siberia when Old Believers had to resist tsarist conversion policy, domestic blessing served as a weapon of the weak because Old Believers supposed it would be viewed as legitimate in the eyes of officials. Thus, a woman, who was accused of ‘seducing’ her own grandchildren into *Raskol* by baptizing them with Old Believer rituals, claimed that she did it because her own mother gave her a blessing for that:

The investigation showed: A peasant woman Ksenia Anufrieva really immersed her grandchildren <...> in 1862 during the Great Lent <...> She performed the immersion by the schismatic ritual thinking that it is a true baptism because her late mother <...> ordered her to immerse both her own children and grandchildren in water by herself (RGADA. F. 1431. Op. 1. D. 3716: 2 back).

In the 19th century, Russian state and church defined religious identity of their subjects quite formally. Belonging to the ‘official Orthodoxy’ was determined by a mention in church records of baptisms, marriages, yearly obligatory confessions, etc. If a person was mentioned in a document of the kind, they were considered as members of the state church and could be punished for performing any Old Believer ritual. In their turn, Old Believers sought to counteract the formalistic, bureaucratic approach of the clerics and secular administration with an appeal to family continuity. I infer these Old Believers presumed that they appeal to the common ground of peasant culture and the state – tradition and veneration of ancestors. At least, being interrogated by the police, they could mention a blessing of women – their godmothers – that would define their true religious belonging:

A peasant Manuil Mironov Vlasov testified <...> that he backslid to Old Belief under the blessing of his godmother <...> who belonged to Old Belief (RGADA. F. 1431. Op. 1. D. 1102: 4).

A peasant widow Aksinia <...>, her son Nikita <...>, Vasilii Ivan Treskov, and the daughter of the latter, Akulina, Nikita’s wife <...> testified that both families have not belonged to the Orthodox faith at all since childhood, because their Ancestors belonged to Old Believer priestless sect and they, by the blessing of their parents, remained members of it (RGADA. F. 1431. Op. 1. D. 1102: 4).

Such parental orders are extremely important for Old Believers, especially in *Chasovennye* faction. I heard multiple times from my *Chasovennye* interlocutors that parental orders should be taken as seriously as religious rules written in books. They even refer to Old Belief as a religion that their ancestors had

used to follow, so that they cannot do anything else except what was instructed by them.

Female blessing is also common in *Chasovennye* monasteries in Siberia. Abbesses are allowed to ordain other women as nuns if the latter want to spend life in hermitages. However, women's monasteries still rely on men because nuns thrive only to their spiritual fathers⁸⁵. This all shows the complexity of female leadership in Russian Old Belief, its vernacular and historical implementations as well as ritual framework.

2.2. Avvakum's women

Although the so-called women's issue in Old Belief has been discussed by some researchers, there is not enough ethnographic data on how women were performing their duties as community leaders. Mostly, this issue has been included into historical discourse. Therefore, speaking about female leadership in Old Belief it is impossible not to mention some of the prominent historical figures, whose images inspired the idea that this movement was coping to survive through centuries due to efforts of several women (see the argumentation of historian Petr Smirnov on pages 35–36). These women were boyarynya Fedosia Morozova (1632–1675), her sister princess Yevdokiia Urusova (1635–1675), and the wife of *streltsy*⁸⁶ colonel Maria Danilova (?–1675), three prominent supporters of protopop Avvakum (1620/1621–1682), a famous leader of the movement. Boyarynya Morozova, who was widowed early and led a religious life, should be considered the most influential of the three. She used to gather the poor and sick at her home along with the famous Russian *Yurodivye* (fools for Christ), who were widely respected and appreciated across the country. This social milieu was certainly against the reformed rite. At her home, Morozova openly accepted clergy outcasts for supporting *Raskol*, including Avvakum himself. On top of that, highborn Morozova had friends and even followers among the nobility. Her relation to Maria Miloslavskaia (1624–1669), the late first wife of tsar Aleksei Mikhailovich spared her oppression and humiliation for siding with Old Believers (Smirnov 1893: 58–59; Zenykovskii 2009: 206–208, 221, 238, and elsewhere). However, after refusing to come to the tsar's second wedding to Nataliia Naryshkina (1651–1694) in 1671, Morozova was forced to take the holy communion according to the new rite and, eventually, to accept the reformed ritual. Morozova's firm rejection led to her and her counterparts (Urusova and Danilova) being arrested and detained in different monasteries outside Moscow. Boyarynya's property was confiscated, and all three of them were subjected to torture. These women were killed rather

⁸⁵ In Soviet times there were two big monastic settlements in Siberia, one in Tuva and another in Krasnoyarsk region, around 2000 miles away from each other. Three years ago, the last nuns in Tuva requested to move to Krasnoyarsk region since there were no more fathers (hegumens) in Tuva to whom they could thrive.

⁸⁶ Russian firearm infantry units and a social estate between the 16th and early 18th century.

brutally: they were sent to custody of the monastery in Borovsk and starved to death in 1675 (ibid.: 246–250).

Obviously, such kind of violence against women, who were considered as “pillars of Old Faith” already at the time of their life, was pictured in the memory of succeeding generations of Old Believers. Morozova, Urusova, and Danilova were in Avvakum’s high esteem. He awarded them with the most exquisite epithets, such as “the Sun and the Moon of the Russian land”, “garden of Eden and glorious Arc of Noah”⁸⁷, and many more, as he addressed Morozova and Urusova in one of the letters⁸⁸; or “the triune unity of the tripartite divinity” for Morozova, Urusova, and Danilova (Gudzia et al. 1979: 157–159, see also Tufanova 2020 on ‘kind vocatives’ in Avvakum’s letters).

Most of the details about the life and death of the three ‘Avvakum’s women’ are known from the hagiography of boyarynya Morozova, presumably written by Fedor Sokovnin, Morozova’s elder brother, a secretive Old Believer and an adherent of his sister, who was called “big brother” in the work (Ponyrko 2010: 25–30). Sometimes this story is called *The Life of boyarynya Morozova, princess Urusova, and Marja Danilova*, as it recounts a biography of the three. It was passed on orally as well as in written copies, so that generations of Old Believers have always paid homage to the three martyresses. In this regard, their image was important in the formation of the identity of the movement, regardless of any contradictions and divisions⁸⁹. Moreover, Morozova’s life story influenced artwork in Russia, and she became a publicly recognized figure. Mostly, she is known through a famous painting by Vasilii Surikov (1848–1916), who depicted a moment of Morozova’s detainment and transfer to jail from her residences in Moscow. Many other painters, writers, and poets were inspired by her image as well (Mazunin 1979: 15).

Taking an example of Surikov’s Morozova, Aleksandr M. Panchenko (1937–2002) wonders why this image of her became iconic for the nation, while portraits of other historical figures by the same artist did not make the same impression? Panchenko argues that Morozova became a symbol of Old Belief in national imagination long before Surikov (Panchenko 1999: 422–423). Unlike the rest of the secular and religious elite, she was not afraid to lose her title and possessions for faith and resistance to the tsar (see how Ustinova 2020 concludes that alleged supporters of Old Belief eventually asserted themselves on the side of the reform). However, her bravery was not the only reason for

⁸⁷ Avvakum used a similar formulaic expression in the letter to *staritsa* (eldress) Kaptelina: “grapes of Eden and glorious Noah’s Arc” (Gudzia et al. 1979: 225). Presumably, this was one of the later letters of Avvakum, written after Morozova’s death (Demkova and Malyshev 1971: 170–171). I should mention that in this context the term “eldress” presumably refers to her age, not her role as *nastavitsa* as in contemporary communities.

⁸⁸ Apart from giving kind names to his companions, Avvakum criticizes Morozova, because “she didn’t listen to him” by using a Russian proverb “Woman’s hair is long, but the brain is small” (Gudzia et al. 1979: 159).

⁸⁹ Neither Morozova, nor Avvakum directly favored priestless or priestly tendencies, therefore, they are equally venerated among all factions.

that. Panchenko supposes that she was close to the people because of her personal traits. He calls her letters “female” as she was not trying to dispute theological matters but sought for Avvakum’s advice for daily life. Morozova, for instance, was concerned that someone slandered her before Avvakum. On the other hand, she asked Avvakum what kind of wife he would recommend for her son (Panchenko 1999: 434–435).

Aleksandr Belousov provided a record of an interview with an Old Believer woman retelling a story of Morozova. It is clear that Surikov’s Morozova left a deep impression on her:

She was a martyress, she suffered for the faith. She was rich before the schism; she had many servants. She took wagon rides pulled by twelve horses. She was tortured for faith. First, all her servants were tormented, then her children were executed, then they went after her. She was severely tortured. They hitched the skinny horse, that was mangy and hairless; they put her in a simple sleigh, chained her and led her to shame. Have you seen a picture? This is how it was. People were standing around, spitting, but some pitied her – those, who stood for the strong faith <...> (Belousov 1980: 142).

Similar to Avvakum, who possessed a remarkable writer’s talent, that among other things was revealed in correspondence with Morozova, Urusova, Danilova, and other female supporters, Avvakum’s women were writers. However, their written heritage does not extend beyond letters. Morozova’s letters to Avvakum (see Barskov 1912) and Urusova’s letters to her children, two daughters and a son (see Vysotskii 1915: 9–29), do not discuss theological problems, as in Avvakum’s writings. It was quite unusual even for noble women to be literate enough to touch this matter. Regarding the fact that Morozova was deeply concerned about her reputation before Avvakum’s opinion, she allegedly had confronted a ‘full for Christ’ Fyodor, whom Avvakum appreciated much and considered his spiritual child on a par with Morozova herself. In one of her letters, Morozova asked Avvakum to deprive him from the holy communion. This request made Avvakum angry for an attempt to teach him how to exercise his spiritual power. As Avvakum put it: “A female tells me how to herd a Christian flock! You are dirty, and clean others! You are blind and show the way! Be sensible!” (see the respective correspondence between the two in: Barskov 1912: 38–42). Unsurprisingly, angry accolades were addressed to another Avvakum’s spiritual daughter, Evdokeia. Protopop criticizes her for the interest in “high sciences”⁹⁰. Presumably, she argued that with the reform in the Russian church Antichrist destroyed Orthodox clergy and the holy communion, which Avvakum could not accept. He identified her views as heretical, comparing them to *lutorski* (Lutheran) and *kalvinski* (Calvinistic) teaching (Gudzia et al. 1979: 227–228). Demkova and Malyshev, who first published *Pismo Dvum Devam* (The Letter to Two Maidens), one referring to Evdokeia,

⁹⁰ In fact, Avvakum means trivium (grammar, dialectics, rhetoric) and philosophy.

infer that she was of noble birth, therefore, her level of knowledge could be higher than average (Demkova and Malyshev 1971: 173–174).

Urusova, in turn, was concerned about the well-being of her children. As Vysotskii reports, her family had been splintered as Urusova's husband and son sided with the reformed rite, but both her daughters were Old Believers. Her messages are practical: she advises to go on a fast, to read particular books, and to stick to the old rite (Vysotskii 1915: 30–37).

The prominent role of Morozova and other Avvakum's women in the establishment of the Old Faith notwithstanding, such authors as Ivan Zabelin argue that their behavior was not anything extraordinary. On the contrary, it was quite common for women in the Russian elite to be overtly religious and seek salvation in virtues and benevolence. It was especially the case for widows with sons, or 'maternal widows' as they are called among researchers. As Zabelin puts it, it was common for maternal widows to reorganize their houses according to monastic rules. They were supposed to accept fools for Christ, wash their bodies, listen to preachers, give alms to the poor, etc. It just so happened that among the strangers there were some followers of the old rite, who influenced Morozova only because she was very much used to the old ways. In the very end, Zabelin claims that "heroic act and fortune of *boyarynya* Morozova were not created by her personality; they were, as the schism itself, an outcome of the course of hidden internal history of the nation, a product of its intellectual and ethical culture, an expression of the outermost restraint and aberration by the authority of empty holiness" (Zabelin 1992: 62–82).

Apart from Morozova, Urusova, and Danilova, there are many other women who played a significant role in the early movement of Old Believers. Among them are nun Melania, who was in charge of Morozova's home monastery, and Avvakum's wife Nastasya, widely known by her patronym Markovna, who remained with him in Siberian exile, traveling in the winter wasteland with her kids and famously inspiring her husband to continue with preaching Old Belief (Smirnov 1893: 59–60).

2.3. Filthiness of birth

[Was it possible to give birth at home?] In a sauna. I was born in a sauna. [Why there?] You can wash [a child – D.R.] right away, it is warm there, it's easier. Steam, probably, anesthetizes. [Did people say that sauna is an unclean place?] They said it was unclean for several days [after the birth – D.R.] ... People even didn't enter a house with a woman after childbirth. Until the prayer ... [is read – D.R.] Nobody follows this anymore. Everyone gives birth in maternity hospitals (Field notes, Verkh-Uimon 2015a, female).

In this section, I swiftly observe the question of ritual purity in respect of gender relations in Old Believer tradition. The quote I used for the epigraph illustrates a folk belief that bodily liquids that come out of a woman's body can be polluting. These are the liquids that appear as a result of childbirth, as in the

case of the quoted woman, or menstrual fluids, as I show below. Such beliefs are common for both *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* factions. They are also adopted into practice in a form of various proscriptions regarding the contact with a woman, who recently gave birth. For instance, the *Chasovennye* woman from the epigraph mentions a practice of bringing a woman in labor into a sauna and a proscription of coming into a house where a woman just gave birth. *Fedoseevtsy* faction used to have even more restrictions regarding the matter because of their prohibition of marriages and procreation. Below, I focus on these *Fedoseevtsy* restrictions since they demonstrate the ambiguous semiotic status of women in Old Believer tradition.

Nikolai Leskov (1831–1895) was one of the few authors who raised the women’s issue in Old Belief based on some ethnographic accounts. Leskov was a famous Russian writer, lesser known for his activity as a representative of the Ministry of Education. In 1863, the Ministry sent Leskov to Pskov and Riga on the subject of schools organized by Old Believers. The latter were denied keeping public schools open under the decree of tsar Nikolai I (1796–1855), unless the teachers did not belong to the Old Faith. However, Aleksander II (1818–1881), the successor of Nikolai I, adopted a more liberal policy, and during the years of his reign (1855–1881) discussions on reopening the Old Believer schools, as well as a more tolerant attitude to these people and their social institutions, became possible again. Nevertheless, Leskov had a genuine interest in Old Believers and on his mission, he tried to capture a social portrait of their communities. Leskov was eager to meet as many Old Believers as possible, looking for vivid pictures that would illustrate the state of mind, attitude, and moral of *Raskolniki*. Leskov stood in solidarity with Pavel Melnikov’s approach to Old Believers as a solely religious movement. Although Leskov was an adept of liberalization policy towards them, he actively criticized the moral part of Old Believers’ lives. He was especially concerned about practices of concubinage common in Pskov and Riga *Fedoseevtsy*.

As I have already mentioned before, *Fedoseevtsy* are mostly known as a marriageless faction. In their doctrine, a lay person could not sanctify marriage, therefore there could be no marriage assuming that all the available Orthodox clergy was a part of ‘Nikon’s heresy’. Instead of marriages, *Fedoseevtsy* insisted their followers on a pristine way of life. However, the denial of marriage did not sound attractive for people who were already married, and, of course, it could not be appreciated by the youth who would prefer to get married⁹¹. *Fedoseevtsy* leaders tried to solve the contradiction by making promises to divorce from couples who were joining the faction. Also, they allegedly claimed that adultery is a lesser sin than marriage⁹² (Lednev 1897b: 264). Reportedly,

⁹¹ I should note here that marriage was an important part of Russian rural life. A refusal from marriage could be justified only if a person dedicates themselves to monastic life.

⁹² I [Lednev – D.R.] asked [a Rubenishki (Latvia) nastavnik – D.R.]: Who do you think is chastier – married, or unmarried, although the latter lived impurely [here: they had concubines – D.R.]?

this caused a practice of concubinage in this group, which created an image of *Fedoseevtsy* as corrupted and prone to violence in the eyes of many authors.

Regarding the problem of concubinage in *Fedoseevtsy* faction, it becomes clear that the actual position of women in Old Belief was unenviable. Leskov says that *Fedoseevtsy* men used to call their concubines *posestrie* (lit. step-sisters). These women could not expose names of their lovers and fathers of their children, and even children sometimes considered their mothers as step-aunts because revealing the fact of co-living could cause excommunication. At the same time, these women could be easily expelled from concubinage in cases when men were displeased with them (Leskov 1996: 545–546). Often, the reason for that was pregnancy and birth of a child. In Riga, as Nilskii and other authors claim, abandoned women and children were struggling to survive on streets (Nilskii 1869b: 127–128; Leskov 1996: 550).

In his notes of the year 1863, Leskov wrote positively about the activity of Pavel Prusskii (1821–1895), an Old Believer, who teaching in favor of marriages among *Fedoseevtsy* was actively spreading in Pskov region⁹³. Prusskii was a nickname of Pavel Lednev, given to him for serving as an abbot in the Old Believer monastery in Voinovo⁹⁴ in 1852–1867. A former supporter of *Fedoseevtsy* teaching on marriages, who was strongly influenced by *Preobrazhenskoe kladbishche* (cemetery), a famous *Fedoseevtsy* center in Moscow, he became a faithful advocate of marriages and an opponent of *Preobrazhentsy* around 1856, spreading a teaching similar to *Pomortsy* doctrines among marriageless Old Believers (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 212). As Lednev confesses, *Fedoseevtsy* failed to organize a chaste lifestyle in the absence of marriages. Fornication, abortions, and other things that were blooming in such circumstances made Lednev change his mind about marriages (Lednev 1897a: 5–9). In time, Lednev became disenchanted with Old Belief and converted into *Edinoverie* in 1868, a branch of the official Orthodox Church, where clergy was allowed to perform services according to the old rite. His career in the church

Nastavnik replied: A bachelor is higher than a married man as much as the sky is far from the earth, albeit he sometimes fails.

I asked: If he always fails, or to put it simply, lives unchastely?

Nastavnik said: Although he won't live chastely, he is more chaste than the married.

I asked: And why is that?

– That's why, – he answered: The married (man) lives with his wife without fear, but the bachelor is afraid, he looks back wherever he goes, what if someone spotted him, and if he is seen, then he grabs the hems, runs away, sometimes breaking a window...

That said, *nastavnik* pulled up the hems of his clothes and illustrated how that guy would run... People bursted out laughing, women blushed, and I felt guilty for provoking such explanations. But what could I do? People need to assess the teaching of their *nastavniks* <...> (Lednev 1897b: 264).

⁹³ According to Nikolai Leskov, Pskovian *Fedoseevtsy* adopted new views faster than their co-religionists in Riga: "There are remnants of *Fedoseevtsy* attitudes toward marriage in Riga teaching, while Pskovians developed clearer views regarding marriage than *Pomortsy* themselves" (Leskov 1996: 390).

⁹⁴ Formerly in Eastern Prussia, Voinovo belongs to Poland nowadays.

was quite successful as eventually Lednev gained a position of archimandrite (a monastic superior) in Nikolskii Evinovertcheskii Monastery (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 94–101).

Nikolai Leskov does not mention if he was in personal contact with Pavel Lednev, but they both expressed a similar idea that in *Fedoseevtsy* faction women were suffering because men did not have an intention to take responsibility for taking care of their offspring. Moreover, women could be abandoned during childbirth. Leskov describes a terrifying scene he encountered in one of his journeys, where he and his travel companions discovered a woman in labor, whom all the villagers refused to assist. The author further reproduces a long dialogue with a local woman, presumably, a housewife⁹⁵ of a place they stayed in, who explains that no one among *Fedoseevtsy* comes for help because of the filthiness of birth⁹⁶ (Leskov 1996: 562–568). I have to admit that I am not aware if the said dialogue really took place or was it a part of Leskov's literary exercises, but the appearance of filthiness in the context of women's social status is quite important.

The Russian word for filthiness mentioned in the dialogue was *skverna*. By this, they mean not the literal body liquids but the ritual impurity, which is believed to appear during labor. This is not common only for *Fedoseevtsy*. On the contrary, such beliefs are circulating among all Russian Orthodox Christians even nowadays. As a rule, women are required to stay aside from visiting church within 40 days after giving birth because of their filthiness.

The only difference is, of course, that women are not abandoned in such circumstances. Leskov's interlocutor tried to explain that they could not help the woman in labor because of the lack of clergy:

This is filthiness, the filthiness of birth, there's nothing to wash it out with. In the old days, we had clergy <...> our clergy is in heaven now, no one to marry, no one to defile from the filthiness of birth. That is why, my dear, we escape from this filthiness and do not touch a woman while she is in filthiness. There's a law for everything, dear: the elders established it for a reason (Leskov 1996: 567)⁹⁷.

Another idea of ritual impurity is connected to menstruation. It is also common in Russian Orthodoxy practice that a woman cannot attend church or take holy

⁹⁵ Although the word 'wife' does not quite suit in the context of *Fedoseevtsy* community.

⁹⁶ This contradicts to a standard rural practice in Russia, where the help of a midwife is important not only from practical but from a symbolical side as well. It should also be distinguished from a common practice when isolation of a woman in labor is performed for a symbolical protection of a mother and a child (Rouhier-Willoughby 2008: 31–37).

⁹⁷ Compare this to Alevtina Tsvetkova's report on *Chasovennye*, who would invite an elder to bless the room where a child was born before inviting guests: "A prayer is given, when the childbirth took place <...> It's also the elder who gives a prayer in their room" (Tsvetkova 2021: 364). Also, see this explanation of a Malye Kolki woman: "If a woman in labor is at home... I was going to prayer house, and my mother attended the birth. I had to pray three *lestovkas* arrival when I came to the prayer house. If I had come two times per day, I would have had to pray twice" (Morozova, Novikov 2007: 66).

communion when she has periods. Similar recommendations can be found in Russian Orthodox Church. *Companion for a Cleric* mentions a 40-day ban from entering churches for women who have given birth, and a ban for menstruating women to take the holy communion (*Nastolnaia Kniga Svashchennosluzhitelia* 1983: 214 and 289 respectively). In 1805 Tyumen council of *Pomortsy* forbade menstruating women from being baptized (Pokrovskii 1999: 463). A contemporary liberal Orthodox journal *Foma* insists, though, that the menstruation ban applies only to receiving the holy communion, unless a woman is gravely ill. A bleeding man is equally denied taking the holy sacrament (Editorial board n.d.).

Interestingly, one of the founders of the Old Believer movement, protopop Avvakum (1621–1682) advised his followers to chase a Nikonian priest off the house by telling him that a housewife is menstruating:

Whereas you, wife, a servant of Christ, doing your housework come and tell him: “Father! What kind of person are you? Don’t you know from your wife about that? It’s not the right time” (Borovkin 1861, vol. 2: 20).

The point of this scene is that in tsarist Russia it was a common thing for a priest to visit houses in his parish on big holidays, such as Christmas, for blessing. It was a courtesy of the hosts to let the priest in and welcome him with some donations, and the priest was sprinkling the holy water around the place. The state and the church were looking at the Old Believers as their regular Orthodox flock, just fallen into a heresy. In the time of Avvakum, it was quite dangerous for Old Believers to overtly profess their religion under penalty of detention and exile, therefore, they could not stop a priest from visiting homes nor turn him down by simply revealing their identity. Instead, Avvakum proposed turning normative for an Orthodox practice notions on female impurity into a weapon of the weak against “Nikon’s clergy”.

In *Fedoseevtsy* milieu, there are some more specific ritual regulations. Pavel Lednev, for instance, notes a proscription on breastfeeding. As I have explained before, all blame for marriage was put on women giving birth, and they were excommunicated, i.e., not allowed to pray or eat at the same table with congregants. Hence, these women could not breastfeed their baptized newborns, otherwise the latter would be equally excommunicated. However, this rule was not applied to women, whose relationship were not discovered (Lednev 1897a: 1–5). Council resolutions from Siberia, though, constitute a regulation not to accept a child for baptism from *nevernykh i novozhenov*⁹⁸ (infidels and newly married) (Pokrovskii 1999: 453).

⁹⁸ I left the writing of the term with low case letters as in the original, although it should be noted that *Novozheny* (newly married) was a specific group within *Fedoseevtsy* movement. Couples that were entering into the faction already being married, either in the official church or in other Old Believer groups, were referred to as *Starozheny* (previously married). Such couples had to be baptized, since *Fedoseevtsy* did not recognize external baptisms, before being accepted under a promise to get divorced, which was often just a formality and, in most cases, *Starozheny* continued living together. It was considered as a greater sin to get

Altogether, the idea of natural impurity creates a symbolic separation of space between men and women in Orthodoxy in general and in a highly conservative Old Believer tradition. This should be considered while all the cases of female leadership are studied, because the symbolic meaning of this gender division becomes a sort of a milestone in this question. In other words, despite the significance of all such cases, they remain rather in the position of exceptions. In this sense, the tradition tends to maintain a gender order, where men are superior, and women are kept aside from leadership and performance of rituals.

2.4. Semiotic ideology and gender commitments

There are a lot of men in Erzhei, they are in a brotherhood. It can be said that we [in Saryg-Sep – D.R.] don't have men. There is one, but he is [chronically – D.R.] ill. Mainly, women do everything. If there is an opportunity, then men rectify⁹⁹. If not, then women do it. A man can take a woman [for confession – D.R.], but a woman cannot take a man. Anyhow God is a man, that is why a woman is secondary. <...> In a prayer house, men stand to the right, women to the left. Women take over just now. Nevertheless, these are men who must be superior, and in the family, a man must lead. Perhaps, men are to blame themselves [in current situation – D.R.]
(Field notes, Saryg-Sep 2018, woman).

Above is an excerpt from one of my Saryg-Sep interviews. Saryg-Sep is a former Old Believer village in Kaa-Hem Tuva with just a handful of Old Believer inhabitants, mainly women. For Erzhei and other communities of Kaa-Hem, such people as in Saryg-Sep live wrongly: they buy food from stores, receive pensions, and on top of that they do not have an elder. I think it will not be an overstatement to say that Old Believers of Upper Reaches do not consider Kaa-Hem communities as belonging to their brotherhood. The Saryg-Sep community is eager to disapprove of this point of view. Taking this into account, a reflection of my Saryg-Sep interlocutor on gender order appears in a more comprehensive perspective. I shall put it in Webb Keane's terms by calling this reflection an example of Old Believer religious language, which has its commitments to certain semiotic ideologies (Keane 1997).

There is one problem in such mapping of Old Believer semiotic ideologies, i.e., a necessity to live without the Orthodox hierarchy. Regardless of the claims to preserve the unreformed Russian Orthodox Church, Old Believers had to change a lot due to that fact. Changes that have had to be made in order to protect the old ways constantly produce a sort of semiotic ambiguity. Belousov suggests that this situation could be considered as an emergency mode (contrary to operation mode): a "great need" that requires additional efforts for re-

married for baptized *Fedoseevtsy*, as these so called *Novozheny* were expelled from prayers with their congregants (See Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 199).

⁹⁹ Since *Chasovennye* do not have priests, they receive holy water as a holy communion. *Chasovennye* commonly refer to this practice by the verb 'to rectify', as the cited Saryg-Sep woman does.

configuring practices and redesigning ways for salvation (Belousov 1979: 72–73). In this sense, the semiotic process resembles charting the territory with a notice that not only space but time, too, obtain coordinates. The basic feeling of life on the verge of doomsday produces multiple versions of a universe where true priesthood existed or not, sacraments were preserved or perished, and lack of something could be compensated or canceled. The same applies to female leadership which appears, in terms of Belousov, to function in emergency mode. Belousov, of course, meant that the whole tradition had to struggle with constant systemic breaks, but compared to male institutions, female leadership required more searching for indirect ways, more efforts to make up for lack of social and material resources.

For some Old Believers, the establishment of religious practices confirm the necessity of gender division. This is how a female interlocutor of Irina Külmoja refers to a common distinction between male and female baptismal crosses, using it as an argument that men and women should be dressed differently:

Men's gear does not belong to women. We have crosses for men and women. It is not like the same goes to one and the other, the same one, no. One for men, another one for us. This is a female cross, this is what it is like, it is female (Külmoja 2007: 235).

Marja-Liisa Honkasalo points out that for many scholars a question of agency is discussed from a perspective of activity. She assumes passivity as one of the possible modes of agency (2015: 69). In the case of *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* women, this problem is not solved in a similar fashion. Free will in terms of Old Believers does not range agency against passivity or activity: humans are active beings by all means because they are free to abide by rules set up by God. To be precise, agency is defined by obedience; being amenable to godly discipline means living actively. This partially explains the reason why female leadership does not achieve the same level of institutionalization as the male one.

Besides that, there is a bigger reason for such a setup. Orthodoxy is very strict about gender roles. My quoted Saryg-Sep interlocutor mentioned a separation between men and women in a prayer house: men occupy space on the right, women on the left¹⁰⁰. This touches not only spatial positioning but hierarchical relationships too: women are inferior to men because God is a man. This does not mean that women are not considered as agents, though the idea that women have to put more effort into salvation is entailed. I had another interlocutor, this time a man from Erzhei, who attempted to describe an inferior 'nature' of women in the following manner. This is quite close to what Lawless calls a threat to fixed gender roles and, in the long run, to perception of God as an asexual male (1994: 57–59):

¹⁰⁰ Schleif reports that a similar gendered spatial orientation is applied in many European and American churches (2005: 207).

Such a mess at our services. Rule number 282, Epistle to Timothy that Paul the Apostle wrote: “I forbid women to teach and rule.” Just take a look sometimes. It’s in all books. They cannot set the tune [during the service – D.R.]. They can sing in the background, but not before a man starts. There’s another book, Typicon. It says from the beginning: If someone doesn’t follow holy fathers, he ends up in darkness. Apparently, Paul is an apostle chosen by Jesus Christ and his rules are neglected! You see, that’s how it has started, that’s how it goes <...> One man from a thousand will be saved, but one woman from a legion, from ten thousand. Why? Because Paul the Apostle forbids women to teach. But they sing in our churches. And in yours. A woman is a devil’s tool. You believe in God, you’re young, a beautiful woman starts to tempt you. And she tries to seduce you. Therefore, she drags you from praying. Then they become aware: Oh, what have I done! That is why a woman is a devil’s tool and more [of women’s souls – D.R.] will die (Field notes, Erzhei 2017a, man).

The words of my Erzhei interlocutor should be interpreted correctly. His take on women as tools of a devil was part of the broader critique of local Erzhei elders who, in his opinion, allowed women to sing in the church. Female singing used to be largely debated in Old Belief since the beginning of the 20th century (Dyannikova 2009: 84–87). Despite the fact that nowadays female singing is widespread in most factions, exclusion of women from reciting liturgical texts or performance of chants is sometimes still considered as “stricter” and therefore more appropriate (Zaitsev 2019: 33). This ambiguity towards the performance of women is what is important to note here.

The same applies to other rituals performed by women. For example, Marya Karpovna Novosadova (died in 1863), an eldress of *Pomortsy* in St. Petersburg performed many marriages in the community. She was the daughter of late Karp Novosadov, a prominent *nastavnik* in Petersburg, and that fact probably gave her much of the symbolic capital to take over her father’s role. Another reason for her service in this role might be that her father had been arrested, and the prayer house in the city was under threat of closure. Nilskii speculates that Novosadova would probably think that a punishment for a woman should not be as severe as to a man, that is why she agreed to secretly perform marriages for *Pomortsy*. Although Old Believers failed to find any proof for marriages made by women in the past, they did not object Novosadova’s authority. She became so famous that couples even travelled from other cities under her guidance (Nilskii 1869b: 41–44). The same Nilskii reports that there could be local stories when simple men and women were performing marriage rituals by a lack of consecrated elders (Nilskii 1869a: 398).

Since gender specifications are embedded in semiotic ideologies of Old Believers, they mark the boundary between the Orthodox faith and the outer, unholy world. All kinds of violations of this order may cause bigger problems. For instance, a common Old Believer opinion that women should not wear pants (i.e., male clothes) should be taken in this regard. And according to one of my Altai interlocutors, the violation of this rule does not simply make another sin but can have serious consequences in the real world. She mentioned a local

term for androgyne, *kyr*. As she put it, androgynes appear because women do not wear skirts like it was in the old days:

[How are *Nikoniani* different from Old Believers?] Well, nowadays there is no difference. [Old Believers – D.R.] used to abide by the rules. They all wore *sarafany* with “Save and Protect” woven belts. [Women – D.R.] didn’t wear neither pants nor underwear, neither in winter nor in summer. [Wasn’t it cold?] A human being gets used to everything. Nobody was sick. Now people suffer from cancer, they have erosion and whatever. They put on pants and the air doesn’t go through. A woman must ... how to say... everything must be loose there. But they pull on pants and then they have different inflammations. They also wear pants during pregnancy <...> A woman mustn’t wear pants at all. It looks like they call such women a *kyr*. [*Kyr?*] Right, there are those *kyry*, both men and women, one month a woman, one month a man. There are such people, unfortunate people. God forbid. <...> [Such person has two sexes?] Yes, two sexes (Field notes, Oktyabrskoe 2015, woman).

Another woman after being asked about the Apocalypse mentions that it is a difficult book to understand. It predicts a scary future, one of the signs of which is people dressed improperly. In this context, she points out that women in her and other villages wear pants:

[Talking about the Apocalypse, the book – D.R.] Bad times await us. It will be a terrible time. <...> People here in the village smoke, drink, dress disgracefully. Women will love men’s clothes and men women’s clothes. Awful. I was in Koksa¹⁰¹ recently. Oh dear! Even old ladies wearing pants. I am not talking about the town. They have lost human face. Nowadays everything is done against God. Nothing is done for the sake of God. People are undressed. <...> How to live in the world? It was not my thought, there used to be a woman here. She has passed away already. She used to say: “One will be wise who finds salvation in the world”. I am thinking: “How’s that? If only you hide away” (Field notes, Zamulta 2015b, woman).

This also works in the opposite direction when men refuse to comply with the divine image. Men must be bearded since they had been created so by God. The same Erzhei informant who claimed that “a woman is a devil’s tool” shared a prominent apocryphal story to illustrate how the loss of beards caused heresy in the Catholic church. It is based on the assumption that Old Belief preserved the initial form of Christianity. Old Believer men must have beards, otherwise they are not considered as Christians. Fighting for the right to wear beards had been a subject of struggle against imperial policy of westernization in Russia. Therefore, all churches in the past should have had male adherents wearing beards. The following legend explain why Catholic church stopped doing this and how this supported a heresy of angel-like humans:

¹⁰¹ Ust-Koksa, an administrative center in Mountain Altai inhabited by a mixed population, including Old Believers.

There is also the pope of Rome, a great man. The vicar of God on Earth. <...> He fell in love with one woman. He catfished her, wanted to sleep with her. She refused. Then she saw he was completely into her <...> So, she told him: If you shave your beard, I'll give myself to you. But he wanted this so desperately. Of course, he was so desperate as it was by the devil's will. <...> So, he shaved the beard, and she had no choice. <...> So, he sinned. Then he thought: What am I going to do next? I can't leave my holy orders behind, neither can I end up without a beard. Everybody has a beard, only I don't have one. So, he was thinking, thinking, and then made a cry to his subordinates. Well, tell the people that the pope is seriously ill. No visits. And then he started feeding two doves, from the ears. First from a hand, then ears. He put some grains there. Then he pretended to recover and took the floor with the new teaching. People were like: Hey, Pope has no beard! So, he started to teach: <...> The Holy Spirit came and told me in the shape of a dove ... So, those doves appeared. He trained them somehow, with a swipe of a hand ... So, look, they tell me [Pope continued – D.R.], while those doves were pecking grains, that we should be as angels, without beards. Angels do not wear beards. That is why we have to be the same. So, we shouldn't have it. We should be as pure as angels. So, this is the Catholic teaching, they have been shaving for a long time (Field notes, Erzhei 2017a, man)¹⁰².

Aleksandr Belousov, though, shared another variant of this legend, where a woman, on the contrary, remained true to the tradition. This legend was recorded in Prichudie. A woman turned out to be testing a man for his devotion to the old ways:

It was started by some women. Some man was going to one woman for about a thousand years¹⁰³. The woman told him: "If you shave your beard, I will love you, if not, then I won't". And when that man shaved his beard, the woman didn't accept him and said: "You are a traitor!" Orthodoxy¹⁰⁴ was started by him (Belousov 1980: 134).

In this sense, Old Believer women do not tend to change the system. If Western scholarship has developed a huge debate in the subject of women's ministry (see Heeney 1983; Macy 2000; Rossi and Otranto 1991; Tkacz 2006 and many others), then in Old Belief, as far as I know, this question has never been discussed at length. Western authors usually appeal to examples present in ancient and early medieval documents to prove the point of view that initially, in the early church, women were allowed to be preachers, priests, or even bishops. Some of them are bringing examples of individual struggle of women to find their proper place in the church, whose desire to apply to ministry is explained

¹⁰² This legend corresponds to a statement made by P. Melnikov, that Old Believers assured that shaving was introduced by the Pope Formosus (816–896), by the request of a woman whom he wanted to make his concubine (Melnikov 1910: 267).

¹⁰³ This expression means "for a long time".

¹⁰⁴ The storyteller meant 'Nikon's church' that tolerated shaved men, not the entire Orthodoxy.

in terms of a call, i.e., a divine call (Grenz and Kjesbo 1995: 13–15). Archival documents show that there used to be a grassroots movement in the Russian Orthodox Church for restoration of the ancient order of deaconesses (a lower rank in clergy) (Bisha et al. 2002: 283–286). There used to be women in Old Belief whose service was to a great extent equal to a male one, but these were idiosyncratic exceptions, not even local. These exceptions were based on authority, but they never shattered the system and died out together with a person. This can be said, for example, about *nastavnitsy* in Malye Kolki *Fedo-seevtsy* community, who used to serve as female *nasavniki* and were acting as baptizers for a long time. Them practicing baptism had never been questioned but in general, Estonian Old Believers deny the fact that women were allowed to do that.

2.5. Female Space of Old Belief

Six out of eleven communities in Estonia are run by men nowadays. There used to be time when there was only one male elder who had to visit the whole country once in a year. Nevertheless, this situation has been considered inappropriate. One Riga elder once told me that women interfere with community affairs too much, insisting on having their own point of view on things that are supposed to be cared by men. Unlawful, in terms of faith, interference of a woman with community policy often served as an argument against some of the elders (Khristoforova 2016a, Paert 2003: 79, Rogers 2009: 84). Another Estonian Old Believer shared a story that the image of Estonia as a female-dominated country was plotted by some Latvian elder who wanted to get a grip on the situation in the new country. So, he made this up to find support from his community (and eventually failed, because nobody believed that the actual state of affairs was so bad in Estonia). Along with that, many studies of Prichudie argue that women represented the core of the Estonian community (Plaat 2005). Plaat figured out the community concern about extinction of religious tradition “due to the death of older generation and elderly *batyushki*” (ibid.: 23).

The debates around gender representation of Estonian Old Believers show one simple fact: when women run communities, it is often considered as if a tradition was in decline. As if those were the last days of Old Orthodoxy in Estonia. Increasing number of male *nastavnik*, in its turn, signifies going back to ‘normal’. On the other hand, the number of female-run communities is high enough to influence the actual practice both in Siberia and Estonia. This causes tension between male-dominant space and female agency.

By leadership, first of all, I mean complex responsibilities that include conducting religious services and rituals. Male *nastavnik* leads the ceremony with the help of some other people from his parish who read or sing other parts of a mass. Besides that, he is responsible for children’s baptism, marriage, and funeral rites, as well as for other occasional minor services. Another important obligation of a *nastavnik* is hearing the confessions of the villagers. In *Chaso-*

vennye faction confession and communion are merged in a ritual called *isprava*, *ispravlenie* (redemption) for people severely ill and risking death. Facing death, they seek to be redeemed, therefore they are looking forward to absolution and holy communion from *nastavnik*. This last ritual is important in terms of posthumous commemoration in the community: only redeemed late parishioners can be commemorated in public prayers, contrary to private prayers offered up by relatives. For the sake of the context, I shall add that *Chasovennye* do not obtain communion in its traditional form with transubstantiation of bread and wine, which are replaced by the so-called Great Water. According to their beliefs, all the water in natural sources becomes blessed on the eve of January 19 (old style January 6) the feast of the Epiphany. To make it suitable for communion, this blessed water must be ‘diluted’, i.e., mixed with the remains of the previous year’s Great Water during the communal service. *Pomortsy*, who do not affirm Eucharist as a ritual that can be performed by the laity, regard confession as the most important ritual for posthumous commemoration. For *Pomortsy* in Estonia, a single confession performed once in three years before death suffice for a person to be publicly commemorated (Kuvaitseva 2017: 35). All these rituals are supposed to be conducted by a male *nastavnik*, but quite often he is substituted by a woman.

Tale of Miraculous Events / Patericon of the Urals and Siberia, a writing of Siberian Old Believers that I vastly analyze in Chapter V, provides an example, that does not fit to the usual picture of female space in Old Belief. This work includes a short story about mother Vera, whose grave was situated near Miass (a city in the Urals) and was annually venerated on May 12 (Povest I, 61). According to it, Vera settled on the island Turgoyak, where she was later buried, in 1835, i.e., that she lived about 100 years before the story was composed and was one of the founders of monastic tradition in Old Belief. What was special about mother Vera, that a man came to her and asked for her blessing to be an elder “of his house”, i.e., to serve as *nastavnik* for his family as he lived among strangers and he did not have an elder around. Mother Vera asked him to wait till morning and told him a parable about priests who were persecuted for the Old Faith. Upon finishing the parable, Vera “blessed him to teach in his own house” (ibid.: 61–62). The authors of the story tried to keep the element of reality by providing a reference to an eyewitness:

Brother Aleksandr Grigorievich told us about mother Vera: “I heard” – he said – “from my father-in-law Filipp, who told me the following”. “My” – he [father-in-law of brother Aleksandr Grigorievich – D.R.] said – “grandfather Ioan <...> decided to ask mother Vera if she would agree to make him an elder of his house <...> (ibid.: 61).

However, it should be noted that this story was created according to the patterns of the hagiographical genre. Mother Vera, as most of the characters in this tale, is attributed with features of a saint (see Zolnikova 2014).

It is quite common for Old Believer women to be responsible for administrative and property issues in their communities. This can be found both in Prichudie and Siberia. For example, a woman who used to conduct services in Tallinn was also responsible for administrative issues. When a male *nastavnik* was trained, she became occupied only with those issues (Field notes, Tallinn 2020, woman). I assume that one of the reasons for that is the semiotic status of this kind of work. Rituals are semiotically loaded, that is why interference of female agency may cause frictions. That is why cases of interference are either forgotten and in rare cases can be found in historical documents or become a part of the legendary history of a faction. At the same time, it makes work performed by women crucial for supporting the ritual system of a community. For instance, one of my interlocutors in Sizim, Tuva, works as a secretary and accountant of a local man, an Old Believer, at the gas station (Field notes, Sizim 2018b, woman). He himself belongs to the brotherhood¹⁰⁵ and does not sign documents himself.

Although women in Old Belief face restrictions regarding the conduct of religious service, they are quite familiar with its order, singing, and reciting practices. They can also transfer this knowledge to younger practitioners:

[Was the service familiar to you since childhood?] I knew the [Church Slavic] alphabet since childhood but I became a real practitioner only after my father's death. I got a firm hold on that, my soul stretched to it, and I started to study carefully. N.J. helped me quite a lot and Ye.K. Probably you have heard about Ye.K? [I know who N.J. is but not Ye.K.]. Well, N. is young, we are of the same age. Ye. will be 87 or 88 in August. She drew my attention to stresses [in service books – D.R.]. Even now I hear mistakes when a person reads incorrectly. [Could you tell me how you studied it?] I went to Ye. not very often, maybe once a week. I studied with N.J. maybe twice a week. Other women also attended but they do not come now. There were four or five people at that time, but they are not in the choir now. [Was it a study group?] Yes, she taught us all the time, corrected us. This is how it worked. [Why did she teach you?] Because before that she had learnt from P.B., who was very literate in our area. She was a very literate person at her time. She learnt from her because she had good knowledge <...> [Is that right that women taught literacy here more than men?] Sure, N.D. now teaches at school, she works with kids and here in the Old Believer children's camp (Field notes, Bolshie Kolki 2021, woman).

2.6. Genealogies of factions

Although religious lifeways of Old Believers are considered as unofficial, and therefore noninstitutionalized¹⁰⁶, some patterns of institutionalization can be traced through. Here I mostly mean normative documents, such as resolutions of councils, and spiritual literature written by Old Believer authors. Thanks to

¹⁰⁵ See section 3.3. *Chashka as a social category* for further context of this term.

¹⁰⁶ See Roy Robson's view on Old Belief as a popular religion (Robson 1995).

works by Siberian archaeographers, Nikolai Pokrovskii and Natalia Zolnikova in particular, a prominent text corpus of *Chasovennye* Old Believers has been published since 1990s. Juxtaposed with archival documents and my field notes, those materials shall highlight fluctuations of female leadership in *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* factions in Siberia and Estonia respectively. In the first place, I focus on *Chasovennye* because the corpus of their texts is available. However, I provide multiple examples on *Pomortsy* situation, too.

Discussion on female leadership in Russian Old Belief often misses a point that women's roles as community leaders or educators have never been established as a norm. As my interlocutors often explain, women who gained those male responsibilities appeared mostly locally and occasionally, i.e., unofficially even by Old Believer standards. Such exceptionalism is not something unusual for Old Believers, who often introduce changes on the pretext of need (see Belousov 1979). Having been matched to exception, female leadership wins its grounds by means different from the male one. Albeit female leadership could not be simply juxtaposed to the male one, it is still the fact that women are active practitioners who influence the current situation and produce changes in the semiotic ideologies of the group.

Babushka Monya was a female *nastavnik* in Verkh-Ujmon of Altai until she died some time ago¹⁰⁷. Her granddaughter, with whom I was talking about the local Old Believer tradition, mentioned that babushka Monya used to be an active person who, being a calf herd, was sent as a 'deputy' to VDNKh¹⁰⁸ in Soviet times before she became a leader of her community. I would not take it as a coincidence that the two greatest achievements of hers – vibrant working life and faithful service to her religious community – are aligned in one sentence. The granddaughter's story depicts Monya as an iconic type of woman responsible for religious services in the priestless community. She resisted receiving a pension, as well as taking any medications in spite of being seriously ill, a practice common for Siberian *Chasovennye*. But the most remarkable of her description was that she baptized many local children. As the granddaughter put it:

"She hadn't studied this [i.e., how to conduct services and perform rituals – D.R.], she learned everything on her own <...> A lot of children were baptized. People speak warmly about her; she didn't turn away from anyone. Of course, it was a hard job, she had to pray for everyone being baptized for a great while". (Field notes, Verkh-Uimon 2015b, woman).

It did not come quite clear from the story what duties babushka Monya exactly had as a *nastavnik* except for baptisms. Being gravely ill, she had to make certain preparations including the blessing of other members of her community

¹⁰⁷ Unfortunately, it was not specified, when Monya served in this position and when exactly she died, however, it happened in the lifetime of my interlocutor, her granddaughter.

¹⁰⁸ *Vystavka Dostizhenii Narodnogo Khozyaistva* (Exhibition of Achievements of National Economy).

to make them hold her funeral reception. Those blessings were not even about the ritual itself but were aimed at minor things like washing the dishes or serving the tables. But even they could not be performed without the blessing. There was also an intriguing detail in that story: before Monya died she was waiting for someone to give away her duties (*sdat nastavnichestvo*). I take into account that Monya's granddaughter could not remember precisely what this procedure was about. However, it is more likely that it was a service called *isprava* which I briefly mentioned above: she was supposed to confess and receive a sip of the Great Water to be purged from sins before she died. I think so just because such a procedure as giving away of *nastavnik*'s duties to a successor does not exist in *Chasovennye* tradition (though I would not exclude that in certain circumstances it could work on the local level). Nevertheless, I mention this vague report to bring up an important issue of succession of *nastavniki* in the Old Belief, which is also known as genealogy (*rodoslovnaya*). In this case, genealogy has nothing in common with consanguineous relationships but stands for the historical background of a faction. Justification of all rituals and dogmas within an Old Believer group requires drawing a clear line of succession from the true Orthodox Russian clergy to current holders of *nastavnik* posts. Most Old Believer factions consider bishop Pavel Kolomensky as the last bishop who pleaded against the reforms of patriarch Nikon and therefore resisted Nikonian heresy. According to the Old Believer lore, he managed to bless some of his adherents to keep true faith and establish communities of faithful Christians. This line of succession is acknowledged in many *Chasovennye* texts, such as *History of Old Devoutness, Where It Prospered From*. As a rule, these texts refer to the foundation of Orthodoxy in the 10th century by Prince Vladimir of Kyiv, who is considered in Russian historiography as a baptizer of Russia.

The root of devoutness: Vladimir, Prince of Kyiv, who accepted the faith from Greeks, was baptized in Tsargrad. Being in Kyiv, he baptized the Slavs. He affirmed the Christian faith. And the faith remained from Vladimir the Prince until Nikon the Patriarch unscathed and imperishable. When Nikon arrived – he spoiled the Christian faith and overthrew orders and regulations of fathers. Two bishops did not bend to Nikon's offenses: Markel and Pavel Kolomenskii, and two priests: Distifey and Feodosey. They liturgized and served the needs of the world. Feodosey lived on the Don and he had *inok*¹⁰⁹ Kornilii in obedience for seven years; that's from father Kornilii who assured us on sacred secrets. Priest Feodosei redeemed priest Sofronii and priest Sofronii redeemed priest Nikifor, and priest Nikifor redeemed priest Iov, and Iov redeemed Yakov <...> (Pokrovskii 1999: 31).

¹⁰⁹ One of the ranks of monks.

Another writing, *Genealogy of Chasovennye of Trans-Urals* created by *cher-norizets*¹¹⁰ Valentin not later than 1879 in Yushkova village of Tyumen County¹¹¹ traces succession line back to the starting point of Christianity:

From Jerusalem and Christ Our Lord himself. Christ had chosen apostles and ordained them and blessed them. And in Jerusalem Christ put the first bishop Jacob in charge, Christ himself blessed and ordained him. In the same vein, apostles were ordaining bishops and presbyters and sending them to places and blessing them (Pokrovskii 1999: 54).

Pomortsy made similar attempts to find approvals for their Christian background. For example, decisions of a council held in 1805 in Tyumen open with a statement of loyalty to ancient adherents of Old Orthodoxy. This document titled *Paragraphs of Tyumen* feature Pavel of Kolomna as the one who established the priestless movement.

In the summer of 7313 (1805 common era – D.R.) since the creation of the world, on January 2. On behalf of all Christians who assembled in the town of Tyumen at one God-loving man's place we inquired each other in a talk based on the Holy Scripture about Church dogmatism and old-time customs. In accordance with those who abided by Fedoseev *soglasie* altogether we accepted the assertion to adhere to ancient martyrs and teachers of Church who lost their lives at hands of Nikon and his neophiles for standing the old Church piety. At first, we'll show: blessed archiereus God's man Pavel of Kolomna. That one standing for the name of Jesus Christ and Old Church Orthodoxy was sent to confinement in the Paleostrov monastery of Olonets county. Being there for some time he taught the peoples freely and assured them to abide by words of old fathers and care for piety. He was a disciple of holy fathers in everything, and he baptized members from the Great Russian Church with the true baptism. He also commanded not to accept newly ordained priests <...> and to be guided along the evangelical path, not to receive from those (priests ordained after Nikon's reforms) a single sacrament <...> (Pokrovskii 1999: 451–452).

Chasovennye and *Pomortsy* trace their history basically to the same figures, including Pavel of Kolomna. The only difference between the two approaches is that in the case of *Chasovennye* Pavel approved the acceptance of priests by the laity, while in the version of *Pomortsy* he, on the contrary, totally compromised priestly practice. However, both histories miss women as participants in line of succession. That means, they were not supposed to take over leadership, but somehow female *nastavniki* appeared. Remarkably, *Tale of Miraculous Events*, the only text that focuses on the background of the ordination of women does not suggest any clear suggestions. Although it traces not the genealogy of

¹¹⁰ The lowest rank in the monastic hierarchy.

¹¹¹ This place is situated in close proximity to Avraamiy island, one of the most venerated sacred places of *Chasovennye* (Pokrovskii 1999: 622–623).

nastavniki but nuns, it gives an idea of how representation in texts justifies and institutionalizes male practices over female.

We do not know an old Genealogy of eldresses, no old manuscripts about their genealogy have reached us. We know the stories about the last eldresses, since we heard from currently living, and since eldresses mother Flina and mother Anatoliya saw them themselves and wrote the stories down on our request. We, in turn, collected it from their manuscripts and the story of mother Akinfa (Pokrovskii 2014: 171).

That said, there is a specific genre of texts in Old Belief genealogy that traces a historic sequence of the imposition of hands to justify the Orthodox origin of a faction. Genealogy is not only a historical background of actual Old Believer practices. It also refers to the ritual of blessing, which is supposedly related to chirotony in the church hierarchy. That means, the Old Believer *nastavnik* cannot be simply elected by the community: he must receive a blessing from his predecessor, which includes some elements of a clerical ceremony of chirotony. Therefore, a question arises: when women become *nastavniki*, do they establish their own network? The answer seems to be negative. I can bring the example of Kseniya Anufrieva who was interrogated by local authorities in 1862 for baptizing her grandchildren in the old rite. Anufrieva declared that she had been told to do so by her mother (RGADA F.1431. Op. 1. D. 3716: 2ob). I suggest that Anufrieva was not simply told to perform baptism for the children in her family, but it was a parental blessing that includes some sort of commandment: guidance for the child's life. As a rule, parental blessings are taken very seriously in Old Belief. That is why in the 19th century the oppressed devotees often addressed their parents' will to explain the reluctance to official Russian Orthodoxy. It was common for the Old Believers to claim that they followed this faith just because their ancestors had held it, but they could not break up with this heritage. Anufrieva could employ the same scheme of negotiation. However, her case reveals the fact that women could have their own ways of transferring valuable positions. Unfortunately, this Uralic case is the only example of the kind known to me. I should mention, too, that Kseniya Anufrieva was limited to acting within her family.

Interestingly, Old Believer hermitages created more opportunities for women's institutions. Nuns of *Chasovennye* faction hail from the female line of succession. The ritual of dedication to monks or nuns is called *nakrytiye* (covering) as it includes veiling the body with a monk's habit:

We can't bless monks ourselves <...> He spends six week in isolation without light or anything in a separate hut. He is only given food, this is it. Thus, it takes six weeks. Then, they probably read *otritsanie*¹¹², same as one is accepted to the brotherhood. They should do it the same way. A similar ritual (Field notes, Erzhei 2017b, man).

¹¹² Lit. denial. Prayers that are read by a person before joining the Old Believer community.

Nuns perform covering themselves, although they confess to abbots of male hermitages. Same as they are usually redeemed by men, but sometimes this order rolls over. *Tale of Miraculous Events* reports that in 1942 one of the Dubches monks, father Mina, was redeemed by mother Mastridiia (Povest I: 157). This was a casual mention, a matter of trivial fact in the context of life and death of father Mina. Thereby, though other cases are not revealed in the story, it presumably was not considered as something extraordinary.

Quite often women in Old Believer settlements turned over some occasional services, like praying for a deceased person, praying “for health”, and even baptizing children. Old Believers were moving fast across the land, acquiring new territories, inhabiting new places, or joining the existing villages. However, the number of *nastavniki* did not change accordingly. They had to operate throughout vast provinces with widely scattered settlements. Therefore, to keep up with the rising needs of their people, *nastavniki* had to choose deputies, including women, who were literate and experienced enough to perform certain rituals on the ground. At the time when I talked to Monya’s granddaughter, a woman from a neighboring village of Ust-Koksa baptized Old Believer children in Verkh-Uymon and probably some other places. It just so happened that the male Verkh-Uymon *nastavnik* could not carry out his duty because of a serious illness. Consequently, that Ust-Koksa woman was his replacement in terms of baptisms, but nothing more. I presume that Monya herself had been a similar type simply remembered as a female *nastavnik*, who obviously performed baptisms as her principal duty. It is just a matter of fact that the replacement came to be a woman since all available men were actually considered as inappropriate (which in this very case and most similar situations is described in terms of literacy). Here, I elaborate using the example of the ‘grey zone’ of the Tuvan Old Belief: *Chasovennye* communities of Kaa-Hem.

The communities I am referring to are organized in a way that is not typical of the region as a whole, which results from the shattering experiences they went through in Soviet times. These settlements were founded at the beginning of the 20th century by Old Believers, so they were predominantly inhabited by them. Soviet anti-religious policy had a greater impact on them compared to settlements in Upper Enisey, where Old Believers had more opportunities to keep up with religious commitments due to its situation in a mountain and deep taiga region. Therefore, Old Believers of Kaa-Hem were forced to abandon their religious ways and dedicate themselves more to secular life. Eventually, it led to marriages outside the group, which were common when the communities had either ceased to exist or were well hidden. Some of these communities have been restored nowadays, consisting mainly of women, whose number is nevertheless very thin. The proportion of women whose spouses are not members of the denomination is still high.

The problem is that such ‘cross marriages’ go against the rules of *Chasovennye* for memberships: both spouses must belong to one faction and perform a proper marriage ceremony, blessed by *nastavnik* and parents, to be considered as part of the community. Nowadays communal worship is not restricted

anymore, but the parishioners do not have the opportunity to correct the facts of their Soviet curriculum vitae. On the other hand, knowledge, and experiences of such women are invaluable in terms of conducting services, reading prayers, singing, i.e., what is considered as literacy in terms of Old Believers. In one such case known to me, it turned out that an ‘improperly married’ woman knew the order of the services better than anyone else. She had to obtain the Krasnoyarsk preceptors’ blessing in order to correct the old women of the community at the services. Interestingly, she could not apply to her brothers and sisters in faith in Upper Enisey. That would be a wise choice due to the proximity. Unfortunately, Upper Enisey Old Believers do not recognize those of Kaa-Hem, unlike *nastavniki* in Krasnoyarsk. However, in spite of the blessing, she still cannot be accepted completely as a member of the praying sisterhood because of her improper marriage. So, she does not pray at the same time as the rest.

In these communities, the situation regarding the Great Water is problematic because without the preceptor’s blessing it cannot be ‘diluted’ and kept during the year. They have to apply to their co-religionists in the Krasnoyarsk Krai both for their blessing and for the water itself:

They have this water that was handed down when there were priests in Russia. It was running out among them. [...] it seems to have even sort of evaporated [...] We went to [Yuzhnoye – D.R.]. There is a very big brotherhood there. There are very few unbelievers [...]. They poured the water into this flagon for us. We asked for it, and they gave it to us. But for some reason, we don’t receive the little water¹¹³. It’s not our custom. (Field notes, Kyzyl 2018b, woman).

Why then would female deputies be called *nastavniki*? I suggest it might occur because of the misunderstanding of correct terminology or be derived from the local dialect. Monya’s granddaughter admitted that she was not familiar enough with the nuances of *Chasovenneye* religious life. By the same token, non-Old Believer locals tend to call Old Believer elders the priests. It does not mean that women could not be called *nastavniki* at all – it seems that the example of Estonian usage of the term *batka* (father) refutes the argument of misunderstanding. However, one should distinguish a title acquired by a woman in the community and a reference to the functionality she acts for. In the second case, women perform only specific roles like ‘baptizer’ or ‘leader of communal services’.

¹¹³ The little water, or Savior’s water is consecrated on the feast of the Procession of the Cross (the First Feast of the Savior, August 14). This water is not used for communion but for purifying ‘defiled’ vessels at homes. In the Krasnoyarsk krai the little water is also used for purifying foodstuffs bought in the shops (see Chapter III for more details on purification of vessels and food).

2.7. The Gospel

When I describe church service, I often refer to some texts that should be read during it. Some of them have a particular importance, namely, these are the Gospel Book and the Epistle Book. According to the established order, a certain Gospel as well as a certain part of it should be read during the service. Same goes for the Epistle Book. However, in Estonia it is prohibited for women to read or even touch those books. This creates a huge problem for congregations without men who would be able to recite those texts. Some of the women claim that they have never opened the Gospel, albeit by moving it around while cleaning the prayer house:

Basically, we couldn't even touch the Gospel, we only have to when we tidy up, well, somebody has to move the book from place to place, but reading it, no I have never opened it (Field notes, Bolshie Kolki 2021, woman).

Only in Malye Kolki women “dared”, as a young male *nastavnik* put it in the interview, to read the Epistle Book on their own. However, they were praying ‘17 bows’ as a replacement for not reading the Gospel and as a sign of humility. The 17 bows mean 17 short ‘Jesus’ prayers’. The Jesus prayer consists of just one line (*Gospodi, pomiluy*¹¹⁴) and is followed by bow to the ground (that is why this prayer is called ‘a bow’). This practice used to be customary for several communities in Estonia. For example, in Bolshie Kolki Old Believers were also praying ‘17 bows’ when the service was led by a woman called Yevdokiia. Currently this congregation has a male *nastavnik*, therefore, he reads the Gospel Book himself. In other places, women were reciting *Credo*, which is known in Church Slavic as *Veruyu* (I believe):

Well, it is because women are not allowed to read the Gospel and somewhere they just pray *Lord, have mercy on me*, somewhere *Credo*, and we always read *Credo*. When we had *batyushka*, we had the Gospel, our *batyushka* was good at reciting both the Gospel and the Epistle, so that his reading was clear (Field notes, Voronja 2021, woman).

The idea of such substitution was rather in asking for collective forgiveness from God for the absence of Gospel recitals. In fact, one of the most important moments in Orthodox liturgy is when the Gospel is read out. It is necessary to ‘hear the reading’ of this book as it is considered ‘useful’ for one’s soul. However, some of my informants recall that the substitutional practice was disapproved by the authority of St. Petersburg *Pomortsy* center:

When we didn't have *batyushkas* we prayed not 40 but 17 bows instead of that [reading the Gospel – D.R.]. In *Piter* we learnt that it wasn't necessary to pray them, it doesn't go for the good (Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman).

¹¹⁴ Lord, have mercy on me.

Thanks to Marina Kuvaitseva, who recorded Varvara, an eldresses from Malye Kolki¹¹⁵, it is possible to quote her reflecting on other books that are forbidden for women to touch:

When *batyushka*¹¹⁶ was hearing [confession – D.R.] before, he asked for all the sins. But I read. I said I will read only *Skitskoe Pokaianie*¹¹⁷, but I won't read the big one, which is meant for *batyushka*, where you ask, what is your sin, and you will reply. I read *Skitskoe Pokaianie*, the common one, because I am a woman, but I won't take the *Book of Needs*. And they say: "Well, it doesn't matter, we will come anyway. This time I had 45 people at once <...> (Kuvaitseva 2017: 43).

In this case, Varvara was referring to a *Book of Needs* or *Potrebnik* in Russian. *Potrebnik* is basically a huge instruction book for a priest on how to conduct rituals. It is commonly used by elders both by Siberian *Chasovennye* and Estonian *Pomortsy* and is quite often assigned with a high sacred status. For instance, I have been told that only a consecrated person, i.e., *nastavnik*, is allowed to open *Potrebnik*, because one needs to be spiritually ready to deal with it. Eldresses of Malye Kolki (at least, one of them) decided that she would not break the rule, although she was not allowed to hear confessions either. I can only assume that she opted to bend a rule by substituting a book to make the ritual¹¹⁸ more feminine and, therefore, not to challenge the existing ideologies and hierarchies by her actions. *Skitskoe Pokaianie*¹¹⁹, from this point of view, seemed safer.

Similarly, Kuvaitseva provides a quote from an interview with a Mustvee woman, who thinks women are not allowed to use *kadilo* (an incense burner) because of their inferior nature:

We don't have *batya* in *molenna*. No *batya*! And now it is a huge sin, I am not supposed to censor with *kadilo*, but there's no one to do it here, I censor with *kadilo*. I lit icon lamps, candles. *Kadilo* can only be touched either by *batya* or by an unmarried widow. A woman is not even allowed, regardless of who she is because a woman is believed to be dirtier than a man. Eve seduced Adam – a woman is a worse sinner than a man. But since we don't have *batya* now, one woman serves as *batya* now (ibid.: 55).

¹¹⁵ I mention Varvara for the first time in section 1.9. Since she, unfortunately, passed away before I could access her, Kuvaitseva's materials are extremely helpful.

¹¹⁶ Here, Varvara certainly meant an elder, i.e., a male *nastavnik*.

¹¹⁷ *Monastic Repentance* – an order for a solo confession, originally meant for hermits. It is known in Russia since the 15th century.

¹¹⁸ Here, I mean a sequence of actions that constitute a ritual. Confession is, for sure, a sacrament.

¹¹⁹ Although confession with *Skitskoe Pokaianie* seems to be common for priestless Old Believers (at least, I have heard about its usage in Siberia and seen actual copies in elders' libraries), it is sometimes considered as problematic because it contains rather detailed questions about forbidden sexual practices. From this regard, it can lead a repentant to think about these sins they have not committed yet rather than preventing from doing them.

The usage of *Skitskoe Pokaianie* in Malye Kolki community is not coincidental since this order has a deep background in Russian Orthodox tradition. Aleksandr Almazov argues that an order of *Skitskoe Pokaianie* appeared before *Raskol* within Russian Orthodoxy in the 15th century and was commonly used as a means of more thorough preparation for the confession by monks, clergy, and lay people before the introduction of the print, i.e., before the first half of the 17th century, when the first Russian church service books were printed without this order (Almazov 1894: 112–114). As Almazov further develops his argument, when *Skitskoe Pokaianie* was left aside, it remained only in Old Believer practice, where it transformed into “a viable replacement of a regular confession under special circumstances in the absence of the priest” (ibid. 1894: 115). Apparently, the lack of a suitable man in Malye Kolki was solved with a measures inherent in Old Believer tradition.

2.8. Hearing confessions

Hearing confessions is one of the most crucial practices in the Old Belief because it defines belonging to the community. Estonian *Pomortsy* call the procedure *sdavat grekhi* (give away sins) and for Siberian *Chasovennye* it can be either that or *hodit na duh* (lit. go in the spirit). There are several occasions when Old Believers perform this sacrament. First of all, it is embodied into the cycle of ritual calendar, since members of the community are supposed to make a confession from one to four times in a year, usually during four Orthodox fasts. Second, it goes along with joining the community. For example, *Chasovennye* in Altai do not participate actively in religious life until a certain age. Usually, they join after retirement, when they need to give away sins before being allowed to pray with the rest of the community. Finally, it is important to confess before dying. It affects postmortem commemoration practices, as I have already mentioned in this chapter. Old Believers’ attitude towards commemoration adheres to the Eastern Christian views when mentioning the name of a late person on certain dates in collective prayers is extremely important for his or her soul. That is a sign of a proper death after which the soul goes to heaven, therefore, it can be commemorated. In other cases, performing a public prayer violates godly rules.

This is how Old Believer women describe the process of hearing confession:

Well, it happens that you need to get free before death. You need to go to repentance, as they say. [Do they give away sins?] Well, sins... old women, who pray, they are summoned and ... well, you must tell all the sins that you have committed during life. She must listen to it and then to be quiet, she can't tell anyone. [Is it done once in a life?] Well. [In a life?] Well, by the end of the life. It is done by the end of the life (Field notes, Tikhonkaia 2015, woman).
It is bad to die without confession <...> You need to find a good person, who would agree to hear you <...> Our confession is *Skitskoe Pokayanie* [monastic

repentance]. It is read by one person; others bow and ask for repentance. (Field notes, Saryg-Sep 2018, woman).

Making a confession becomes an individual responsibility. *Chasovennye* believe it should be performed regularly so that a dying person can take “the holy sacraments” (the Great Water). For *Pomortsy* in Estonia a confession made once in three years would suffice to pray for a person collectively.

It is quite important who can hear confession from whom. As a rule, confession is considered as a sacrament that can be performed only by a man. At least, women can accept only women. Of course, this rule gets broken when there is no other option. As Kuvaitseva shows, in Estonia where the number of male *nastavniki* is relatively low, *Pomortsy* Old Believers used to gather once in a year for the so-called collective confession. *Nastavnik* was touring the region before Easter by visiting prayer house by prayer house, where parishioners of all genders were expected to come to the prayer and confess simultaneously in the same room. According to Orthodox tradition, he recites all sins aloud from the Book of Needs, while the confessants have to bow each time when they are guilty. Normally, this procedure is performed face-to-face by an elder with an individual. For collective confessions, they would also try to accept men and women on separate days, if only they had enough time during the tour (Kuvaitseva 2017: 33–49). As I pointed out in the previous chapter, in Malye Kolki village it was customary for women to hear confessions regardless of the gender of the confessant. Those were also collective events performed by a female leader of the community.

When an eldress has to hear a confession, she takes an order other than men use, the so-called *Monastierial Repentance* (Kuvaitseva 2017: 34–35)¹²⁰. Men, in their turn, employ a confession order for the laity. It is quite surprising that female *nastavniki* consider this demanding order which is practically designed for people who took tonsure. Probably, it is somehow connected to the idea of women’s chastity. However, *Pomortsy* women are not the only Old Believers who do it this way (Pokrovskii 2008: 233). *Monastierial Repentance* is also commonly used for making confession solely, i.e., when no elders are available. It is remarkable that the text which might be possibly read without *nastavnik*, is, at the same time, used by female *nastavniki*. That said, although the leadership of women in Old Belief is quite common, it is still considered as an exception from the rule. I argue that this state of exceptionalism exists more or less intentionally. Replacement of male texts by ‘semantical’ equivalents, ordination which exists in a form of parental blessing, and many other things actually constitute loopholes in a semantically very strict system of Orthodox order,

¹²⁰ I cannot, however, confirm this claim by Kuvaitseva with my field materials, because I was told that hearing confessions was uncommon for female leaders in Estonia, and the only community in Malye Kolki where it allegedly was performed has already moved away from this practice far enough to forget such details.

especially in the adaptation of Old Believers. Further, I will show how this rule of exceptionalism works in terms of semiotic ideologies of Old Belief.

2.9. Summary of Chapter II

As I show in this chapter, female representation has problematic for Old Believers from symbolical and practical point of view. On one hand, there are marturesses or female founders who are venerated in various ways. Their gravesites are regularly visited (e.g., mother Vera from *Patericon*, writings are dedicated to them (e.g., Morozova and multiple women from *Patericon*), they are orally commemorated (Monya of Verkh-Uimon). On the other hand, female nature is often perceived as impure and Christian teaching is often interpreted by Old Believers to the detriment of women. Therefore, when it comes to the practice, i.e., when women can and have to take over traditionally male duties such as church services or rituals like baptism, it does not lead to overhauling of existing norms and regulations.

Regarding this, female leadership looks like exception within exceptions, if we except Aleksandr Belousov's metaphor of a pretext of need as a driver of changes in Old Believer tradition. Women can be leaders and invent their own ways to bend the rules as it has happened in Malye Kolki or in Varnja in Prichudie. In case if men take their positions back, female heritage is appreciated but it is not considered as norm, as the same example of Malye Kolki demonstrates.

Another example of how tricky female leadership can be, is an attitude to blessings. Male blessing constitutes a faction itself and legitimizes its practice, while female remains almost untraced and forgotten. Archival documents show many forms of blessings that had an establishment of certain ritual forms as a result, such as female baptism of children under the blessing of an older woman in the family. However, this remains a very limited, local story. In case of *Chasovennye*, a woman needs a male blessing to become a baptizer, and in case of Estonian *Pomortsy*, she is not officially allowed to do it. Although Old Believer writings demonstrate examples of how a woman can bless a man to become an elder, this also does not mean an established tradition. Mother Vera, who did this according to *Patericon*, was attributed with features of saint, who only had power and rights to do that. Besides that, it was also a local story, since the man sought eldership exclusively for his own family.

CHAPTER III. MICROPRACTICES IN SUSTAINING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

I wound up as a guest at Tanyusha and Dmitrii's [a wife and husband – D.R.]. Andryushkino¹²¹ is listed as a hunting ground. All its inhabitants are registered in other settlements. Andryushkino was founded 36 years ago¹²². Dmitrii was born in Andryushkino. When we¹²³ entered [Dmitrii's house], we sat down for a chat. Stepan asked, if the hosts had enough tableware: "We are all from the world (*My vse mirskie*)", he said and left the house to call the others. Only the hosts and I remained. I was called to sit down for dinner. "Well, I also moved to your brotherhood (*Da ya tozhe v vashu bratiyu syekhal*)", Dmitrii said to me, "It happened at the wedding (*Na svadbe eshche*)". I commented: "It is very difficult not to mess up at a wedding (*Na svad'be slozhno, chtoby vse ne smeshalis*)". Dmitrii replied: "Those who are stronger, they keep up, while people like me... Drink with that guy, with another guy... (*Kto pokrepche, te derzhatsya, a takie kak ya... S tem vypei, s drugim...*)". The hosts started looking for tableware and realized that they didn't have enough. "Well, make this cup as well (*Nu, sdelay etu kruzhu*)", said Dmitrii to Tanyusha. She replied: "It is me who will have to pray for this afterwards (*Mne zhe potom otmalivat*)". But she put a cup on the table. "Everything that is on the table is yours (*Vsye, chto na stole – vse vashe*)", she said about the tableware. She joined us at the same table, putting a small blanket over her corner. <...> Stepan was saying all the time that he was not one of those who would refuse to eat from the same tableware as outsiders. But he abided by the rule. That is, it was clear that he was dining with us because he was *mirskii*¹²⁴ (from the world), while his family, including his wife, had been eating separately. Apart from this he had not allowed us to offer waffles to his children. "<...> Look ... we rectify everything (*Vish, my vse ispravlyaem*)". Dmitrii, too, shared that in spite of his pleas, his friends were drinking water out of a dipper (Field notes, Andryushkino 2018, man).

This short vignette is illustrative in several senses. What we witnessed was an example of the so-called 'bowl rule', a practice that is supposed to manifest, according to scholarly thought, the conceptualization of ritual purity in Old Belief. First, it shows that these contradictory rules require a host to adjust quickly to the situation. The rule does not include instructions for its fulfilment. Second, the rules are manifested in trivial, hard to observe actions that I will refer to hereafter as micropractices. Finally, it reveals a certain social structure and division of gender roles in the community.

¹²¹ A tiny Old Believer village situated on one of the tributaries of the Podkamennaia Tunguska.

¹²² The note was made in early August 2018.

¹²³ Here I refer to other researchers who were participating in this field trip, and Stepan, our Old Believer guide.

¹²⁴ See the explanation in this chapter on pages 143–146.

3.1. The bowl rule

The bowl rule shapes social relations within and outside groups of *Chasovennye* Old Believers. Despite the fact that the bowl rule is aimed at regulating interaction with outsiders, it generally structures the group itself and influences ties between different local communities. In addition to talking about this, I also address gender aspects of the rule since the bowl rule is applied more strictly to women than to men and so is important for female religiosity. It is through the turn to the performance of the bowl rule by *Chasovennye* women that the significance of micropractices can be observed. I argue that practices of ritual purity produce social relations, hierarchies and authority for community members. However, these are not those social relations “between sexes or between social units” (Douglas 1975: 55) since such large-scale clean-cut configurations would distract me from my prior concern – practice. On the contrary, I deal with shifting boundaries, blurry power structures and nuanced, and barely definable, relationships.

The *Chasovennye* divide themselves into two major groups, the *Mirskie* (of the world) and the *Dobrye/Chisty*e (fine/clean). As a rule, those groups are represented by the word *chashka* (bowl). It is quite remarkable that *Chasovennye* Old Believers use the word bowl both to signify types of tableware and define the social group. A person who claims, “I am in the fine bowl”, indicates that they belong to a group of *Chisty*e or *Dobrye*, an equivalent of *chistaia/dobraia chashka*. On the other hand, an outsider *pitaetsia s mirom* (eats with the world), i.e., they do not distinguish between faiths and therefore live in an unclean state. The definition of *Mirskie* (as a group of people) is quite dubious because linguistically *Chasovennye* do not distinguish non-Old Believers from violators of religious rules, describing both as *Mirskie*. In other words, the term *Mirskie* is applied to a person who has been baptized in the community of Old Believers but does not follow the required restrictions¹²⁵, as well as to one who has never belonged to the community. This distinction is hard to articulate, although it does not cause problems for the *Chasovennye*, who easily identify *Mirskie* as members of the community, and *Mirskie* as outsiders.

The bowl rule seems to contravene principles of guesthood common to the Russian peasantry. One of the reasons why *Chasovennye* Old Believers attract the attention of scholars is a set of rules designed to secure the ritual purity of the group from the defilement of the outside world. It is important to note that proscriptions on eating are often perceived by researchers as a literal limitation of contact between Old Believers and outsiders. Specifically, Ageeva, Robson, and Smiljanskaja state that “From an anthropological point of view, food has always taken a central place in ritual separation of ethno-religious groups”

¹²⁵ *Chasovennye* want to exclude rule-breakers, engulfed in smoking, cutting beards, receiving pension, possessing TV-sets or radios at home, having sexual affairs, etc. Such people are not allowed to participate in religious ceremonies equally with others, namely they cannot cross themselves, sing, prostrate, or show any other visual cues of prayer.

(1997: 113). Pokrovskii argues likewise: “Ancient Christian rules about non-communication with people of other faiths, soul-destroying effects of praying, eating, friendly conversing, and having marital relations with them were inherently kept in *Chasovennye* faction” (2000, 145). Ostrovskii asserts that “Restraint from eating together with outsiders <...>, in particular, from the same tableware <...> still functions as a limitation of contact” (2011: 232).

Guesthood could also be considered as an important methodological approach in studying Old Believers. As Graham Harvey suggests, implication of guesthood in a fieldwork practice could become a possible ethical decolonizing method when researcher and interlocutor consider each other peers (Harvey 2003; see also Herzfeld 1987). Moreover, researchers have to follow regulations and protocols of hospitality imposed by hosts. In the case of *Chasovennye*, it works perfectly. It happened that in scholarly practice the only affordable way to communicate with Old Believers is to become their guests. They do not favor strangers staying in their villages for long periods of time and for that reason a year-long fieldwork period is impossible¹²⁶. Regularly visiting Old Believers seems to be one of the appropriate field methods of studying their religious practices. My own fieldwork has consisted of multiple short stays at the *Chasovennye* communities in Siberia, conducted since 2014. In particular, I have communicated with the Old Believers from villages in Mountain Altai, Mountain Shoriia (Kemerovo region), the Republic of Tuva, and Krasnoyarsk region, including monasteries on the Dubches river.

Herein I consider the bowl rule as a set of micropractices that not only manifest social relations and religious experience but also produce them through everyday interaction. By micropractices I mean rules embedded in everyday life and embodied in routine actions. I apply this term here partially following Elizabeth Perez (2016), who focuses on things that hardly seem connected to rituals, e.g., cooking and conversation while cooking. Nevertheless, these actions give huge support to the development of religious identity and maintenance of community bonds. The intersection of the bowl rule and hospitality seems to be a key point in formulating new approaches towards understanding the social lives of restricted religious groups.

3.2. *Obmirshchenie* as a cultural category and as a practice

Implementation of the bowl rule is closely connected with one of the basic categories in the Old Believer tradition named *obmirshchenie*. This word can be roughly translated as ‘secularization’, but in the context of Old Belief it specifically means contamination with the world outside their communities, which is a place belonging to the Antichrist and therefore full of sins and temptations. For this reason, certain practices have been established that aim to exclude interaction either with *Mirskie* people, i.e., ‘people from the world’ or people

¹²⁶ David Scheffel (1991: 4–5) and Richard Morris (1991: 114–115) failed to receive any formal consent from Canadian and Oregon communities respectively for the same reason.

who bring potentially harmful objects from it¹²⁷. Here I follow Richard Morris who translated the term *Mirskie* as ‘of the world’ (1991: 75). *Chasovennye* do not regard *obmirshchenie* as contamination with a substance, but rather as an action of ‘making it worldly’, which is expressed through a verb *obmirshchit*, i.e., ‘to make worldly’. An outsider using Old Believer tableware makes it belong to their outer world. From this point of view, an Old Believer should not eat from the ‘contaminated’ tableware because they must not *obmirshchitsia*, i.e., become worldly.

Each Old Believer denomination has its own understanding of the possible level of interaction with the world. For example, most Old Believers think that praying with members of other religions should be absolutely prohibited. Moreover, this prohibition concerns Old Believers of other factions. In the case of *Chasovennye*, the notion of *obmirshchenie* is very strict because they are one of the few factions that is still coherent in proscribing sharing a table with strangers. The idea that this action brings contamination is based on a juxtaposition between eating and praying. The *Chasovennye* assume that both prayer and eating should be performed in the name of God: eating with strangers means praying not in an Orthodox way, which is already leaning towards heresy. Therefore, the bowl rule is designed to build a symbolic boundary and prevent contact with the outer world.

The bowl rule states that Old Believers are ordered to keep two types of tableware in their houses: one for community members and the other for strangers. This covers cups, spoons, forks, plates, knives, and bowls. Such items as pots, pans or dippers can also be divided into the two categories, but since they are used only for cooking, there is no need to hold a second set. The first category of tableware is called *chistaia* or *dobraia chashka*, which means ‘clean or fine bowl’ respectively. As the names show, these are used by the *Chasovennye* Old Believers themselves. The second set is *mirskaia chashka*, which I call ‘common bowl’ here. In order to portray comprehensively the meaning of the Old Believer term *mirskaia*, tableware of different types is even washed separately, which makes the lives of women and children (who are mainly responsible for such housework) much more difficult, as they must remember which bowls, plates, cups, spoons, etc., are fine and which are common.

Similar senses are attached to Estonian vernacular terminology, albeit it was a bit different from the *Chasovennye*. The former used to call tableware of people who entirely belonged to the community *Khristianskaia* (Christian) or *Staroverskaia* (Old Believer). Those excerpts also give a clue that in Old Believers in Estonia were doing dishes after giving confession to *nastavnik*. Palikova’s interviews, recorded in the early 2000s, represent the Soviet tradition: they are memories of old women whose grandparents were still holding the tableware rule. Obviously, this shift has happened within the generation of their parents. Compare the previous materials with the following excerpt from the interview:

¹²⁷ Such as computers or cell phones (e.g.: Rygovskiy 2020a).

Our aunt used to go for confession before Easter. Upon her return, she was washing all her dishes up. Cups, spoons – she was cleaning everything up and putting it separately: “Do not touch my stuff! You are *Mirskii*”. She used to call us this way, and she had her own tableware, because we were wicked, and she had given away her own sins already [Kallaste, 2003].

[*Mirskoi*] is someone who walks in the world, eats out, stays not only at home. And *Khristianskii* – this is him with separate tableware, he eats only at home. Well, *Mirskoi* can become *Khristianskii* too, but he has to be ours, an Old Believer. He should pray for it, *polozhit nachal* (recite the starting prayers). Our father was supposedly *Mirskoi*, because he had one and the same glass, he was already going away somewhere for earnings, but we were still *Khristianskie*. But when we went to school, they started feeding us there, we became *Mirskie* too, grandmother fed us separately. On top of that, when we joined the pioneers¹²⁸, we became fallen by no means [Uus Käsepää, 2008].

[Was it usual to drink tea from different cups?] Of course! This was considered *kristiyanskoe*, that one *mirskoe*. I married that family, their grandad was educated. There were some shelves. I was told: this is *mirskaia*, this is like for drunkards, cups and glasses. This one is ours, *staroverskaia*. And that one, if some unknown Estonian arrives, he will also have separate tableware [Uus Käsepää, 2003]. (Palikova 2008: 87- 88)

Estonian Old Believers remember that in their families, men coming back home from seasonal work assignments were supposed to sleep in the sauna’s dressing room for two weeks. That means, men were not only proscribed eating with ‘clean’ members of the family but to sleep in one bed with their wives. Such an order was kept until the late 1950s. Allegedly this used to be a local regulation, because Siberian *Chasovennye* did not abide by this rule, which was causing a lot of jokes. Pazderin, an Old Believer from Tuva, left his memories about the Revolution in Upper Reaches. In January 1921, a Red Army squad searching for the last White Army fighters in the region, called for a meeting in Uzhep. The squad commander forced the locals to sign up for ceasing any support for the White Army. In that time, Old Believers were refusing to sign any documents related to Soviet power, since they considered it antichristian because of its antireligious policy. Nevertheless, they had no other choice and signed the paper. The local religious leader, father Palladii, excommunicated all signers:

Old Believers didn’t want to sign up, but there was no retreat. Many of them didn’t use their surnames, only first names, while Tyukalov Anton signed as a servant of God. After that, father Palladii, whose name was Petr Chunarev¹²⁹ at that time, called everyone traitors and excommunicated them. There had been no women at the meeting, they had not signed up, therefore Palladii didn’t xcommunicate them. For a long time, wives and children didn’t feed their husbands

¹²⁸ Members of the Young Pioneers’ organization in the USSR.

¹²⁹ Along with a standard Orthodox practice, Old Believers change their names when entering the monastery. This means, father Palladii was not a monk yet in 1921.

and fathers from the same tableware, but in the bed a husband and a wife were not isolated from each other, they both had the same interest. Several months passed by, a so to say spiritual revolution was happening – a bowl one (TIGPI RF. D. 503: 31–32).

Categories of *chistaia* and *mirskaia* bowls should not be confused with the so-called *poganaia posuda*, or filthy tableware. The latter type of vessel includes cleaning buckets, bowls used as feed troughs, sauna washbowls and other items considered highly impure. The basic feature is that such vessels are not designed to be used in feeding or cooking for people, consequently there is no social group that correlates with this type of bowl. In the case of *poganaia posuda*, a classical definition of ritual impurity as a contagious substance can be applied. For instance, notwithstanding their hygienic function, water dippers and basins used in the sauna are believed to be ritually polluted, i.e., *poganye*. It is likely that this attitude is related to Russian folk belief, in which sauna is usually described as a dangerous place, a habitation of evil spirits where a person needs to behave properly to avoid contact with devilry (Budovskaia and Morozov 1995: 138–140; Zelenin 1991: 285). *Chasovennye* think in the same way and, thus, notions of spatial impurity are transferred onto the objects used for washing the body. In that sense, all sauna items and liquids are more defiled than *mirskaia chashka*.

I must put emphasis on the distinction between common and filthy vessels because these two concepts are often mixed up in vernacular language.¹³⁰ As a rule, confessional neighbors of Old Believers perceive common tableware as filthy, though it goes beyond original definitions. The term *poganye* is associated with a strong perception of disdain, and those who claim that Old Believers feed their guests out of *poganye chashki* usually want to accentuate an allegedly dismissive attitude towards non-Old Believers. What I often encountered during my fieldwork in Altai and other communities, where *Chasovennye* live intermingled with other confessions, was that without sufficient knowledge of tableware rules, their neighbors presume that Old Believers simply think very highly of themselves. It is in this sense Caroline Humphrey speaks about the tone in hospitality repertoire: “What that tone might be like in one cultural setting – let us say, grave, or warmly effusive, or aggressive – would be different from another”. (Humphrey 2012: 64).

Poganaia posuda fits best to the classical scholarly understanding of what ritual pollution is. Here I refer to works by Mary Douglas, who at her time changed the perspective on the subject of ritual purity and ritual pollution, but in the outcome, substituted one essentialism to another. At first, it was pre-

¹³⁰ Richard Morris argues that *Chasovennye* in Oregon call a person permanently living in an unclean state *Poganye* (filthy), demonstrating a stronger level of worldliness. At the same time, the one who breaks the bowl rule deliberately, such as eating hospital food while a patient, is considered as *Mirskie* (Morris 1991: 75). According to this division, Morris himself belonged to the *Poganye* people as he was not an Old Believer. However, I have never heard the term *Poganye* employed by Siberian *Chasovennye* in such a strict sense.

sumed that fear of gods and nature became a basis for rules and notions of symbolic pollution in the so-called ‘primitive religions’. One of Douglas’ most salient contributions is her claim that issues of ritual purity, pollution, and taboos also fell within such religions as Judaism and Christianity. Deriving from societal attempts to structure the world symbolically, pollution as a classificatory lapse can be found in every society. In fact, Douglas was thinking of division between the clean and the polluted as of semiotic process. The idea was that any society inevitably produces some concepts of purity and pollution, and whatever these concepts are, they would be based on the elaborated semantics of dirt. However, Douglas depicted dirt as a universalistic category. It is notable how she elucidated this concept:

[T]he attitudes to rejected bits and pieces goes through two stages. First, they are recognizably out of place, a threat to good order <...> This is the stage at which they are dangerous; their half-identity still clings to them and the clarity of the scene in which they obtrude is impaired by their presence. But a long process of pulverizing, dissolving and rotting awaits any physical things that have been recognized as dirt. In the end, all identity is gone. The origin of the various bits and pieces is lost, and they have entered into the mass of common rubbish (Douglas 2002: 197).

As Douglas pointed out in this paragraph, dirt was not necessarily contagious or fearsome, but still it remained a substance. Subsequently, rules of ritual purity, in the first place, are aimed to avoid defiling all unfavorable contacts, as well as to diminish anxiety caused by the presence of unacceptable objects in a local environment. This approach is preoccupied by the substantiality of ritual purity, so that rules for dealing with dangerous objects, places, actions or people, and semiotic principles behind them are placed at the core of the subject. In the case of Old Believers, some substances, such as sauna water, can be polluting, but mostly this refers to action rather than to something physical. Even though the practice of separating tableware includes the language of avoidance of physical contact, it is assigned to a category of worldliness, which should be distinguished from classical pollution.

However, there are some cases when common tableware might be called *poganye* by Old Believers themselves. In most situations, the term appears during arguments, if guests deliberately violate the rules of ritual purity. To illustrate this, I will cite an example from my field experience in Krasnoyarsk Krai in August 2018. My colleagues and I were once asked to do the dishes after dinner. The host explained that we could do it in a washstand, but afterwards we had to put our plates and cups on a certain shelf for *mirskie chashki* inside the cupboard that was above the washstand. Unfortunately, one of my group mates placed her cup on the top of the washstand. The host, who noticed this, became angry and muttered that we had polluted (*zapoganili*) the washstand because the water from a common cup had dripped inside. Although a second later he remarked that it was possible to get things restored, i.e., to bless

the washstand again. In this case the word was uttered in a moment of anger, but basically this shows that *Chasovennye* do not think that a person is able to permanently pollute anything, meaning that an object can no longer be used.

Here I am coming to semantic differences between two actions, *obmirshchit* (to make common) and *zapoganit* (to pollute), which represent two distinguishable types of ritual uncleanness. Worldly vessels can be used by non-Old Believers and those *Chasovennye* who have been defiled themselves, while polluted tableware is supposed to be taken out or given to animals.

3.3. *Chashka* as a social category

I have already mentioned in this chapter that from time-to-time members of *Chasovennye* communities have to eat and drink from *mirskaia chashka*. How is it that they are temporarily excommunicated? One of the reasons might be immoral conduct, although more often it is for more mundane reasons. As I have briefly mentioned above, there are a number of occasions when *Chasovennye* have to bend the rules, for example when in the hospital. However, the most frequent reasons are connected with labor and life events that might involve close and constant communication with *Mirskie* members of a *Chasovennye* community, or outsiders. For example, such regular life events can be weddings. Despite attempts to prevent tableware from being shuffled, if this happens, *Chasovennye* prefer to *stanovit'sya na pravilo* (lit. to step on a rule), i.e. to read a certain number of short prayers called *pravilo* (rule) cast by a community elder (*nastavnik*) in order to be redeemed.

The need for money forces *Chasovennye* to look for paid jobs outside their communities. As a rule, these include construction, commercial fishing, logging, etc., which are typically men's occupations. When away from home they have to share meals with other workers, who are not necessarily Old Believers. Therefore, *Chasovennye* families are often divided into working members, who are 'in a *mirskaia* bowl', and members who *derzhat chashku* (lit. hold the bowl, i.e., abide by the rules). This division marks not only gender roles in families but age grouping, too. One of my interlocutors in Mountain Shoriia mentioned that her sons do not follow the bowl rule because they have their own business and must always be away:

For guests, if they eat from our plates, if they belong to our faith, then we eat together with them. *Mirskie* are separated. Well, all our kids also work, they eat with *Mirskie*. That is why they are also separated, Only I with the old man [i.e., her husband – D.R.] hold it. But they work, how could they not to? Everyone eats together (Field notes, Chulesh 2017b, woman).

Such work activity is religiously approved. Every household has to be economically independent of state payments, including pension, inasmuch as *Chasovennye* are supposed to live within their means. That is why men due to their work activities often simply cannot avoid *obmirshchenie*. At the same

time, women stay at home and keep it clean in every sense. Until the paid work is over, men should be symbolically isolated, which means they can eat only out of their personal dishes. Their tableware should also be kept and even washed separately from the rest of the family.

Elizaveta Rikhter leaves a detailed account on ritual purity practices of Old Believers in Prichudie. *Fedoseevtsy* used to keep separate sets for *Rabskie* (non-married) and *Mirskie* (married) family members on a regular basis. Similar to the current situation with *Chasovennye* in Siberia, Old Believers in Estonia were giving separate dishes for *zimirshchenie* seasonal workers, until they prayed for their sins. Six weeks after giving birth women were also considered as unclean and had to do with special bowls that were used from time to time. Christian and worldly bowls were washed at different places, the former on a table, the latter on *lavkas*¹³¹. Non-Old Believer neighbors could not take water from Old Believer ice-holes with their buckets but had to cut them anew (Rikhter 1976: 180).

Excommunication of family members for reasons relating to work remains symbolic rather than practical. This proceeds even more distinctly from the Soviet work experience of *Chasovennye*. Another interlocutor in Shoriia told me that her father used to be an officially employed Soviet worker. At that time *Chasovennye* considered working for the Soviet state a more serious violation of religious rules than having an official contract today because the former was strongly associated with persecutions of Christianity. Nevertheless, this man was still respected by his family members. As the interlocutor put it, he ate at the same table with the family yet from his own plates. The children washed it separately after the meal, but this did not affect their ties with the father. Interestingly, this woman herself worked as an accountant, i.e., had an official Soviet job, but later started following the bowl rule closely. Such fluctuations between *Mirskie* and *Dobrye* are quite typical in the biographies of most of the *Chasovennye* I have encountered. Rikhter reports about similar situations with seasonal Old Believer workers in Prichudie – they were sharing meals and drinking vodka with *Mirskie*¹³², but used to perform several hundreds of ‘bows’,¹³³ to get redeemed (Rikhter 1976: 190).

When a tradition ends up disappearing, it changes its meaning (what is also common for outsiders). Going back again to Old Believers in Soviet Estonia, some of them, at least publicly, expressed the idea that separation of tableware stands for ‘intolerance and hypocrisy’.

Abakanov [M.A., a former *Pomortsy* nastavnik in Tallinn – D.R.] <...> condemns <...> both intolerance and hypocrisy of *Fedoseevtsy*. “Brothers of my wife, he says, belong to *Fedoseevtsy*. When they come to our place, they

¹³¹ House benches without backs that were used not only for sitting but for various household activities.

¹³² Non-Old Believers in this case.

¹³³ Bow is a short prayer finished bowing from a waist.

inevitably bring their own tableware – a plate, a spoon, a knife... However, they drink vodka from my glasses”.

The wife of Kobylkin Samson Timofeevich, *nastavnik* of *Pomortsy* in Tartu community, was also born in *Fedoseevtsy* community in Raja village. Her relatives come to see them with their own plates. “And for us, when we visit them, they put the other dishes, like for all ‘*Mirskie*’, ‘*poganaia posuda*’”, says Kobylkin (Koltsov 1964: 24).

Talking about *chashka* as a social category, it is impossible not to mention that different attitudes among *Chasovennye* to other religious rules complicate the community structure and create manifold local types of bowl. For instance, *Chasovennye* from Krasnoyarsk region and the Tuva Republic cannot arrive at a consensus about receiving a pension and rectification (or, in other words, blessing) of food purchased in shops. In Krasnoyarsk, they think it is possible to receive a pension and to rectify (*ispravlyat*) shop food, while *Chasovennye* in Tuva have the opposite opinion on both questions. Difference in views is not the only trouble, because this all leads to a situation in which *Chasovennye* from both regions consider each other *obmirshchenie*. So, an Old Believer can eat from a fine bowl in Krasnoyarsk, but if she or he goes to Tuva this person will not be allowed to participate in a religious service equally to other *chistye*. There are even more than two types of bowl in some communities, such as a ‘shop cup’ for those who come from Tuva (since Tuvan Old Believers do not bless food they buy in shops, they are considered to be eating something inappropriate). I have discussed elsewhere how various territorial groups of *Chasovennye* create their own competing hierarchies, trying to claim spiritual leadership among their peers (Rygovskiy 2020b, 195–202).

3.4. Entering a house

If regular compulsory interaction with the world finds solutions that help resist *obmirshchenie*, then the arrival of an unknown person is supposed to disturb *Chasovennye* to a greater extent than in any routine case of rule breaking. A new person requires an appropriate attitude, whereas nobody knows what sort of social tie will be established (or not) as a result of interaction. Yet *Chasovennye* usually find ways to react. Therefore, in this section I analyze my experience as an ethnographer entering Old Believers’ houses. This material shows how rules of ritual purity are conflicted by rules of hospitality and vice versa. I find it important to focus on situations of guesthood as they prove that ritual purity is not only about limiting contact.

Chasovennye monasteries on tributaries of the Yenisei are the least accessible settlements for outsiders. Nevertheless, when rare non-Old Believer visitors reach the destination, it is hard to distinguish between strictness of rules and sincere concern about guests. Visitors are not allowed to wander around the monastery alone but are accompanied by an assigned monk, who eagerly shows

every corner of the place and serves as a valuable guide. A greater variety of ritual purity regulations is manifested at mealtimes. Guests cannot serve food themselves as it makes monastery pots worldly. Therefore, every plate with every course is served by monks, yet without limiting quantities. An exception is made only for so-called 'dry food', i.e. pastry, peas, or other dishes that can be eaten by hand. These are allowed to be taken from monastery plates. Apart from this, monasteries provide a more diverse range of bowls that include not only *mirskie* and *chistye chashki* but also, for those who buy food from a shop or have recently returned from a hospital, etc., a separate set is kept for lay *Chasovennye* living in the vicinity of monasteries. They are distinguished from the rest of the group because they follow monastic rule (*stoyat na monastyrskom pravile*), i.e. say the same number of daily prayers as monks, despite not being tonsured. On the other hand, this treatment method seems identical to high-quality restaurant service, despite the fact that everything happens in the deep taiga.

In Old Believer houses visitors are often treated in a similar manner. When guests know that *Chasovennye* do not eat with strangers and notice that they join them, this might be seen as a sign of appreciation and respect. From my own experience, hosts usually sit together with researchers, covering their corner of the table with a special tablecloth, which is considered a symbolic border between pure community members and *Mirskie* guests. Another possible way is to serve the table with dishes that are eaten by hand, such as pastries or fruit. In addition, *Chasovennye* frequently use plastic or paper plates and cups because they can easily be thrown away after use.

Flexibility of proscriptions depending on the situation does not mean a lesser commitment to them. Nor is it a sign of modernization, when compliance with religious rules becomes almost unbearable and individuals have to switch to forms that would conform to basic living standards. Early ethnographic accounts demonstrate that sometimes Old Believers showed a stronger commitment to a situation rather than to rules by allowing the latter to be broken or, at least, slightly changed. A diary of a professor of Botany at the University of Tartu, Karl Friedrich von Ledebour (1785–1851), who performed a scientific expedition to the Altai Mountains in 1826, is one of the earliest sources on traditions, culture, and everyday life of Altai Old Believers in the first half of the 19th century. Together with his colleagues he departed to explore local flora and fauna. In addition to the main goals of this expedition, Ledebour became one of the first scholars to make some records about Old Believers of the region. The importance of Ledebour's diary is in its reflection of how the bowl rule is represented in the eyes of a stranger, who does not deliberately interrogate his hosts about religious restrictions.

What is remarkable is that Ledebour mentions only one case from his months-long experience, which he judged to be an example of inhospitality. Of course, Ledebour did not have any special interest in the religious life of Altai Old Believers. It was just a part of his trip observations that he included in his diary. Ledebour definitely knew about the bowl rule and other Old Believers'

restrictions about contacts with strangers. In one of his remarks, he notices that Old Believers are really hospitable, despite the strict regulations they have. That is why he was really disappointed when one housewife did not give his companion, Dr. Bunge, and him a cup of tea, because she lacked appropriate cups:

Being back in the village I was faced with inhospitality which puzzled me, because the people I met for months were eminently kind and hospitable. I wanted to have some tea for I had everything except a cup, but the hostess refused to give one to me. After a while, she gave a cup to Dr. Bunge, but still refused me. Being asked about the reason for refusal, she grumbled that she didn't know "if I was baptized". This case amazed us, because she preferred Dr. Bunge, who smoked tobacco, which the Old Believers dislike very much. When we asked our hostess about that, we heard that she thought that despite Dr. Bunge not being an Old Believer, he is almost certainly baptized, because he speaks Russian. Whereas I, who do not, am definitely a pagan. When, at last, the hostess realized that I am a baptized Christian, she calmed down little by little and gave me a cup (Ledebour 1993: 134).

The strategy of the woman is open to guesswork, since the bowl rule clearly states to distinguish between Old Believers and all the others. Putting aside her criteria for identifying Christians, it should be noted that she was forced to reformulate the boundaries, but anyway failed to make a good impression on researchers. Needless to say, she probably had a sigh of relief that she fed Christians, though heretics, but not pagans at least. However, having been living side by side with *Chasovennye* for several months, how could Ledebour find himself in a situation like that only once? Perhaps, it was the only occasion when the travelling scientist was refused a cup. He makes a reference to another of his expeditions, in Bessarabia (contemporary Moldova), where Old Believers were also reluctant to give neither plates, nor spoons to travelers due to the same ritual purity issues (ibid.). Ledebour also notes an extraordinary hospitality of Altai Old Believers, which is a greater achievement in the community with such strict regulations (ibid.: 40).

Therefore, in terms of receiving guests, Old Believers tend to be quite flexible in most cases. On the other hand, visiting outsider houses is more problematic to *Chasovennye* than inviting strangers to their own homes. This is simply because of the lack of appropriate tableware in non-Old Believer houses. I have a number of accounts of the neighbors of Old Believers complaining about this type of behavior. Following the choice of words of one of my interlocutors, who has been living in an Old Believer village in Tuva for many years, *Chasovennye* happily rush to his place to drink vodka, but when invited for lunch or dinner they always carry their own plates and spoons. He considered this inconsistent and truculent, although one could say that he should have become accustomed to it after decades in the village.

Hospitality could be considered a site of control over guests, where the bowl rule is one of the instruments. It can be assumed from Harvey's discussion of guesthood as a research method that conversion from strangers into guests is

one of the possible strategies of the hosting community, which happens according to certain protocols elaborated through the ages (Harvey 2003: 142). Moreover, guesthood is always a dialogical, reciprocal communication, comparable to gift exchange. From this point of view, it can be qualified as a social game, in reference to Pierre Bourdieu's ideas. The concept of social game assumes that the rules of the game are not expressed directly, they are not even recognized, although all participants follow them (Bourdieu 1990: 104–105). This means that overt expression of the bowl rule does not necessarily mean that all strangers will be identified as enemies and denied access to the house of an Old Believer. Of course, the rule might be followed in its most rigorous form, but the game can also be played as if a stranger is in the hosts' good graces.

In other words, when researchers interrogate community members about ritual purity, they often receive objectified rules, i.e. in the case of Old Believers it all amounts to avoiding behavior and limitation of contacts, whereas it should be admitted that restrictions shape communication within and between communities of *Chasoven'nye*. On the other hand, Old Believers themselves suggest that their restrictions can sound weird or offensive to their guests, this is why they sometimes prefer not to go into detail. In other words, it is easier to host non-Old Believers without drawing their attention to the context of religious life of the community, than to give profound guidance to that context.

3.5. Gendered micropactices

Speaking about gender aspects of the bowl rule, I want to go back to the opening vignette to the Chapter III (see page 135). In particular, to the short dialogue between Dmitrii and Tanyusha, when he asked her to put *dobraia chashka* on a *mirskii* table. Dmitrii admitted that at that time he was *mirskii* too because he had returned from a wedding. Tanyusha was clearly in *dobraia chashka*, as she was sitting with a towel under her plate that was symbolically separating her from the *mirskii* table. Why then did she resist giving us one of the *dobraia* cups for a while? She gave a partial answer herself, when she mentioned that she would have to pray for this. However, this requires more clarification.

Chasoven'nye Old Believers have been thoroughly recording penances, i.e., lists of various sins followed by punishment (*epitimia*) and a certain number of prayers and prostrations to be performed as a redemption. Every elder in *Chasoven'nye* settlements uses them to impose relevant punishment. According to records and explanations given by community elders, women are subject to *epitimia* not only for sharing a table with strangers, but also for making *dobraia* tableware contaminated. All the spoiled tableware is supposed to be purified by the efforts of women. Additionally, they have to perform a number of prostrations to redeem the sin of mixing up the tableware. Given that *Chasoven'nye* women are responsible for keeping tableware in order in their households,

keeping symbolic boundaries appears to be a greater personal responsibility for them than for men.

Apart from this, there are some other practices that Old Believer women have to perform in order to protect a house from defilement, such as covering tableware. Empty plates and cups cannot be exposed but must be covered with a towel or in any other way. Such *epitimias* are mentioned in a list of council resolutions I partially copied in Bezymianka, a *Chasovennye* village on the Yenisei:

6. If a vessel stays uncovered overnight, the *epitimia* is 17 prostrations and the vessel is to be censured.
7. If a vessel with food stays uncovered overnight, the *epitimia* is 30 prostrations and the vessel is to be purified.
8. If a dirty rug falls into a vessel with food, the eater makes 12 prostrations and the vessel with food is to be purified¹³⁴.

Punishment for exposing tableware corresponds to a popular belief legend among Old Believers according to which a devil spoils all uncovered cups, plates, and bowls by swimming in them, washing off illnesses, pollution, and all other kinds of nastiness, putting people in danger of catching diseases. That is why tableware has to be swathed in a towel, or, at least, something like a straw or a stick should be put across the cup (see Khristoforova 2017). Taking into account the fact that in *Chasovennye* families this duty is performed by women, it becomes important mainly for female religiosity. This adherence of women to such micropractices as the bowl rule, covering tableware and many others is recognized in *Chasovennye* regulations. According to the same Bezymianka list of *epitimias*, if a husband seriously violates the law (e.g., if he abuses alcohol, watches television or listens to the radio), and his wife keeps the lifestyle of a true Christian, an elder is allowed to come to her house to perform any necessary services. Interestingly, the inverse situation in which a husband leads a righteous life has not been observed.

Folklore centering on tableware and established religious codes enforces a moral debt on women within Old Believer communities, which in its turn influences strategies of guesthood. When hosting strangers, women and men of Old Belief seem to follow the same protocols. However, their strategies might be different, which can be explained by exploring ways in which restrictions are educated with regard to gender. The following vignette, which I take from Nikitina (2013), resembles the story of Dmitrii and Tanyusha and is quite prominent in this regard, too. Here, an interlocutor speaking to Nikitina, a *Chasovennye* woman from the Tuva Republic, talks about interaction between Tuvans and Old Believers:

¹³⁴ Compare this to the list of *epitimias* published in (Pokrovskii 1999: 385–387).

There was a case. In recent times nobody fed Tuvans, since they were considered defiled. <...> When I got married <...> Sasiny had a rule, if a Tuvan comes, you must provide a meal <...> Then, a Tuvan came and mother says: “You should give him something to eat”. But we had no plates <...> Here I had these Asian bowls, [some time ago] I dropped one in a wash basin, mum said: “Wash it and give it to the cat”. Now she says: “Wash it more, wipe it and give it to him”. Father-in-law lies on the stove. <...> He says: <...> “Agafia, do you want to defile him?” If only they hadn’t eaten carrion. They ate dead horses and dead cows; they had such a rule. <...> He says: “You shouldn’t. Let him eat carrion, but you don’t defile him. Don’t defile him. You defile him, and all others with whom he will share a meal, and you will answer for everyone. Don’t we have any plates to feed him?” (Nikitina 2013: 105–106).

As is illustrated by the vignette, the Old Believers’ stereotypical point of view was that the indigenous Tuvan people consumed inappropriate food. For that reason, the two women did not want to give a ‘clean’ plate to their guest. Eventually, the householder persuaded them that giving a *poganaia* plate would entail a greater sin than defiling an item of tableware.

Compare the Tuvan case quoted above with the following story from the Altai village of Tikhonkaia, where Raisa is describing her brother being dismissed by a severe *Chasovennye* woman:

My brother fell in love with one girl <...> but [her – D.R.] mother didn’t let [him – D.R.] inside <...> So, he said: “I thought of coming inside asking for water <...> They came into the house. [The girl says – D.R.:] “Mom, this guy is thirsty”. “Then give him a cat’s bowl”. So. “Thanks for treating me, I don’t want your water and I’m not going to drink from your filthy cup”. That’s what he said. “And granny, don’t give food to the people in the filthy tableware, it will be your great sin. I am not baptized, I don’t know, but it will be your sin” (Field notes, Tikhonkaia 2015, woman)¹³⁵.

Raisa and her brother were of mixed Altai-Old Believer descent. At the time of interview, the woman considered herself *Chasovennye* and kept the bowl rule at her place. According to Raisa’s story, her brother came to an Old Believer woman as a stranger both in religious and ethnical sense, who, however, he was familiar with *Chasovennye* regulations. This knowledge did not help him to resolve the conflict, but the entire story shows an elderly woman protecting the purity of her house by not sharing a bowl with a stranger.

It is rarely emphasized in research about Old Belief that if men are punished only for *obmirshchenie*, women have to answer for the defilement of tableware as well. In the Tuvan case, the two women were so anxious about plates, only the weight of the sin was persuasive. In patriarchal communities of *Chasovennye* it is sometimes the choice of men to give fine plates to guests. Exactly the same situation was observed in Andryushkino.

¹³⁵ This resembles a Tuvan story represented by Nikitina but provides a point of view of a stranger who was denied proper hospitality.

In some *Chasovennye* communities, women become the only active practitioners who belong to *dobraia chashka*. Such situations are especially common for Mountain Altai, where the whole tradition is mainly represented by older women, while young and middle-aged people live as *Mirskie*, although they can be found in other regions as well, such as, for example, Tuva. Interestingly, when women began to prevail in this manner, it is often perceived as a decline of tradition. Even local people express doubts about the future of their communities because *Chasovennye* rules do not allow women to perform many important rituals and sacraments, such as marriage or hearing confession. However, by keeping a fine bowl and baptizing children and grandchildren¹³⁶, those women pave the way for future development.

I argue that close engagement of female religiosity with rules of ritual purity, forms the core of the *Chasovennye* tradition. In the Tuvan village Saryg-Sep, *Chasovennye* is a religious minority. Founded by Old Believers¹³⁷, their community became small in the Soviet period. Anna Alimova, my interlocutor in Saryg-Sep, told me about the problematic situation with men in their community. As she put it, they had only one man, who was ill and could not lead the service. Moreover, her husband and children were *mirskie*, albeit baptized as Old Believers. Alimova also mentioned that other *Chasovennye* in Tuva do not pursue engagement with Saryg-Sep community because they are considered to ‘live weakly’, i.e., they commit many violations against the religious law. In particular, this concerns the lack of men. For that reason, Saryg-Sep *Chasovennye* seek support from Krasnoyarsk co-religionists. Although Krasnoyarsk communities are situated significantly farther from Saryg-Sep than the Tuvan, they have established relations. A similar process can be noted in Altai. When I documented the frustration of the Altai *Chasovennye* with lack of men and a male leader, I was conducting fieldwork there in 2015. In 2018, I learnt from a Bezymianka elder (a Krasnoyarsk settlement) that he had recently visited Altai to give blessings to a new young community leader.

3.6. Summary of Chapter III

Concepts of ritual purity and uncleanness along with specific practices of separation between Old Believer communities and strangers play a crucial role in *Chasovennye* religiosity. Proscriptions of sharing tableware and meals with strangers that used to be common for most of the Old Believer factions are nowadays almost obsolete except for *Chasovennye*. In Chapter III, I explain why these practices are important and how they affect women’s participation in religious life.

The bowl rule can be applied differently depending on the circumstances. Regardless of whether Old Believers consider strangers as possible allies or

¹³⁶ Women are not prohibited to perform baptism.

¹³⁷ The founders belonged to another denomination of *Belokrinitskie* Old Believers (Storozhenko 2015: 99).

enemies, it is safer for them to remain hospitable, therefore, the proscription itself does not isolate them from the rest of the world. However, the bowl rule has a great significance inside the group, since it requires personal efforts from every member of the community to stay in the clean state. Old Believers who are suspected in violating the rule are usually excommunicated.

In this regard, women have to be extremely careful about *obmirshchenie*. Not only they are responsible for themselves as all men do, but they also need to take care of their families. There is always a risk to spoil the clean objects, such as pots, buckets, or washing stands while doing the chores (this has been demonstrated by my colleague who put dishes in the wrong place), therefore, the knowledge of rules must be interiorized in micropractices. It is also necessary to understand that specific rules vary from community to community. Anything that is fine for one *Chasovennye* settlement is not accepted in the other. This, for instance, concerns a practice of sanctifying the food bought at the store. Since it is a woman who usually moves to a husband's place in *Chasovennye* matrimonial tradition, she has to be ready to adjust to new system of regulations in her new community. Given that this is an interiorized religiosity, women in Old Believer communities can be stricter about 'daily' proscriptions and keeping the boundaries of the group.

CHAPTER IV. SHAPING FEMALE OLD BELIEVER IDENTITY BY PRACTICING THE EXTERNAL PIETIES

In this chapter, I focus on some proscriptions common both for Estonian and Siberian Old Believers. In particular, the distinction between male and female garments and the concept of Christian clothes, i.e., what Old Believer men and women should or should not wear in order to prove themselves as Old Believers. I intentionally use the verb ‘to prove’ because it refers to the essence of the semiotic ideology behind those rules, i.e., belonging to Old Belief is something that is and should be doubted by the community and the believers themselves. Therefore, men and women need to practice their faith endlessly and overwhelmingly in order to provide the proof to themselves, God, or the community. In accordance with this logic, an outer expression of faith should correspond to the inner state of it. So, if one wants to be an Old Believer, they should think of what they wear, what they speak, what they eat, etc.¹³⁸.

My goal here is not to make an observation of these requirements but rather to analyze the semiotic background of Old Believer external pieties and the material ways of transferring and maintaining them. In particular, I am going to look at council decisions of both *Chasovennye* and *Pomortsy* Old Believers, along with some other traditional homiletic and regulative texts. However, I mostly reflect on materials of a Latvian Old Believer journal *Rodnaia Starina* and some other educational activities among *Pomortsy* in Prichudie in the interwar period (1918–1940).

External pieties of Old Believers are learnt and maintained in the families and supported by the pressure of social ties within a community, subject to constant reminder from elders. It is a never-ending concern for the latter, that their congregants would be eating out, using forbidden items (such as radios or cell phones¹³⁹), wearing ‘non-Christian’ clothes, etc. Many community leaders have resorted to a trusted form of persuasion for Old Believers – the written word. Open letters, polemical essays, and resolutions of councils¹⁴⁰ have been intended to show the right way to salvation through abiding by numerous micro-rules, through a change of behavior and daily life according to a ‘Christian way’. Containing calls to conform by different rules and regulations, these written texts have been read individually as well as out loud publicly, and further discussed in the communities. Instructions for the choice of clothes and other issues relatable to external pieties are seldom omitted in such documents.

¹³⁸ See in the Introduction my review of Saba Mahmood’s takes on external piety and the concept of kenosis in Old Belief (pages 52–53 and 61–62 respectively).

¹³⁹ See Rygovskiy 2020a.

¹⁴⁰ Councils in Old Belief are regular meetings of representatives of several communities living in the same vicinity where important spiritual problems of those communities are discussed. Often, they take up specific immediate issues, however, general challenges are also taken into consideration. For example, a council can consider, if a person is allowed to marry, or, what clothes are prohibited to wear.

It is important to mention that I address piety as a feature that is practiced, which closely resembles the analysis of ethics in Douglas Rogers's monograph about a *Pomortsy* community in the Uralic town of Sepych. Rogers sticks to the term ethical repertoire that signifies an immediate reaction of a religious community to changing circumstances (what he calls 'ethical regime'). He also points out that material objects serve for codification and dissemination of moral statements as well as instructions that are supposed to guide individuals in daily life. They can be anything, including old books so beloved by Old Believers (Rogers 2009: 15–19). Although Rogers looks at objects which can be exchanged between people (e.g., food, labor, money, etc.), the aim of the present chapter, as mentioned above, is to analyze how written sources have been shaping religious practices of the community.

4.1. External pieties in resolutions of Old Believer councils

Article 15 of Polish Charter of Old Believers, which was passed in 1752 by Old Believers living within the Polish borders and which defined the main principles of *Fedoseevtsy* faction, reads:

Those who grow hair and wear *malakhi*¹⁴¹ or hats are to be banned from praying; Should such renegades come up, let them make 100 bows. Should they not give up this habit, let them be excommunicated (Popov 1864: 14).

Article 41 of the same document addresses the appearance and proper behavior of both men and women:

Young men are not to wear red shirts nor *kamelankovy* pants, and girls are not to wear red boots, nor red headscarves, and not to stand in golden bandages at the holy service, and they should not belt themselves, nor lure the Orthodox people; if the renegades come up, let them make 300 prostrations (Popov 1864: 19).

Later in 1809, similar prohibitions are repeated by *Fedoseevtsy* gathered in St. Petersburg. Thus, Articles 8 and 9 of the 1809 Charter state:

As it is seen, a lot of Christians wear German dress, although there are firm restrictions on that. Therefore, elders should keep them away from this soul-corrupting custom, and to excommunicate the resisting.

And some Christians do not cut their hair according to the Christian custom, those who don't do it should not be allowed at a communal prayer because they do not keep prohibitions of apostles and fathers (Popov 1864: 28).

It is amazing that commenting on the accepted rules, strict *Fedoseevtsy* authors of the 1809 Charter assumed that the 'German dress' was preferred by apostates

¹⁴¹ A comment in the source explains that this requirement is addressed to those who do not cut the top of their head. *Malakhovka* is a hat divided into four parts (ibid.).

who thought of luxury and for that reason mimicking Nikonians. The document stated that parents wanted their children to get married. For this reason, they dressed themselves in alien clothes and made their children wear the same garment, because “if there are Russian or Christian clothes, then they would be considered rude and disrespectful [by Nikonians – D.R.], and that might interfere with their plans for marriage” (Popov 1864: 52–53). As I vastly explain in Chapter II of the present thesis, marriages were nothing but sin for *Fedoseevtsy*. In this perspective, wearing clothes other than Christian acquires a particular symbolic meaning and presumes certain social preferences. It also shows how complicated the Old Believer concept of external piety actually is as the choice of clothes receives moral assessment in terms of class division of a society (i.e., wealthier Nikonians lead a corrupted way of life, because their wealth corrupts them). Further, I focus on other examples of resolutions of Old Believer councils in terms of regulations on clothes and appearance.

I should mention again that Old Belief as a movement appeared on the onset of the era of modernization. All innovations, let it be social or economic changes, or appearance of new goods and equipment were associated with Nikon’s *noviny* (i.e., novelties in Russian religion, introduced by Nikon) or *prelesti zmeiny* (serpent’s allures). It was a constant appeal for elders to fight with such things and make their congregants a part of this struggle. The fear of modernization and loss of Christian ways, as well as a guidance for prevailing it, is reflected in numerous written documents created by Old Believers.

In this and the following section (4.2.), I work mostly with the two types of resolutions of Old Believer councils. The more traditional type is a manuscript with the date and place of a council, and a number of articles that summarize the questions discussed at the meeting. These articles contain answers to those questions and references to holy books that confirm the council’s decision. Mostly, I have been working with resolutions of *Pomortsy* and *Chasovennye* published in the collection of Old Believer texts *Dukhovnaia Literatura Staroverov Vostoka Rossii* (Spiritual Literature of the Eastern Russia Old Believers; Pokrovskii 1999). There is another type of resolution that appears in the 20th century and contains the whole discussion, i.e., in contrast to the first type, we can read a variety of opinions on a question. Of course, delegates were supposed to come to a certain conclusion and publish it as well. Another difference between the two types of resolutions is that the first type has usually been a local event, when members of communities of the same vicinity were gathering, while the second one has been bringing together representatives from different regions and even countries. The latter is often referred to as a convention (*sjezd*) rather than a council (*sobor*). In section 4.2., I analyze materials of Estonian conventions with delegates from all over Estonia, including representatives of Latvian and Lithuanian communities.

Resolutions of councils were not the only kind of documents that codified external piety systems of Old Belief and served as an instruction for ordinary Believers. For example, Nadezhda Ponomareva points out that a significant place of Old Believer literary tradition in Estonia “was taken by texts, calling

for maintaining the idealistic image of old piety and, as far as feasible, keeping a Christian away from temptations and ‘sorrows of our age’” (2009: 136). A circle of Estonian Old Believer texts belonged to various genres: councils’ decisions, homiletic articles and sermons, satirical works (ibid.). One of the most representative and famous locally found texts was written by Petr Karpushenko (died in 1871), a powerful *nastavnik* of *Fedoseevtsy* from Latvia. In 1867, he visited Old Believer communities in Prichudie and blessed three local male leaders. These *nastavniki* came along with Karpushenko by invitation of some local Old Believers. Nevertheless, *nastavniki*, whom he blessed for Prichudie, had to leave because local authorities persecuted them (Morozova 2009: 130–131).

Given that, it is not quite clear how *nastavniki* from the outside of Prichudie influenced local practices. However, Karpushenko’s *Zaveshchanie ostaltsam drevlego pravoslaviia* (The Last Will to the Extant Followers of Old Orthodoxy) was known by Old Believers in Estonia. Karpushenko’s *Zaveshchanie* was first read out at the council meeting in 1868 in Revdino (Latvia) (Morozova 2009: 130–131; Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 136). After that, the work was copied and spread out among *Fedoseevtsy* in Latvia and Estonia. Several copies were later found in Raja (Morozova 2009: 134).

In his work, Karpushenko identified the most disturbing problems of local Old Believers, native to Latvia, Estonia, and other neighboring countries and regions. Clothes became one of the topics touched on by the famous elder. In article nine¹⁴², he specified what kind of clothes are forbidden for *Fedoseevtsy*:

Do not wear unchristianlike clothes, neither shirts with a high collar, nor peaked caps on heads of men, nor Polish dress suits or shirts. Women must not wear *salopy*¹⁴³, *karnalin*, nor Roman *andraki*. Who won’t be subject to discipline and would show disobedience, do not give any *epitimia* for these two causes, for carelessness and for clothes, but excommunicate right away to where you want to (Morozova 2009: 142).

It is notable how Karpushenko calls a non-Christian apparel Polish, a rhetoric that not only connotes the foreign influence but also stands for a modernized European culture. Something that should certainly be avoided by a true Old Orthodox. Karpushenko also uses an obviously archaicized language by calling another piece of clothes the ‘Roman *andraks*’. Compared to the previous, Polish, epithet, Roman *andraks* are based on an opposite logic, since this expression sounds anachronistic, i.e., it definitely does not belong to the contemporary world. However, it serves the same function of distinguishing between non-Christian, non-Old Believer modernized culture and a Christian, Old Believer,

¹⁴² In total, there are 25 articles in *The Last Will*.

¹⁴³ *Salopy* probably sounds offensive, but it is a translation of the Russian word *салопы* which means ‘a piece of clothes and a piece of clothes only’. The word *salop* was a loanword from French where it also signified ‘fur coat’. Unfortunately, the meaning of the word changed, and I am not sure if it means anything else but the pejorative.

non-modernized one. Because such discourse presumes a respective worldview in which Roman, i.e., pagan, clothes define the religious belonging¹⁴⁴.

Karpushenko specifies what clothes should not be worn by men and by women, continuing to follow gender-based semiotic ideologies of Old Belief. Later, in the last 25th article, the elder gravely castigates younger girls for dancing:

Certainly, and disapprovingly, every father must forbid his daughter to dance. You see what time has come! Every girl dances and does not hide it. A new peril of the world is seen in this obvious debauchery. Do as you wish, but if you don't rectify this, I will give up all of you. Here, I leave my last will for you, and the ones who would listen, this would work for your salvation (Morozova 2009: 145).

As a rule, dancing and celebration is not welcomed by Old Believer elders. Nonetheless, these activities remain, or, at least, remained for a significant period of time, an important part of the social life of peasantry, for whom marriage was one of the most significant achievements (Kabakova 2001: 157). Marriage also had an important economic function as it was an exchange of workforce between two families. The bride's family loses a pair of working hands, but they don't have to worry about feeding another soul (Olson and Adonyeva 2012: 92). As Semyonova-Tyanshanskaia notices, peasant parents wanted to get their son married as soon as possible, because they would get extra workforce in the family (Semyonova-Tyanshanskaia 1914: 4). Games, night meetings, dancing, and other forms of interaction of the youth, of course, serve only in favor of this goal (see *ibid.*: 43–46). I do not claim that a search for a future partner has been the only reason for Old Believer girls to get socialized but presumably it should have been appreciated by their parents, but that was an obvious contradiction between concurrent frames of social life in Old Believer communities. On a vernacular level, Karpushenko's appeal to fathers to forbid their daughters dancing did not look like a rule that would certainly come to life, but it was significant that *nastavniki* were often trying to interfere with some local conventions and change particular habits that might be observed in congregation.

Councils of *Pomortsy* in other regions were also concerned with the problem of Christian clothes. Documents from Siberia reflect these concerns and demonstrate usage of a similar language. As *Tyumenski statii* (*Articles of Tyumen*)¹⁴⁵ state, "Christians must have clothes according to the old-time Christian law, but

¹⁴⁴ As Ponyrko claims, Avvakum and his followers deliberately used vernacular language in their writings (Ponyrko 1994: 104–105). This was also common for other Old Believer writings. For instance, Zhuravel comes to the conclusion that authors of *A Tale of Miraculous Events*, a recent hagiographic story of *Chasovennye* faction, deliberately changed contemporary spelling of names, words, and terms into archaic or vernacular (Zhuravel 2014: 412–413). See more on this work in Chapter V.

¹⁴⁵ Tyumen is a city in Western Siberia. The *Pomortsy* council took place there in the beginning of 1805.

not according to the German law, and they mustn't come to accord with the foreign law and have Latin clothes or cuts of different countries, as well as the immodest footwear, otherwise the renegades should be excommunicated" (Pokrovskii 1999: 457). The council paid attention to women's decorations, claiming that it was common for women to adorn "Christian cut" clothes with "fornicary and satanic widgets" (ibid.). It was strictly prohibited to confuse the gender attributes of the attire:

Women should not wear male garments, neither hats nor unusual *chabaki*¹⁴⁶, nor external clothes worn by outsiders <...> but to wear usual garments: Women's clothes for women, which are not alluring and rather credible, and not disgusted by God. Women should cover their heads with usual shawls that are kept from olden days, and their hair should not be visible. We pray and testify that shawls with trims should not be accepted, because such custom had not been found in the olden days and hadn't been witnessed by the Christians (ibid.: 460).

In this excerpt, elders strictly speak out against any decorations or 'trims' (they probably meant folk ornament) that is often considered as a casual part of peasant clothing. This totally contradicts what later would be proposed by Ivan Zavoloko, who was promoting the folk tradition as a means of mastering the Old Believer identity. Decorating clothes with folk ornaments became a significant part of this project. More than a century after the council in Tyumen, Zavoloko and other authors, as I will show in section 4.3., would employ a similar language, and a similar logic of abandonment of all the foreign, alien, and embracing the Christian, Old Believer, traditional.

Meanwhile, Tyumen elders expressed prejudices against women, who, according to the quoted articles, were inclined to overuse decorations. The Tyumen articles also restricted wearing of the belts over outer clothing – it could be put on only over undershirts (ibid.). Another document, *Predlogi Pashenski* (Pashenski Pretexts)¹⁴⁷ conveys this even more straightforward:

By the word of blasphemer and oppressor, Peter the Great, females exhibit uncovered foreheads, and girls wear underskirts, others have dragging *sarafany* <...> Women prepare for the church, primp, and lure the lechers (ibid. 478).

Restrictions on clothes and entertainment is a prominent topic in homiletic writing of Old Believers of all factions. *Chasovennye*, too, tended to teach to their congregation that only wearing certain types of clothes can lead to salvation. Sometimes their instructions resemble the kenotic practices, i.e., imitation

¹⁴⁶ A type of headdress.

¹⁴⁷ A council of a strict *Filipovtsy* Old Believers held in 1877 in the village of Pashenka near Tyumen. This example should be a bit distanced from the rest of the quoted documents because it belongs to a faction I have not been working with for this research. However, *Filipovtsy* share the same Northern Russian background as *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy*, and, as it comes from the excerpt, develop a similar line of argumentation.

of Christ's sufferings (see Naletova 2010; Naumescu 2013; Plyukhanova 2020). As at the Iryum council of 1723, it was declared that men should cut their heads "on top" as a sign of "remembering and mirroring sorrow, because the true faith is persecuted, and our heads are stamped with sorrow" (Pokrovskii 1999: 333). The same council standardized clothes to be worn for praying, both for men and women: "Men should pray in *kaftans* <...>. Women – in black *sarafany* and should have black or *konovat* scarves on their heads" (ibid.). More than a century later, the Tyumen council of 1840 repeats similar prohibitions about clothes:

Males mustn't wear foreign garments that are German – frock coats, Armenian – *armiaki*, Jewish – peaked caps, and Hellenic and Jewish hats Christians mustn't wear. During praying time, they must wear *kaftany* of old cut, wives – black *sarafany*, girls must wear headbands and cover heads with black scarves (Pokrovskii 1999: 337).

This fragment above from *Chasovennye* council can be compared to the phrasing of elder Karpushenko. They use a similar language where medieval ethnic and religious nominations (Jewish, Armenian, Hellenic) are combined with modern (German). I call the former medieval just because they refer not only to ethnic groups but also to religious rivals (heretics and pagans, to whom Jewish / Armenian and Hellenic belong according to Old Believer worldview respectively). Such similarity is not coincidental. In fact, the system of overt and hidden quotes denotes that archaic texts are reused in order to recreate the feeling of the past. Therefore, writing and reading such texts is itself a kenotic practice in Old Belief.

4.2. Old Believer conventions in Estonia discussing external pieties

An author of 1898 Postimees article about Old Believers in Prichudie stated that they indeed appreciated "the outer beauty" (quote from Rikhter 1976: 141). Such comments are dubious because, on one hand, they confirm an importance of external pieties for Old Believers, on the other hand, Old Believer elders and laity have allegedly had opposite views on what clothes are actually appropriate for a Christian. As we could see from the previous examples, elders would repeatedly decide that extra decorations are sinful. However, the commitments of ordinary Old Believers to changing fashion and material culture in general have been hard to break. Those vernacular concepts of appropriateness of clothes have been quite flexible and often contradicted the requirements of the written rule. For example, this is relatable for one of the most prominent pieces of female Old Believer clothing, the so-called *povoinik* (in Estonia) or *shashmur* (in Siberia) – a headdress that signifies that a woman wearing it is married. Initially, *povoiniki* were quite common not only for Russians but for Ukrainians and Belarusians too, notwithstanding their religious belonging. Influenced by

new trends of fashion brought up by modernization, women in those countries mostly abandoned the practice of covering their heads in public. At this point, wearing *povoiniki* became a mark of a Christian value in Old Belief. Elizaveta Rikhter mentions that in Estonia married women were always covering their heads with *povoiniki*. As she quotes on of her informants, women used to comb their hair first thing in the morning and then put on a *povoinik*; if anyone appeared uncovered in public, she would be blamed for that as she had been “crowned” during the wedding (Rikhter 1976: 142). A Kallaste woman born in 1901, whom Rikhter interviewed in 1961, mentioned that women used to put on *povoiniks* before going to greet their husbands coming back from fishing in Ladoga¹⁴⁸ (ERM EA 302: 203). At the same time, Rikhter reports that at the beginning of the 20th century Prichudie women started refusing from wearing *povoiniki*. Interestingly, they explained the ceased practice of wearing *povoiniki* by distinguishing between rules built on holy scripture and rules incorporated into a custom (see Rikhter 1976: 144). From this point of view, the customary nature of covering heads with *povoiniki* gave Old Believer a space for choice. I assume there was a larger shift in material culture and social conventions about clothes that drew on changes in attitudes to religious regulations.

As the examples with *povoiniki* show, even significant elements of the Old Believer wardrobe are exposed to abandonment. That was causing serious problems for elders who would prefer to make their congregants stick to the isolating, distinguished-looking dress code. Even in the 20th century, many elders expressed these concerns in terms of alien influence, be it wearing foreign clothes, or mixing with heretics, which was quite similar to the rhetoric of previous times, as one might conclude from the documents quoted in section 4.1. For instance, an elder and icon-painter from Raja, Gavriil Frolov¹⁴⁹, distinguishes between the right side of true Christians, and the side of the fallen ones, who prefer comfort to precepts of ancestors. As Frolov puts it on pages of *Rodnaia Starina*, it is because of a fascination of ‘German’ lifestyle, Old Believers started forgetting how to be Christians. For sure, German was not intended here to represent the nation, but serves as a personification of a space of another religion and a modernized world:

People are bogged down in sins and have defiled themselves with their own volition, they have deprived their souls of celestial glory and disgraced it with manifold taints. Many have forgotten God and started living of their own accord, and by pleasing the devil, they have become intoxicated with a German hop, with their apostasy. And you wouldn’t find a lot of Christian values in a contemporary world. What a massive mimicking of German beard-shaving, tobacco-

¹⁴⁸ Apparently, this could have happened before Estonia gained independence in 1918 and fishermen from Prichudie were able to cross the lake to the Russian bank. Therefore, the Kallaste woman was sharing memories of her youth rather than her actual practice.

¹⁴⁹ Gavriil Frolov (1854–1930) was a teacher of the world-famous icon-painter Pimen Sofronov (1898–1973). Frolov led selfless, rigorous life and compiled several homiletical works (Isaev 1996: 363–366).

smoking, and dressing, and female decorations, and other temptations! There is not a single person who wouldn't be caught by the German disease. No fasting, no celibacy, no praying, no repentance, no ardent sign of cross, no bows, no fear of God – at least at the time of prayer, no obedience or honoring the parents (*Rodnaia Starina* № 6: 7).

Unfortunately to those elders, Old Believers were not a completely insular group. Given the fact that people were refusing from the basics – men were cutting beards, women were not wearing proper skirts – they were confronted with a choice either to expel the disobedient or to change the attitude to the rule breaking. This served as a basis for discussion at the conventions in the interwar period (1918–1940).

Changes of the 20th century brought up a discussion about the balance of the inner and the outer in the Old Belief. Wearing a beard or a skirt itself was fine and potentially could satisfy both the 'fashionmongers' and the elders, but could this beard be trimmed, or could this skirt be of bright colors or shorter than usual? Some elders suggested that practicing Old Belief was not exercise in 'pharisaism'¹⁵⁰, neither the reckless devotion to some rituals.

At the 5th convention of Old Believers in Kallaste, which was held in June 1928, a delegate and a state councilor Baranov from Tallinn, who was also elected as a chairperson of the meeting, addressed the issue of facilitation of religious beliefs. His address turned out to be a bit controversial, as on one hand, he claimed that some of the requirements for congregants had no relevance to the faith in God. Something that still contradicts the usual attitudes of elders and the vast majority of practitioners. Here is the example he brought in:

A young man has been attending the choir for a long time in the relevant garments – *azyam*, gown, boots, etc., and suddenly he comes in a coat, spats, etc. It is pointed out to him, sometimes carelessly, sometimes extremely carelessly. A young man either takes offence or starts to shy away from that, and his visits to the choir become less frequent at first, then, after more comments, he retires to the balcony, and hardly ever gets back from there, unless being asked multiple times. Can those reasons be considered as sufficient? No! This is only an outer side that has no connection with the personal faith of God (Protokol 1929: 10).

Further, Baranov elaborated that wearing proper clothes is correct from a holy scripture point of view but turns out to be impractical. It is possible to only scare people from attending the services with such strictness, therefore, some milder approaches are needed, although the rule cannot be abandoned. That said, Baranov's message sparked controversy. Delegates from Prichudie village

¹⁵⁰ Here the term stands for a strict, literal observance of a tradition. The word is derived from the name of Pharisees, a Jewish religious party during the Second Temple period, who were infamous antagonists of Jesus Christ. Opponents of Old Belief often accused the latter in pharisaism because some behavioral patterns seemed similar to Pharisees. In particular, this regards Old Believer dedication to micropactices and the formal side of religious service.

communities recalled that men shaving the beard or women in short clothes or wearing hats certainly could not be allowed to pray together with the rest of the community. Baranov's opponent, F. Savostkin from Bolshiye Kolki *Pomortsy* community argued that the secret of facilitation of religious belief is in the beauty of the church and the lifestyle of a Christian, because either an elder or singers and cantors are ordained according to their life and piety (ibid.: 17).

In the end, the Convention approved Baranov's proposal in a way that "outer forms should not serve as an obstacle for communal prayer" with reservations that it should be paid more attention on the solemnity and order of the divine service (ibid.: 23), i.e., formally satisfying all sides of the discussion. However, it did not prevent Old Believers from further controversy.

During the 7th council of *Pomortsy* Old Believers in Voronja in 1930, the delegate of the Tallinn community, F.F. Prussakov, brought about the issue of extending the frames of old rites. He was sure that the ritualistic side belongs to peripheral matters, while the inside search for the evangelical truth should be prioritized. *Nastavnik* A.I. Ekimov objected Prussakov's attempt to totally reform the Old Belief by focusing on coordination of external and internal essence of a human being:

The internal essence of a person is closely connected to the external one and flows directly out of it. Apart from that, it is not tolerated to divide sins into major and minor. That is why there is no and should not be any reason for broadening the framework of ritualistic side among Old Believers (Ponomareva 2005: 407).

The application of the rule that external piety could not be broken can be found in the memoir by Stepan Ratsevich¹⁵¹, who came to Prichudie as an instructor of the Union of Russian Educational and Charitable Organizations. Staging plays in people's houses¹⁵² in Old Believer villages, Ratsevich would notice how different generations of Old Believers interact with older clothes. He often asked amateur actors to find costumes in "old chests" of their parents and it did not always end well for the actors. In Mustvee, a young Old Believer man secretly brought old clothes from his grandmother's place:

[T]en stylish merchant dresses¹⁵³ made in a fashion of that time¹⁵⁴, brightly decorated with ruches, flounces, and hand beaded laces. No one could resist admiring those heavy brocade and silk shawls with old Russian graphics, play of paints on embroidered flowers and ornaments.

¹⁵¹ Stepan Ratsevich (1903–1987) was a cultural activist, journalist, and actor based in Narva. His task in *Prichudie* was to give lectures, organize courses, and stage plays for amateur theatrical news in Russian communities (Isakov 1996: 338–339).

¹⁵² *Rahvamajad* in Estonian or *narodnye doma* in Russian.

¹⁵³ This means women's dresses, i.e., dresses that women from a merchant's family would wear.

¹⁵⁴ It is not quite clear what time Ratsevich meant.

However, the Lanzberg's family learnt about his trick with the costumes. Before putting them back in the chest, clothes were brought to the prayer house where they were sprinkled with holy water in order to get rid of the 'satanic smear' (Ratsevich 2007: 312).

In Voronja, Frosja, a young actress from an Old Believer family, also faced the obstruction by her family, but managed to play her part. However, after the play Frosja and the entire congregation heard a harsh word from their elder: "A thousand of bows to Frosja Fomina, it is not allowed to sing in choirs and take part in 'satanic' games!"¹⁵⁵ (Ratsevich 2007: 336–337).

I find it important how Old Believers relate the problem of external pieties to a certain degree of order, be it a direct relationship between the inner (faith) and the outer (appearance) or an esthetical argument. According to elder Savostkin, it is the beauty of a church order that inspires and attracts believers, but it should be kept by appropriate people, i.e., whose mindset complies with their actions.

This also corresponds with my observations during the fieldwork. At the time of the divine service in a Russian Old Believer prayer house or in a church, everything is subordinate to the invisible order, a hyperstructure in terms of Richard Parmentier (1994: 129). It is not only that men and women are standing there for praying respectively on the right and left sides. Even an individual action should be coordinated according to those commitments: some people want to venerate holy icons by placing candles before them; some simply need to quit the service for some time. Community members do that without interfering with the reading of liturgical texts, as they know when and how they should move, or, most importantly, when they should not move at all. For Old Believers, it is clear from those minor movements who is an experienced practitioner among them and who visits the church 'once in a year', even if they see a person for the first time. It really looks as if the divine service has been choreographed with the exception that this choreography requires embodied knowledge more than a choreographer. The latter exist though, in the face of elders, cantors, singers, regents who give commands in case the congregation does not know what to do on certain occasions. These are, of course, famous 'grannies', who became the talk of the town not only among Old Believers but also among regular Orthodox believers. They could simply be anyone who volunteered to help a stranger to find the place and pray correctly (or rather, ask them not to pray). However, mostly people learn all these from scratch either in childhood or being adults via regular practicing.

¹⁵⁵ Although Ratsevich reports that being a girl from a rich family, Frosja managed to get the money and 'hire' another girl to pray instead of her (ibid.).

4.3. Native Antiquity

The interwar period (1918–1940) in the Baltics coincided with the rise of national identity. This was true not only for Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians but for the Russian minority in the region as well. Russian Old Believers tried to use it for their own benefit. In a sense, the idea of nation is quite similar to any material invention of modernization, such as urban outfit, the popularity of which concerned Old Believer elders so much. One of the leaders of Old Belief in Riga, Ivan Zavoloko¹⁵⁶ (1897–1984) actively participated in a new project of disseminating the old ways in a new form by publishing a journal called *Rodnaia Starina* (Native Antiquity) where he combined more traditional Old Believer homiletic texts and instructions for specific Old Believer practices (including stories on things such as *lestovkas*, tradition of singing, icon-painting, etc.) with professional articles on Russian culture, history, and art. Zavoloko was one of the active figures among Old Believers who realized that faith from the perspective of national identity becomes allegedly more attractive to the younger generation. He was chairing *Kruzhok revnitelei stariny* (lit. zealots of the old ways¹⁵⁷), an Old Believer organization in Riga¹⁵⁸ (see pic. 11) whose goal was promotion of faith and boost of interest in national culture and history within the congregation of the region (mainly, Latvia and Estonia). *Revniteli* was responsible for publishing the above-mentioned *Rodnaia Starina*. With this journal, Zavoloko was able to implement his endeavors in recalling certain patterns of Old Believer external pieties in a form of acquaintance with national tradition (in a broad sense)¹⁵⁹.

Zavoloko was not just a grassroots Old Believer activist. An alumnus of Charles University in Prague, he had a deliberate zest for Russian literature, art, as well as for academic research on national history and customs. During his studies in Prague, Zavoloko attended a Kondakov's seminar, founded in the name of a late Byzantinist and art historian Nikodim Kondakov, where he met a lot of famous Russian intellectuals, including philosopher Nikolai Losskii, historian Georgii Vernadskii and many others (Mekšs 1997: 90). Back in Riga,

¹⁵⁶ See a vast literature on him: (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 109–110).

¹⁵⁷ From now on, just *Revniteli*.

¹⁵⁸ Besides Riga, *Revniteli* had branches in Rēzekne, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Tallinn, and Tartu (Feigmane 1997: 43).

¹⁵⁹ In a way, Zavoloko's project of *Rodnaia Starina* journal was not completely novel for Old Belief. A famous literary school of Vyg monastery used actively not only particular works of their spiritual enemies, Nikonians, but employed new literary styles that were considered alien, e.g., by Avvakum, the founder of Old Belief. Thus, Vyg authors placed spiritual doggerel poems by an exarch of official Russian Orthodox Church, Stefan Yavorskii (1658–1722), alongside with verses by Andrei Denisov (1674–1730), one of the founding fathers of Vyg monastery and *Pomortsy* faction. A verse about tsarevitsh Ioasaf, very popular among Old Believers, was composed by Simeon Polotskii (1629–1680), a theologian, writer, and supporter of tsar Alexei. Besides that, Vyg authors were coping textbooks on rhetoric: sophisticated language art was more than welcome in their milieu (Ponyrko 1994: 110–111). See more on Vyg monasteries in Chapter V.

Zavoloko was at the foundation of an Old Believer youth choir and an icon-painting workshop, led by Pimen Sofronov (1898–1973), an Old Believer icon-painter from Raja¹⁶⁰. *Revniteli* organized a series of folklore expeditions in Old Believer settlements. Zavoloko proved himself as an outstanding researcher and a successful collector of old manuscripts, whose work was appreciated by late Soviet archaeographers, as he was even hired as a non-staff worker to Pushkin's House, also known as the Institute of Russian Literature, St. Petersburg¹⁶¹ (ibid.: 94–96). Besides all that, Zavoloko served as a prolific writer. For instance, he authored a significant part of publications in *Rodnaia Starina*, often leaving them anonymous (ibid.: 92). From this point of view, the journal was to a large extent Zavoloko's personal project.

12 issues of *Rodnaia Starina*, plus a test release without numeration, were published between 1927 and 1932¹⁶². The editors were using pictures of great Russian painters, such as Mikhail Nesterov (1862–1942), Sergei Miloradovich (1851–1943), Nikolai Roerich (1874–1974) and others; providing historical examples as an element of teaching; publishing extracts from historical and folklore research works. Russian architecture, folk ornaments were interspersed with early history of Old Belief and quotes had reference to literary works with Old Believers as main characters (as in *The Siege of Solovki* by D. Mordovtsev). There were quotes from poetry of F. Tyutchev (1803–1873) and A. Khomyakov (1804–1860). Old Believers also shared their views, concerns, and opinions on the pages of *Rodnaia Starina*.

Authors of *Rodnaia Starina* started beckoning their readers already in the trial issue. The Raja icon-painter Gavriil Frolov, whom I mentioned in this chapter before, stated that humanity was overlooking the upcoming Judgement Day. Basically, he meant a failure to adhere to the requirements of the external. As Frolov claimed, some people just call themselves Old Believers, but when they fail to look like them, then they rather demonstrate inner corruption, immorality (*Rodnaia Starina*, trial 1927: 5). The first issue of *Rodnaia Starina*, too, starts with a statement of growing moral depravity in the community: “Walls that separated Old Believers, whose spirit and household was strong, from a destructive assault of a non-religious culture collapsed. A buzz of streets, political pandemonium covers Old Belief. Enters even our temples” (*Rodnaia Starina* №1, 1928: 2).

Most likely, Zavoloko's interests and social ties with Russian white emigration to Europe, which happened after the 1917 Revolution, predetermined the repertoire of publications in *Rodnaia Starina*. He was responsible for overall

¹⁶⁰ Pimen Sofronov worked in Riga between 1928 and 1930 in a workshop at the *Revniteli* organization. He also taught students at the private study group for non-Old Believers. Besides that, Sofronov's works were displayed at various events at this time, including an international exhibition of the Parisian society *Icon* (Paaver 2020: 57–62).

¹⁶¹ Zavoloko started this activity already in 1930s. However, before that Zavoloko spent 17 years in labor camps and exile (Mekšs 1997: 94).

¹⁶² Currently Estonian and Latvian Old Believers publish another journal with the same name.

editing of the journal and cultural and historical materials for the journal together with another *Revnitel*, D. Mikhailov, who prepared the spiritual and dogmatical part (Meksh 2001: 78–79). Interestingly, Zavoloko oriented to literary and art journal *Perezhvony* that was published between 1925–1929 in Riga in Russian language (ibid.: 79–80). One of the goals of *Perezhvony* was to make Russians in diaspora to appeal to Russian history and culture, and to introduce new art works (Abyzov 1997: 17). As Eduard Meksh points out, the approach in *Rodnaia Starina* to selection of reproductions of secular art was more straightforward than in *Perezhvony*, because in the latter Western art was widely represented (Meksh 2001: 81).

This led to a curious although intended situation, when the editorial board of an Old Believer journal published a lot of things that generally had an indirect relevance to Old Belief, but ultimately formed a bizarre combination of texts and images that were supposed to boost Old Believer identity. For instance, this included an excerpt by Russian popular folklorists, Fjodor Buslaev, in which he was talking about the aesthetics of a beard (*Rodnaia Starina* №2, 1928: 26). Furthermore, journal's fifth and sixth double issue published a piece on icons by a historian of Russian art V. Nikolskii (*Rodnaia Starina* №5–6, 1928: 25–26), as well as notes on restoration of icons and icon painting in Soviet Russia, a highlight on activities of Kondakov's religious art seminar in Prague and of the society *Icon* in Paris (ibid.: 28–29). Even Nikolai Roerich found place in *Rodnaia Starina*: an anonymous author¹⁶³ argued that among other Russian painters and architecture historians, Roerich was able to catch “the poetry, the ancient soul” of ancient Russian architectural monuments (such as churches, fortresses, etc.) (*Rodnaia Starina* №4, 1928: 25). The irony is that Roerich has been discredited in the eyes of Old Believers because of his exuberant philosophy and ecumenical views on culture and religion.

A similar approach can be observed in the series of events organized by *Revniteli* that included presentations by professor S. Zavadskii on the purity of Russian language (*Rodnaia Starina* №4, 1928: 32), by S. Mintslov¹⁶⁴ on the influence of Tatar yoke on Russian culture, by Yu. Novoselov and V. Sinaiskii on Russian ornament, by professor I. Alekseev on church and state, by N. Besedin on important milestones in Russian history, by V. Zenkovskii on science and religion, by I. Tutyshkin on national motives in Russian bylina, as well as talks on Russian art before Christianity, Old Russian art, Pushkin's covenants (presenters were not specified), and many other topics (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 32). Those presenters mainly represented local¹⁶⁵ Russian intellectual circle that included a lot of white émigrés. Most of them were not

¹⁶³ It could be Zavoloko himself, albeit Mekšs does not bring the abbreviation S.M. up as the one used by Zavoloko for signing his articles (Mekšs 1997: 92).

¹⁶⁴ Sergei Mintslov (1870–1933), a writer and book collector, was the husband of Ksenia Mintslova, who left some ethnographic notes on Tuva Old Believers (Mintslova 1915).

¹⁶⁵ With a notable exception of Vasilii Zenkovskii mentioned above and Sergei Zavadskii (1871–1935), who used to be a member of Hetman Skoropadskii's cabinet in Ukraine after the Revolution.

famous in Russia, but they had embraced the variety of ideas circulating among Russian intellectuals before the Revolution of 1917 and Civil War (1917–1922). Although their project with Old Believers could not have high impact and later was brutally interrupted by Soviet occupation, this attempt of reconceptualization of external pieties inherent to Old Belief is certainly worth mentioning.

Old Believer ways of preaching were also implemented into the ideological canvas of the journal. Zavoloko and Frolov published many notes on history and rules of Old Belief, along with calls for obedient Christian life, exploiting a more traditional Old Believer language with its apocalyptical metaphors. Sometimes real documents were used for influencing the audience. Zavoloko published pictures from an 18th century *Pomortsy* illustrated manuscript titled *A Mirror of a Soul* and provided a detailed description of its main points. Basically, the idea was again kenotic – salvation is only possible if a person aligns their life with Christian covenants (*Rodnaia Starina* №7, 1929: 18–24). Some of the pictures from the manuscript referred to the requirements of external piety, showing torments of hell for men shaving beards and women using makeup (pic. 12).

4.4. Women's issue in *Rodnaia Starina*

The authors and editorial team of *Rodnaia Starina* had not overlooked the spiritual education of women (of course, in a way they understood them). They gave special attention to the role of women in Old Belief and, in particular, in mastering external piety in women. Number three of the 1928 journal is completely dedicated to ‘women’s issue’ and contains multiple calls to women and provides guidance for being a true Christian.

The visual design of the ‘women’s issue’ of *Rodnaia Starina* immediately catches the eye: paintings of women in Russian folk costumes drawn by different artists representing traditional culture and Old Belief itself. Some of those pictures clearly define Old Believers. For example, the painting by V. Plotnikov (1866–1917) which depicts a woman sitting on a gravesite surrounded by ornate sepulchral crosses with a tiny roof above them, which were typical for Old Believers of the Russian North (pic. 31). Another picture shows one of the Nesterov’s girls with a *lestovka* and *podruchnik* getting prepared for a prayer (pic. 32), while other pictures depict girls just doing regular things: they walk, wash clothes at the river, etc. (pic. 33). Sufficient attention is paid to *boyarynya* Morozova (see section 2.2., pages 103–107): there is not only an excerpt from Daniil Mordovtsev’s (1830–1905) eponymous novel, but a reproduction of Vasilii Surikov’s (1848–1916) painting, a picture of Morozova’s gravesite in Borovsk, and a retelling of her martyrdom story. The images are supposed to communicate the beauty of a Christian woman and the spirit of holy Russia. They are supplemented with a list of 15 holy women from various cities of Old Rus and with a row of four new heroines. Two Old Believer women are represented: one had been an abbess in Moscow, and the other was a

lay person from Pskov, known for her charity work, directing the church choir, and other activities. The other two women served as researchers of Old Belief and Russian folk culture, Varvara Yasevich-Borodaevskaia¹⁶⁶ (1861–1920) and Princess Mariia Tenisheva (1858–1928). Zavoloko claimed that the death of the latter was a great loss for all the admirers of Russian art and traditions (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 1, 9, and elsewhere).

Apart from providing examples of national art and honorable mentions, the authors of the third issue of *Rodnaia Starina* opened a discussion on what could be called a female agency in Old Belief. They were speculating on what the spiritual role of a woman could be in the older and contemporary Christian church (having in mind the Old Believer church, of course), and by what means she could fulfill this role nowadays. There are several examples which can illustrate the discussion started in *Rodnaia Starina*. I. Parfenov enumerates activities available for contemporary Christian women to prove their faith:

Can a contemporary Christian woman imitate holy devotees to at least some extent? The answer to this is simple: Of course, she can. Although currently the faith is not persecuted, but it is not easy for a truly loving mother, a strict Christian, or at least someone, who carefully looks after children's education, to hold themselves and their children back from temptations around, ribald conversations, habits, shameless entertainments <...> A present-day teacher can always be a solid example for children with her appearance, clothes, and her actions, if she wishes to. It is impossible for a woman of our time to touch the hem of Christ's garment, but she always does that on relevant occasions when kissing the holy icons, the true cross, and the holy gospel, according to the rule of the Old Believer church. Instead of myrrh, she brings her signing to the Lord, solely or among the clergy. And instead of aromatic and precious nard, she can donate within her capacities for decoration of prayer temple or for buying the churchware (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 4).

In another article, I. Parfenov¹⁶⁷ makes practical offers to create a Women's Committee in every Old Believer community. This committee would consist of 3–5 women, who would “keep the inside of church decorated and clean, <...> collect small donations for churchware and decorations, <...> help women's choir, <...> organize burials of the poor, <...> manage the education of children” (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 24). Observing the current state of affairs, I can say that despite the lack of formal committees, women indeed serve in this capacity.

Female authors in this issue of *Rodnaia Starina* presented a much bolder perspective on women's role in Old Belief and historic church. E. Mikhailova

¹⁶⁶ In fact, Varvara Yasevich-Borodaevskaia focused on religious freedom, mostly addressing the situation of Russian dissenting groups other than Old Believers. It is symptomatic that she dedicated her work to Leo Tolstoy, a champion of religious freedom (see Yasevich-Borodaevskaia 1912). However, that did not prevent Zavoloko from mentioning her name on the pages of a *Pomortsy* journal.

¹⁶⁷ Signed, however, as I.P.

seconds Parfenov's thought about women as teachers and benefactors but goes further in her analogies. If Parfenov offers teaching, bringing up children, and benevolence as substitutes in contemporary, easy-to-leave ("faith is not persecuted") times, Mikhailova suggests that women's historical contribution consists in bringing benevolence into the Church¹⁶⁸. As she puts it, credits for building the Church as considerate and caring about worldly matters go to Christian women. They were gathering the sick and children during plagues. In ancient times, they were "softening the slavery" (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 6). Another female author, K. Polivanova mentions the role of deaconesses among useful activities for women in the Church (ibid.: 7).

Female service as deaconesses is quite a controversial question in Orthodoxy¹⁶⁹. However, it seems that, on the contrary, for *Pomortsy* in Estonia and Latvia it was obvious that deaconesses served in ancient church. Under the pseudonym of *Letopisets* (Chronicler), Zavoloko, in particular, describes them as 40-year-old women, widowed or tonsured, who were blessed by a bishop to instruct other women to perform baptisms. Their goal was to explain what exactly baptizands were supposed to do during baptism and how to answer the baptismal questions. This was called 'a service of words'. Their other functions were visiting ill and struggling people, standing in front of the church gates that were used by women, ushering women to required places within church and keeping an eye on them during service. In relation to the last three activities, deaconesses were also called 'gatekeepers' (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 23). Interestingly, similar gatekeepers exist in many contemporary Old Believer communities, and they are usually women. They keep order and visually check people coming to a prayer house. As a rule, gatekeepers know all the regulars by sight, which allows them to keep non-Old Believers away from trespassing the prayer house entrance.

Another prominent role assigned to a woman is a seamstress. I presume it was one of Zavoloko's major ideas in his plan of promoting religious and national identity among Old Believers. He was genuinely interested in Russian traditional ornaments, embroidery and sewing techniques. He wrote a lot on this topic in *Rodnaia Starina* and also published a collection of Russian (Old Russian, as he called it) folk embroidery from Latvia and Estonia in a short volume on national embroidery (Zavoloko 1939). In this publication, Zavoloko highlights that decoration of churches with stitched pieces of art and preparing vestments for the clergy was one of the greatest contributions of women. Given my observations, I can only agree with that. Prayer clothes both for men and women are a significant part of Old Believer practice nowadays. Therefore, the physical and visual expression of the entire tradition is dependent on women's skills and knowledge. Zavoloko makes a comparison between icons and

¹⁶⁸ See the full quotes in the opening of the introduction.

¹⁶⁹ There is an unpopular opinion in Orthodox circles that in the early Christian church deaconesses served as instructors of women. A few attempts to restore the office of deaconesses in Russian church were unsuccessful (See Bisha et al. 2002: 283–286).

embroidered ornaments on shrouds and aers¹⁷⁰, claiming that the unique features of Old Russian icon painting were carefully transferred into embroidery (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 16). Further, he¹⁷¹ puts an equal footing on peasant embroidery and the rich as well as solemnly decorated examples of historical goldwork and silk stitching (ibid.: 30). Eventually, Zavoloko alone provided one of the most detailed accounts on Russian sewing and embroidery represented as a Christian value.

Presumably, he was inspired by some romantic views on Russian rural culture. Some publications in *Rodnaia Starina* also consider Old Believer clothes from that romanticized point of view:

The appreciation of true Russian folk ornament started only at the turn of this [20th – D.R.] century. Here we should recall the names of Stasov, Vasnetsov, Polenov, Bilibin, Mamontov, Shabelskaia¹⁷² <...> Where should we look for the authentic samples of Russian ornament? Not in the palaces, not in the new churches or shops selling manufactured goods, but in the deepest villages and old skites. Chests of economical housewives still veil artistic wonders. There are only museums and individual enthusiasts who keep folk pieces of art <...> Folk embroidery is the best in keeping the old artistic ornament. It decorates women's clothes as well as men's shirts, towels, tablecloths, kerchiefs (*Rodnaia Starina* №1: 22)¹⁷³.

Clearly, ornament embroidery is not only associated with female Old Believers, but it is also national, what gives it a different perspective. As Zavoloko (under the name of Ivan Nikiforov) points out:

Every nation treats the profusion of its past gently. Only we, Russians, have been defined by a remarkable ignorance of everything close and national. Even a young Old Believer feels ashamed to show up wearing a Russian shirt, while Old Belief had been for a long-lasting keeper of artifacts of old times (*Rodnaia Starina* №3, 1928: 26).

Galina Kabakova considers spinning and weaving as one of the basic women's destinations in the traditional Slavic worldview, which follows the biblical legend by which both activities were assigned to a woman as a punishment for ancestral sins. However, when weaving, a woman turns herself into a demiurge. Folk tradition instructs female weavers by numerous regulations that are aimed at preventing problems with newborns, loss of prosperity in the house, etc.

¹⁷⁰ A large piece of fabric used in church ceremonies.

¹⁷¹ Under a pseudonym I.N.

¹⁷² All of them were Russian painters and collectors of folk objects.

¹⁷³ This excerpt was reprinted from a booklet *Russian Folk Ornament* by Yu. Novoselov (1873–1955), a teacher and ethnographer based in Riga. Most of the ornament samples for the booklet were borrowed from the albums of Natalia Shabelskaia (1841–1901). She is known as one of the principal researchers of Russian folklife and a collector of costumes, ornaments, and other material objects (see: Novoselov 1928).

(Kabakova 2001: 234–239). In Prichudie it was common for women to weave and make clothes themselves until the late Soviet period. However, even at that time Soviet industry provided a chance for women to maintain the required skills since a lot of them were working at the garment factory Sangar in Tartu (e.g., “I finished 10th grade fifteen-sixteen years old <...> And sixteen years old I started working in Sangar”, Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman). Regardless that it was possible to buy manufactured clothes at that time, it often required re-stitching, repairing, recycling, which under the circumstances of Soviet gender order remained a women’s duty as well. Thus, such peculiarities of daily life and labor practices on a grass-root level allowed the religious tradition to survive, although they existed almost out of its context.

For authors of *Rodnaia Starina*, it was important to build on a variety of discourses. If previous accounts might be called historical and ethnographic, then the story titled *A Lesson of a Beauty* belongs to homiletic legends. It is a story of a rich young girl, who lost her eyesight because she had been using make-up instead of protecting her natural beauty. Interestingly, the legend is illustrated with two paintings by Nesterov: the two mystical Nesterov’s Old Believer girls representing natural beauty (see pic. 1, 13). Naturalism is an important domain in symbolic ideologies of Old Believers. From my communication with them and from reading some of their texts, I assume that their ideologies infer that natural equals created by God. Same arguments are usually used to approve why men’s beards should not be cut.

Apart from publishing miscellaneous materials in the journal, Zavoloko and *Revniteli* were sponsoring practical events aimed at educating and facilitating religious identity of Old Believer women on a regular basis. In 1930, they sponsored a seminar dedicated to distinguished Russian women that was followed by presentations on respective topics: the First Christian Woman, Princess Olga, Efrosiniia of Polotsk, Marfa Posadnitsa, etc. An exhibition *Russian Folk Art* was held annually and to my mind it is totally relatable in this context, given that many folk-art forms were considered female (Feigmane 2000: 208).

Rikhter infers that diligence of *Revniteli* in promoting old-style clothes remained fruitless. Young people were strongly influenced by city fashions. At the same time, ritual clothes were flourishing: children’s and youth choirs required wearing traditional costumes both as a necessary, symbolic premise for a divine service and for the sake of performance. Although Elizaveta Rikhter calls the style of those costumes “ostentatious”, they turned into a sign of national and religious identity of Russian Old Believers in Estonia (Rikhter 1976: 171–172).

Revniteli was not the only instrument of pushing Russian folk costume into an instrument of female religiosity. According to Rikhter, the Union of Philanthropic and Enlightenment Societies in Estonia contributed to the same cause. This Union was organizing study groups for women and young girls, where they were practicing housekeeping and sewing. Tutors were borrowing sewing patterns from Estonian magazines, while the embroidery samples came from special collections of Old Russian ornaments. One of those collections was

produced by Ivan Zavoloko (1939). The efforts of study groups were relatively successful because, as Rikhter reports, men started wearing Russian *kosovorotki* on holidays. Members of church choirs also ended up practicing embroidery (Rikhter 1976: 170–171). Other Russian organizations, such as the Union of Russian Educational and Charitable Organizations based in Narva, contributed to that activity (Ratsevich 2007, Isakov 1996: 338–339).

4.5. Traditional clothes in practice and in memory

Practicing Old Believers feel that their traditions have existed, if not forever, then for a decent period of time. Even if a recent introduction of new public rituals is well understood, the circumstances in which they emerged are perceived as inevitable on a scale that would seem reasonable to establish new practices. Although the reasoning for establishing a tradition usually goes far beyond the immediate situation, it appears as a reaction to it. For instance, Nadezhda Beliakova and April French (2018: 181–189) come to the conclusion that Russian Evangelicals made obligatory that their women wear long skirts, headscarves, and clothes with long sleeves, which sounds quite similar to Old Believer actions during post-Soviet times as a response to the rise of consumer culture. The scholars compared the current norms with Soviet-time pictures of Evangelicals to conclude that back then these people could openly wear short skirts and dresses with short sleeves as it was allowed. These clothes were common in the Soviet Union, and they were perceived as conventional at that time. Evangelicals did not oppose themselves to the mainstream culture because the garment they were wearing – simple dresses with medium skirts that would not cover legs – were the simplest and most affordable clothes that seemed suitable for the believers of that time. Currently, as Beliakova and French observe, Evangelicals require longer skirts, claiming that this kind of clothing is demanded by God (*ibid.*).

The garment of Evangelicals described by Nadezhda Beliakova and April French looks very similar to what Old Believers would consider as an appropriate clothing of a religious woman. The difference between them could be drawn in the manner of justification of practices and rules. Given that Old Believers usually refer to the authority of old religious books, they consider their tradition as ancient, Christian original. In this context, it is important to mention again the concept of ethical repertoire (see Rogers 2009). Regular reference to a written source means that it is revisited and reinterpreted in multiple iterations. Old Believer theology of decorum rather exists as a matrix of commitments, of specific practices and a vernacular lore of regulations that can be observed on site. It is a rediscovery of the same literature, which happens through generations, locations, and time.

Therefore, the seemingly stable tradition changes depending on the context. A recent history of the Old Believer costume as observed by Elizaveta Rikhter serves as an illustration for that. In the interwar period (1918–1940), Estonian

Old Believers were actively demonstrating Russian identity by participating in rallies and marches by wearing Russian folk costumes, singing folk songs, etc. Elizaveta Rikhter reports that the ‘Russian costume’ worn by folk choirs was sufficiently different from a traditional one. The former was more colorful and ornamented, and in general, it was stylized. It used to be worn for performance but could rarely be used for wearing at folk celebrations. At the same time, prayer clothes continued to develop, although the first requirements to have a separate dress to be worn in a prayer house existed from 1905 under the influence of Riga (Rikhter 1976: 162). Stylized costume can still appear as a part of performance, but locals do not see any succession between the earlier and the current one¹⁷⁴. Therefore, only Old Believer prayer dresses have remained alive and visibly significant in the community.

My interlocutors have strong opinions about what clothes should be worn during service time at the prayer house. The most active practitioners say that they sew such clothes themselves, giving them a prominent Old Believer look when wearing the garments. When we met outside the service, those women looked quite different. Sometimes I could not even recognize them without those long, dark headscarves and skirts. As a 74-year-old woman from Kallaste said: “Black clothes are supposed to be worn in the church. <...> No rings, no [decorations – D.R.]. Clothes must be modest, a long-sleeved blouse or a dress, long skirt: so that it wouldn’t be naked” (Morozova, Novikov 2007: 59). Of course, there are women who do not have special prayer clothes. Once I attended a ceremony at Voronja, where four women leading the service were wearing prayer clothes, while the rest two or three women standing on the sides of the prayer house had regular clothes on them, which did, however, meet the requirements i.e., long skirts, headscarves, covered arms.

Sometimes reinterpretation of the same rule ends up in sensitivity to tiny details that become to serve as markers of local identity. This includes a differentiation in *Fedoseevtsy* and *Pomortsy* communities in contemporary Estonia. It turns out that the only visible difference between the two communities, with the exception of the background, of course, is the manner of wearing headscarves. *Pomortsy* women put it on so that it has a triangle form, while in *Fedoseevtsy* it is rectangular. In vernacular parlance the two ways of wearing headscarves are called *na ugol* (at an angle) and *napopolam* (in half) respectively (see Field notes, Voronja 2021, woman and pic. 9–10). Also, *Fedoseevtsy* women in Malye Kolki are all dressed in black, while women in neighboring villages can just have dark clothes. In the vernacular lore, black is considered as a *Fedoseevtsy* color (although the Kallaste *Pomortsy* woman whom I quoted

¹⁷⁴ For instance, in October 2021 I saw children wearing stylized costumes when performing with the dancing group at the reporting concert held at the people’s house in Bolshie Kolki. Children came not only from this village but also from Kasepel and Voronja. In July 2021, there were some non-local collectives at the Fisherman’s Day in Voronja who also wore stylized Russian costumes. I bring the latter example because for the locals there was no big difference between the representation of the nominal ‘Russian tradition’ made by their children and invited artists.

above argues that everyone must wear black in the church). Their appearance is explained by a reference to *Fedoseevtsy*'s marriageless past. They used to be stricter and still are, as some of the locals say. Meanwhile, these *Fedoseevtsy* attended spiritual courses at the St. Petersburg *Pomortsy* community together with other *Pomortsy* from Estonia, Latvia, Russia, and other places. Supposedly, the difference in wearing headscarves appeared when those two identities were important and remained as an artifact that defines the background and practices of a person. I mean, people chose to attend the prayer house of their relatives, and that still matters as a social distinction.

One of my interlocutors admits that going across the village in regular clothes might not be right 'by law'. Anna Galaganova lives in a house next to the prayer house in Malye Kolki village and her path to the prayer house is much shorter compared to others. "It is such a place in our time", – as she puts it. After my question, Anna immediately switches the direction of the conversation to a more familiar topic, that some women even in her age prefer to wear pants than long skirts. She starts recalling her mother and grandmother wearing long skirts all life. Pointing at her grandmother's picture, Anna mentions: "Granny is in black and at home, they were probably dressed like that and were wearing headscarves at home" (Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman).

A woman from the neighboring village of Bolshie Kolki says making prayer clothes requires some special skills. When a village is scarce of specialists, then it might be tricky to find an appropriate garment. That is why her congregation is not always properly dressed. It was different in Soviet times because sewing clothes at home was more common. These women just had to adjust their experience to make required garments:

[Does anybody make prayer clothes here?] Mine was made by a neighbor. She is very ill now. She is 90 years old and doesn't deal with it anymore. She even made burial clothes for me. There are also women in Varonja¹⁷⁵ <...> There are just some seamstresses who can make patterns and stitch, that is it. They pass it on to someone younger. <...> That woman was great. She made dresses for men and women <...> Women should wear *shirokoplechnik*¹⁷⁶. A shirt or a blouse can be a regular one. Men wear a special gown, *azyam*. <...> [Can you wear any headscarf? It doesn't have to be sown?] Well, we buy headscarves, we do not sew them. [I saw black headscarves. Should they be black?] During fasts they must be black <...> Well, our women wear dark headscarves and sometimes put on the light ones. There is no such rule that they necessarily should be black. Only in fasting, of course, at the fasting services they must be black. [Were there women in Soviet times who could make those prayer clothes?] Well, yes. I was very young, and I didn't attend services that much. I worked in Tartu, and I didn't have time for that. But those who did attend could stitch. The older generation wore those *shirokoplechniki* and all men were in *azyams* as by the rules (Field notes, Bolshie Kolki 2021, woman).

¹⁷⁵ She splices Estonian and Russian names of the villages, i.e., Varnja and Voronja respectively.

¹⁷⁶ A type of *sarafan* worn by women at religious services.

However, traditional costume is present in memory as a significant part of local identity. I would like to elaborate on this notion, because memories create emotional ties between individuals and the past they relate to. In this regard, external pieties are not just constituted by council decisions or formal knowledge of rules and obsessive implication of those, but also supported and transferred through generations with the help of emotions.

Sometimes such connections can be built on the usage of old objects that used to belong to late parents or ancestors. Often, an inherited object was *lestovka*¹⁷⁷ as they can usually serve for a long time, and they can fit anyone compared to a dress. *Lestovkas* are used as part of Old Believer funeral attire are they are different from the regular praying ones. The former is white and are made specifically for a burial (Kuvaitseva 2017: 138, 143). In some cases, there are succession lines from mothers to daughters:

I have my mom's *lestovka* as an heirloom. Prayer dress we sewed ourselves with a woman from Kasapel, Grishakova <...> Some had it as an heirloom of their mothers, mine wasn't in the choirs, she had no clothes, and I sewed when I learnt it (Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman).

In Siberia, several types of traditional costume can be observed. It includes religious clothes, a costume worn for and worn at the wedding and other festive occasions, clothes for work. Making such clothes remains women's responsibility. In *Chasovennye* communities, both younger and elder women can stitch clothes for all these occasions¹⁷⁸. However, in case of some specific items or types of clothes, only particular women could deal with them:

[Who makes *lestovki* here?] Unmarried girls are supposed to stitch them. [Do they still do it?] Not here. My son-in-law's sister did. [Why should an unmarried girl do it?] An old widow. These are our [customs – D.R.]. [Why are they like that?] I don't know (Field notes, Chulesh 2017a, woman).

In other cases, *Chasovennye* refuse from making items of clothing for some personal reason. They prefer to buy it from a seamstress:

[Do you weave belts here?] My husband bought me a special tool. But now we have stopped doing it and order [belts – D.R.] instead. [Why have you stopped?] We used to have more time perhaps. Now we do not have enough time. Busy, busy, hustle and bustle (Field notes, Kilinsk 2017, woman).

On other cases, these are rather the new items of clothes that cause an emotional response and make the wearer think of her identity and aspirations.

¹⁷⁷ As I mentioned in the introduction, *lestovka* is an Old Believer type of prayer beads.

¹⁷⁸ Since *Chasovennye* are reluctant to be photographed, I did not take pictures of them wearing or making clothes. I only keep a men's working shirt made in a nunnery in Dubches that I received as a gift.

This is what happened to Valentina, a young Shor woman, who married an Old Believer¹⁷⁹ and had to start wearing a *shashmura*¹⁸⁰ – women’s headscarf that only married women could wear. She had experienced village life, but her routines were entirely different before the marriage as she was not an Old Believer before. It was not in Valentina’s habit to wear skirts or not to have a haircut – things that *Chasovennye* women in Shoriia have to stick to. Valentina had to conform to please her husband and the new relatives. However, while talking to the researchers, she admitted that she was secretly trimming her hair. Also, she was not braiding her hair because of the lack of the skill and was taking off her *shashmura* before going to bed. Besides that, Valentina was not always covering her head when going out (Boiko, Litvina 2015: 36–37). She also insisted on staying in *Mirskie*, despite propositions of her husband:

I have relatives. I can’t visit them... When you can’t have water or anything else to drink. They would offer you something, but you stay like some stranger... That would be embarrassing (ibid.: 33).

Emotional ties with a tradition expressed via relation to a material object attach a certain level of intimacy to the memory of the tradition. I would like to illustrate this by quoting two excerpts from Marfa Goroško’s letter. In 1993, she answered a call, published in the newspaper *Estonia*, for collecting ethnographic materials. For her, Old Believer tradition is associated with an order in the house of her mother, a Piirissaar native. When visiting Piirissaar many years later, Goroško considered local daily life as an example because her mother brought it to the mainland:

What struck me on the island and what did I see? Among Russians, there live only Old Believers, they have their own church, an Old Believer cemetery. It is ideally clean in the houses, clean windows with white net curtains, holy icons in corners, woven striped mats, Russian oven, samovars are always on the tables as a symbol of some festivity. When I was served tea, there was boiled sugar on the table. Every household had its sauna that was heated on Saturdays. When I saw it, it evoked the memory of my pre-war childhood. Our house in Mustvee (burnt down during the war). All the same, clean¹⁸¹ windows with gauze, starched curtains, striped mats, samovar, tea with boiled sugar, sauna on Saturdays, beautifully decorated holy icons in the corner, and two big portraits in gilded frames – of tsar Nikolai I and of tsarina Catherine the Great. This means, my

¹⁷⁹ As it comes from Valentina’s ethnic identity, this story took place in Mountain Shoriia, one of the Old Believer regions in my research.

¹⁸⁰ It is a similar kind of headwear for a married woman as *povoinik*, which has a name of *shashmura* / *shashmur* in Siberia.

¹⁸¹ Estonians, too, highlight this cleanliness in Old Believer houses. “Everything was painted in dark colors at our place. Dark-green walls and brown floors. That was, like, predominant. There were flies. Animals and barns, and things. It was dark, so that flies on the walls wouldn’t be seen. But in Russian villages, it was, like, white beds, laceworks, several pillows on top of each other. It was like some fairy-tale land for me.” (Güsson 2019: 18).

mother carried over the model of living from the island to the mainland, where life with its customs and traditions went on (ERM KV 757: 317–318).

Marfa Goroško also had some recollections on Russian folk costumes from Prichudie, that are linked with her family history as well:

Interestingly, Russian people in Prichudie had their national costumes. In my family, my mom used to sew them. She made a Russian *kosovorotka* decorated with a funny ornament for my father and brother. I still keep my brother's one. I was eight when my mother sewed a national costume for me, [it consisted of – D.R.] a white embroidered blouse, a red satin polka-dotted *sarafan*, and an embroidered white lacy apron, beads on the neck. Mom's blouse is still kept intact. When did we wear the national costume? For festivals. I remember when Estonian president Pääs was going through our town [Mustvee – D.R.], all my family went out to greet him in national costumes. With my family, I attended singing festivals that were held in the town. Here, in Mustvee, used to be a big Russian choir (ERM KV 757: 320).

Since Old Believers are committed to their tradition on a very intimate level, they are very sensitive to its representation or misuse. For example, one of the critiques of the Visitor Center of Prichudie in Malye Kolki, Estonia, a place that I used as a headquarters for conducting my fieldwork and participant observation, lies in the reconstruction of the Russian folk costume. The founders of the Visitor Center were looking for a new design of the landlady's outfit, i.e., for staff who would greet and guide visitors. Figuring out the form of the headscarves, they relied on ethnographic work by Elizaveta Rikhter and eventually chose the ones with the scarf ends tied in a knot on top of the head (Güsson 2019: 29). Rikhter's work has a depiction of such scarf. Besides that, Prichudie *povoiniki* also had knots (see pic. 14–16). However, local women did not accept this form, saying that their ancestors never veiled their hair that way:

Let's take that house. What is the name of that woman who is a bit older? <...> She ties a scarf this way. When you look at the photos of our grannies, you won't find anything alike. <...> They assured our Old Believers went with those scarfs. We have different concepts (Field notes, Malye Kolki 2021, woman).

4.6. Summary of Chapter IV

The bowl rule thoroughly discussed in Chapter III is a part of a larger complex of rules which I refer to as external pieties. The idea of external piety is based on ethics that builds an unbreakable connection between internal faith with its exterior manifestations. In particular, I focus on requirements to clothes as they have been applied to women.

A traditional Old Believer form of communication of rules to congregations is a list of council decisions. Councils usually gather at least once a year when representatives of several congregations (they can be elders and / or some

authoritative members) gather to discuss various religious questions and agree on how to solve them. Quite often, councils address the issue of exterior look of lay Old Believers, which have always been a subject of change due to development in economy, consumption culture, etc. Elders have sought to reuse previously established practices and reinterpret them according to the current situation.

In this regard, a project of Ivan Zavoloko is of particular interest. Zavoloko was convinced that in order to protect spiritual Old Believer tradition, it was necessary to preserve material forms as well. For example, he promoted Russian national costume and ornaments as a part of Old Believer identity, although originally these clothes would be rather called Christian than a folk one. It seems that his efforts had some impact on Old Believers in Estonia, where a three types of clothes were eventually developed – one for services, a working one, and for stage. I also point out that external pieties quite often gain some sentimental rather than religious value, since they are related to personal memories.

CHAPTER V. FEMALE SPACE AND WRITING IN DUBCHES MONASTERIES

This chapter focuses on a community I have briefly mentioned before in the present thesis. Specifically, it is dedicated to the writing tradition that has been kept alive in the monastic *Chasovennye* community in Dubches. Moreover, it is about Old Believer women who write themselves. In a way, this writing tradition is aimed at creating an image of a proper Christian woman, making her a virtuous example for the entire community, very similar to how it was with *Rodnaia Starina*. This time, however, I deal with Church Slavic compositions of *Chasovennye* Old Believers. In particular, I keep in mind *A Tale of Miraculous Events*¹⁸², a lengthy creation of Siberian *Chasovennye* that appeared in Dubches monasteries and was later acquired and published by a team of Novosibirsk archaeographers, headed by a prominent researcher, academician Nikolai Pokrovskii (2014, 2016). There is another piece of writing that appeared in one of the *Chasovennye* monastic communities of Dubches, *A Genealogy*¹⁸³ of a Cloister 'Novoselie'¹⁸⁴, discovered in 2018. A group of scholars from different academic units across Russia and Ukraine managed to take photographs of it in 2018 during an expedition to Old Believer settlements and monasteries on the river Dubches. This document has not been studied before and has, thus, not entered research reference yet. As a member of the expedition group, I have access to this work and a right to quote it in my research. In addition, some photographs of other copies of *Povest* were also taken during the 2018 expedition and they will be quoted in the present chapter.

Why are these two documents important? A second title of *Povest* – *Paterik* (Patericon) – gives a clue that we are dealing with a collection of life stories or, as they are called in the Orthodox tradition, hagiographies. This title somehow reflects the content because hagiographic descriptions of men and women who lived and died in *Chasovennye* monasteries forms the basis of both *Povest* and *Novoselie*. Usually, hagiographies are written about saints, but these people were not recognized as saints. Without clergy, *Chasovennye* abandoned a practice of proclaiming saints, however, they have the concept of 'righteous people', whose life might serve as an example for future generations. As Zolnikova summarizes, authors of *Povest* kept in mind that 'saints' could not be canonized by traditional Orthodox rules, that is why they were recognized as such with a help of popular Christian features, such as divine gifts (clairvoyance, performance of miracles – healing objects and relics that belonged to a 'saint', an ability to exorcise, and so on), and also on the basis of a specific reaction of

¹⁸² In Russian, *Povest Chudesnykh Sobytiĭ* – *A Tale of Miraculous Events* (also known as *Uralo-Sibirskii Paterik* – *Patericon of the Urals and Siberia*). From now on, *Povest*.

¹⁸³ Genealogy or *Rodoslovnaia* is a specific historical genre in Old Believer literary tradition that is supposed to support the belonging of a given denomination to a true and unchanged Orthodox church and observe a succession in its leaders from apostles and early founders.

¹⁸⁴ In Russian, *Rodoslovnaia Obiteli 'Novoselie'*. From now on, *Novoselie*.

people possessed by a demon in a presence or at the mention of a name of a 'saint' (Zolnikova 2014: 350).

A large proportion of the hagiographies found in *Povest* and the entire *Novoselie* describes women. Therefore, I have decided to concentrate on these two works for the analysis because they represent the life of women in the monasteries and their writing practices, which makes these two literary sources a unique document regarding women's history in Old Belief. I do not claim that Old Believers have never dedicated their writings to women – there is an example of *boyarynya* Morozova, whose hagiography I mentioned in Chapter II (see also: Mazunin 1979; Ponyrko 2010)¹⁸⁵, nor do I claim that women have never been authors in Old Belief – on the contrary, there were female authors who contributed to *Rodnaia Starina* or some other examples. Aleksandr Maltsev mentions a few essays of *Stranniki*¹⁸⁶ Old Believers written by women. One of them is a historical account titled *Istoricheskii Rasskaz Inokini Raisi o Drevnem Startse Nikite Semenoviche* (A Historical Tale by Nun Raisa about the Ancient Elder Nikita Semenovich), completed in 1957 by the mentioned nun Raisa, who used to live at the end of the 19th century with one of the key leaders of this faction, Nikita Semenov (Maltsev 1996: 167–168). Irina Fedorova, a powerful successor of Efimii, the founder of *Stranniki* faction, also composed important texts and developed some of the religious practices of the faction (ibid.: 187–189, 241). Additionally, Maltsev infers that the author of a polemical essay about Siberian *Stranniki* faction *The Answers to the Notebooks from Pomorie* written around 1820 was a woman called Marja. The mentioned essay appeared during the indirect dispute between *Pomortsy* and *Stranniki* living in the vicinity of Tyumen, Siberia. Concerned about the growing influence of *Stranniki* Old Believers, *Pomortsy* elder Vasilii Semenov identifies two leaders of the rival faction, Kir and Marja. By the time the dispute erupted, Kir had already passed away, while his accomplice could answer Semenov in an essay (ibid: 175). However, this assumption is vague because the name of the author still remains unknown. The name of another Siberian author of a polemical essay *An Interrogatory Epistle of M.S. to Tyumen elder and teacher Fedor*

¹⁸⁵ Another important example of Old Believer literature, featuring women, can be a famous *Pomortsy* book *Vinograd Rossiiskii* (Grapes of Russia). This is a martyrology, dedicated to Old Believers, who suffered for their faith. It was written by one of the leaders of Vyg monastery Semen Denisov (1682–1740). Among 74 chapters, only 8 are dedicated to women, which includes 6 chapters about individual martyresses with names, a chapter about 3 anonymous women, and a chapter about a husband and a wife (Denisov 1906).

¹⁸⁶ *Stranniki* (lit. Wanderers, an emic term *Istinno-Pravoslavnye Khristiane Stranstvuyushhie*, True Orthodox Errant Christians) is a faction that split with *Fillipovtsy* Old Believers in the 18th century. They are characterized by a strong rejection of contacts with secular society, celibate, and living in secret in houses of their supporters (*Strannopriimtsy*, i.e., those, who receive wanderers) or in hidden cloisters. *Stranniki* were dependent on the supporters, who, basically, secured all the needs of the 'errant', i.e., isolating, part of the faction. Although *Strannopriimtsy* were formally a part of the faction, they had less rights than *Stranniki* themselves. This description was close to the situation of *Mirskie* Old Believers in *Chasovennye* faction (Vurgaft and Ushakov 1996: 42–43).

Afanasievich remains unknown too, but in this case, Maltsev is convinced that it was a woman (ibid.: 176)¹⁸⁷.

Russian Old Believers are known for their prominent writing tradition, which is significantly based on the literary culture of Russian Middle Ages. They were not only coping and preserving ancient sources – something that has been appreciated within Archaeography¹⁸⁸, a branch of history in Russian academia – but also creating original texts¹⁸⁹. The latter can be divided into several genres, including polemical essays, letters, historical texts, etc. The most recent Old Believer written works were created by *Chasovennye* Old Believers in the vicinity of Dubches monasteries or *skity* (sketes), as they are often referred to by Old Believers.

5.1. Everyday life in Dubches cloisters

Before I move to analysis of written sources and writing culture in Old Belief in general, I would like to make a short excursion to the daily life of a cloister. I do it by quoting my interlocutors: mostly, lay people from *Chasovennye* villages who visit Dubches monasteries on a regular basis. One of those people was deported from Dubches by Soviet authorities in 1951 and never made it back¹⁹⁰. Besides that, I had a chance to speak to Old Believers while being at the monasteries. It is a common practice for lay *Chasovennye* to go there for some time, especially if they have relatives who decided to settle in a cloister. Staying there for an unspecified time became a common spiritual practice for younger people in the faction. For them, it is an opportunity to try themselves and figure out if they are able to follow a monastic life. On the other hand, they acquire various skills in constructing and maintaining (men) or cooking, sewing, etc. (women) because work constitutes a significant part of daily monastic routine. Some of my interlocutors even laughed that monasteries turned into a vocational school for youngsters because they can learn things they probably would not be able to try at home, and then they quit and use them in ordinary life.

A woman, who lived in Dubches monasteries in 1937–1951 as a novice, remembers the following drastic changes that happened in the recent years:

¹⁸⁷ I am thankful to Nadezhda Morozova for pointing out that writing practices were not uncommon for Old Believer women in Prichudie who made copies of some manuscript. My interlocutors did not mention if they had any of those manuscripts at their houses. Pavel Varunin commented this the following way: “In families, such things were common around 20 years ago. Probably, something remained now. Mostly, these were spiritual verses. There were both handwritten books written in *poluustav* letters with inks and simple notebooks with texts written with ball-pen imitating *ustav* letters” (Field materials, Tartu 2023, man).

¹⁸⁸ See an excellent popular introduction into the topic in Pokrovskii (2005).

¹⁸⁹ These texts are also studied by archaeographers.

¹⁹⁰ See more details on that tragic event remembered by *Chasovennye* on page 196.

There is a long way to go. They covered bogs with footbridges, and people walked along them. [Were these footbridges there before?] No, they make them now. <...> I lived there for twelve years. There were no bridges, no people. Nobody visited us, and we didn't go anywhere. We just lived there, and that's it. [Nobody knew about you?] Almost nobody. Crops didn't grow. Everything grew poorly. We sowed anyways. We dug and sowed. [Was it rye?] Only rye. Wheat would freeze out there. Now it's been brought in. You won't be able to plough enough. Every family¹⁹¹ has 200 people. And there are several such cloisters there. There are three female cloisters and two male¹⁹². And 200 people in everyone... <...> I haven't been there for a long time. <...> We were short on everything. Both in the monastery and in the world. <...> Nobody made icons there at my time, nobody could. Now they do it. They have all the people, even doctors (Field notes, Sizim 2018a, woman).

As it comes from the story quoted above, Dubches monasteries nowadays are inhabited by hundreds of people. It became an important spiritual center of the faction. Its infrastructure was developed to be able to host numerous visitors. Another woman, whose mother lives in Dubches as a nun, notices that monastery time is different from the lay one. She also describes the working order:

It is like in the army there. Regimen is regimen. They start praying at 5 AM and finish at 7 AM. I liked it very much when I was there for the first time. When you enter the chapel, you see a working schedule on the wall. They come in and see without further ado what assignments each of them has. They finish the prayer, turn around and go to work. Someone cooks meals, someone works in the garden, someone chops wood <...> They also follow a schedule of prayers, who follows whom in reading them. They don't ask questions at all. If they start resenting, a penance would be imposed on them. When I was there for the first time, I was totally out of touch. I only knew that we came on Thursday, May 28. It was Ascension Day. They had no time, and every cloister had its own. There was no night, only twilight. I thought it was strange that it was as light as day, but everybody went to bed. I once counted that there was a four-hour difference with the regular time. Theirs was ahead. My mom used to tell me: "It's 9 o'clock, time to wake up". So, I estimated that if they start praying at 5 o'clock [by regular time – D.R.], then it was 9 o'clock [by monastery time – D.R.]. <...> When I was there, I took my phone with me. Not to make calls, to check time. <...> I was just eager to compare. Because when you come to one cloister there is one time, when you come to another cloister – it is different. <...> They adjust it approximately. There's no TV, they can't compare (Field notes, Sizim 2018b, woman).

Comparison of life between a monastery and an army is common for other interlocutors as well. Thus, I spoke to young inhabitants of a male cloister in Dubches who came there from Tuva:

¹⁹¹ *Chasovennye* call their cloisters *semii*, i.e., families.

¹⁹² I heard other numbers from other interlocutors: three male cloisters and about ten female.

Morning prayer starts at 10 AM. Work begins at 12.30 in the afternoon and lasts till 22.30 in the evening <...> We also have some free time here. You can pray at this time, do some handicraft <...> Some people draw, some carve crosses, braid chains. Some people do gardening. There are special people with good handwriting who copy books. They write *tsvetniki*¹⁹³; they read books and write down something interesting. Then, it is more interesting to read something on a specific topic. Some people draw pictures. It can be nature or anything else. There is an icon making group here, up to 20 people. They make icons predominantly in winter. There is too much work in summer. Icon makers have lots of orders. I ordered an icon when I arrived. I was 425th in the queue. Not sure about now <...> The regimen is like in the army: lunch, dinner, personal time, rest <...>. (Field notes, Dubches 2018, men).

5.2. Place of women in Old Believer writing tradition

Writing in Old Belief predominantly presumes a production of homiletic or polemical texts based on medieval Russian Orthodox literary tradition. I gave an insight on this when I described Avvakum and Avvakum's women in Chapter II. Writing was considered a male practice. At least, most authors of polemical texts that have been studied were men. Nevertheless, there are numerous sources showing that women have been authors too. The texts I analyze in this chapter are perfect evidence of this. Old Believer journalism, such as *Rodnaia Starina*, was based on contemporary Russian language, and therefore is often disregarded as a representative example of Old Believer writing. The latter, according to academic tradition, should be preferably in Church Slavonic. *Povest* and *Novoselie*, in their turn, counter the viewpoint that women were not exercising writing in Church Slavonic.

Space and time are two important questions in writing practice. Virginia Woolf states in her famous essay that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (Woolf 1963: 4). In this phrase, money can surely be replaced by time, because enough free time is basically an opportunity that money could give to a writer. I brought this argument into discussion because a monastery, especially situated in the middle of nowhere, where life is subjected to strict communal rules and the inhabitants are simply surviving, does not look like a place, where a woman would have a room and time to write. Nevertheless, Dubches monasteries proved to be a school of contemporary Old Believer writing with a significant contribution of women. One of my goals in this chapter is to show how certain routines and moral guidelines facilitated writing practices among consecrated women.

Since all the routines have a sacred meaning in Old Believer external pieties, there's almost no space in women's schedules for writing. Women were taught to read and could become reading teachers themselves, but it was not the same for writing. Fortunately, obligatory public schooling in Russia and in Estonia

¹⁹³ *Tsvetnik* (Florilegium) is a collection of sententia or excerpts from homiletic literature, a genre popular among Old Believers that is rooted in medieval writing tradition.

fill this gap in modern times. However, in places where accessible public education was lacking, conservative views that it is inappropriate for women to master their writing skills would win. One of my interlocutors was Yevgeniia Kulakova, an Oregon (USA) Old Believer of *Chasovennye* faction, who was born in China in the 1930s. In China, Russian Old Believers did not have an opportunity to open a school, nor were they able to send their children to any public schools. As Yevgeniia recalls, her parents were completely against her learning to write. She was offended and triggered by the fact that one of her young male relatives could write really well. Even without stationary items, Yevgeniia was looking for surfaces suitable for writing on:

I was learning, I really wanted to learn to write. When windows were fogging up and no one could see me, I was writing in them. I would write anything on the ground. I would peek. I'd remember a random word from a book, and then wrote it everywhere <...> I picked up those 'pencils'¹⁹⁴ <...> and wrote the entire fence over. I got a scolding for that. They made me... <...> I couldn't wash it off (Filed notes, Oregon 2019, female).

Yevgeniia's case should be compared to archived answers of Yevdokiia Matrosova, born in 1905, from Zhelachok, an Old Believer settlement in Piirissaar (Estonia). Yevdokiia said that she was asking her parents to let her attend classes at school. Apparently, they replied: "You only want to learn writing [love] letters to boys". In the end, Yevdokiia admitted that school is redundant to 'us', meaning women (ERA, Vene 15: 42).

Although I had to take Yevgeniia as a rare example of such deprivation from getting education, it does not mean that in general women in Old Belief are expected to be literate enough to be able to write a text in Church Slavic. Both homiletic and political types of texts belong to the realm of teaching. Their primary goal is to communicate an Orthodox way to salvation for the entire community. Nevertheless, the gender of an author matters, or as my interlocutors often say – only a man is allowed to teach. Even public schooling does not make a difference. For example, Old Believer children in Siberian villages often receive only primary education, which is obviously not enough for a writing career. Becoming a writer in Church Slavic requires extra effort, because 'civil' literacy does not provide any input to this language. Public education is especially effortless in a spiritual sense because tradition requires that an author would be inspired by the divine. Being far away from a Christian lifestyle, a public school does not build such feelings in students.

In Estonia, public education is much more accessible for current Old Believers and younger generations (who are almost entirely not active practitioners). The problem is that the tradition of Old Believer writing itself is lost. Although higher education sometimes paves the way for outsiders to compile important writings about Old Belief. In this regard, I can cite the case of Natalia

¹⁹⁴ A local name of some plant. Yevgeniia also calls them a rooster's head.

Sidorkina, a researcher from Krasnoyarsk, who got acquainted with the culture of Old Believers in the 1980s by doing fieldwork in the Krasnoyarsk region. Natalia decided to convert to Old Belief and eventually got married to a man from the community. In 2022, she finished her manuscript titled *Zapovednaia Vera. Kniga Zhitiia i Stradanii Symskikh Staroobryadtsev* (A Reserved Faith. A Book of Life and Suffering of Sym Old Believers) dedicated to the community of *Titovites* or *Titovtsy* Old Believers¹⁹⁵, a Siberian branch of a large *Pomorian* tradition (Prigarin, Storozhenko, Tatarintseva 2020: 182).

That said, Dubches monasteries, contrary to lay communities, provide a space for women to become authors. Life there, only surrounded by wild taiga and wild animals, does not sound really appropriate for developing a writing tradition, because the inhabitants live on fishing, foraging, and unsustainable gardening while trying to survive on the uncultivated land, far away from other settlements, roads, conveniences, or commodities. However, this Siberian soil became fruitful both for growing vegetables and composing new manuscripts. I argue that female writing in Dubches monasteries became so prominent due to its routine, not despite of it. The written texts, combined with fieldwork materials, will speak for themselves.

5.3. Formation of Dubches monasteries and creation of *Povest* and *Novoselie*

The monastic tradition of *Chasovennye* has a rich background. Basically, *Povest* describes its history from the perspective of Old Believers, and, for that reason, it has been serving as a historical source for researchers. According to *Povest*, the first monasteries were founded in Kerzhenets and Irgiz, and then moved to the Urals and Western Siberia. Because it was illegal for Old Believers to keep monasteries, they turned into a network of settlements, often in the vicinity of the villages of the laity. They were spread out also in Eastern and Southern Siberia. That is why a description about the life of monks often looks like a long, twisted track of their migrations in groups or individually.

Some of these monasteries functioned in parallel with Dubches *skity* in different locations in Siberia and Far East. My fieldwork took place in some of these locations, where monasteries had already ceased to exist. My interlocutors often mentioned a skete near Sokol in Mountain Shoriia. A skete in Bezymyanka (a settlement situated on the Kas River, a tributary of the Yenisei) is mentioned in *Povest* several times. In Tuva, an important spiritual center was operating until 2010, when Dubches monks took the last eldresses with them (Storozhenko 2019: 12). Tuva was crucial for Siberian archaeography too: this is where Nikolai Pokrovskii discovered a monastic scriptorium with old books of late 16th and early 17th centuries (Pokrovskii 2005: 19–21).

¹⁹⁵ A small faction in Krasnoyarsk krai; they are close simultaneously to *Pomortsy* and *Chasovennye* in terms of rituals and beliefs but independent from both factions. Their background is unclear.

Vyg monastery of *Pomortsy* faction situated in the Russian North, also known as *Vygovskaia Pustyn*, *Vygovskaia Obitel*, *Vygoretsiia*, or *Vygo-Leksinskoe Obshchezhitelstvo*, should be acknowledged as a role model in studies of Old Believer monasteries. A savage place in Pomorie became a redemptive refuge for violently persecuted Old Believers in the last quarter of the 17th century (Yukhimenko 2002a: 15). Vyg leaders were keen on commemorating their ancestors. One of the founding fathers, Andrei Denisov composed a martyrology of early Old Believer leaders called *Vynograd Rossiiskii*. His successor, Ivan Filippov, produced a history of the Vyg monastery (Crummey 1970: 96). One of the names of the Vyg community, *obshchezhitelstvo* (lit. co-residence), appeared due to the fact that monks shared the place with average, lay people, who, however, had to abide by monastic regulations. Yukhimenko points out that both male and female cloisters of Vyg and Leksa respectively were built in the likeness of old Russian monasteries (Yukhimenko 2002a: 58). The writing tradition of Vyg and Leksa communities was so strong, that specialists distinguish Vyg Old Believer literary school. Leksa women made a striking contribution to the development of this literary school, however, mostly as copyists. As Elena Yukhimenko put it: “Not only silence attracted the founders of Vyg literary school to Leksa, but also an opportunity of a fast and thorough copying of their works in a Leksa scriptorium” (Yukhimenko 2006: 10). Yukhimenko also names three female writers from Leksa: Fevroniia Semanova, Sofia Danilova, and Feodosiia Gerasimova (ibid.: 11–12).

Dubches monasteries were founded by *Chasovennye* elders and eldresses (monks and nuns) circa 1939 fleeing away from Soviet power from the Urals and Western Siberia. They were looking for a secret place deep in the forest to avoid any contact either with the state or with non-Old Believers. The place they discovered has never been used for cultivation of land before. Lay followers of *Chasovennye* faith were migrating along with the monks and settled nearby to provide support for the monasteries. In the vernacular language, this complex of Dubches monasteries is called *skity* (hermitages), although people live there in cenobiums. One skete is often called *semia*, i.e., a family.

I also need to mention that in the context of monasteries the term elder / eldress have a different meaning than in the lay community. In Russian, it sounds as *starets* / *staritsa* (male and female term respectively), which is clearly distinct from the lay nominations of *nastavnik* / *nastavnitza*. If elders / eldresses are leaders in lay communities, then *starsy* and *staritsy* in sketes are just average inhabitants who were tonsured, i.e., it is the analog of monks and nuns. Besides that, men might be called *otsy* (sing. *otets*, i.e., father) and women – *materi* (sing. *mat'* or *mater'*, i.e., mother). In *Chasovennye* tradition, a male leader of monasteries is addressed as *igumen* (hegumen or abbot), while a woman who runs a skete would be called *igumenia* (hegumeness or abbess).

Chasovennye define several monastic ranks. The lowest one is *tsernorizets* or *tsernorizitsa* (male and female respectively). Currently they have only this rank, while earlier there were also such ranks as *inok* and *inokinia*. *Povest* tells some stories of these early nuns and monks who earned this rank. Old Believers

explain that their ancestors were careful and did not dare to transfer to higher ranks, because they were not sure if they would be allowed to consecrate anyone to this level.

Although the term *starets* / *staritsa* seemingly refers to the age of a person, Old Believer monks and nuns bear these titles regardless of their age. What matters is a level of dedication to the community. Actually, the English term that defines taking monastic vows, tonsure, does not accurately describe *Chasovennye* practice. The term they use sounds as *nakrytie* (covering) that presumably reflects the ritual action that is performed for consecration. Therefore, all the inhabitants are divided into two categories: *Nakrytye* (Covered) and *Nenakrytye* (Uncovered).

The uncovered inhabitants of monasteries are often considered as *Gosti* (Guests). These people usually come to visit their relatives or just try to live in accordance with the daily routine of monks. Sometimes such visits drag on for several years and end up for a visitor either with sudden death or a consecration to monastic life. Of course, many guests simply leave the place after a short while, especially if their aim is just to attend to their parents, children, other relatives, or their graves. Regarding this, *gostit* (to visit) in monasteries does not equal a similar action, *gostit*, in a lay community. In a way, it is an adjustment to local routines and preparation for becoming a monk or a nun.

Among the authors of *Povest*, Zolnikova names four in particular. Hegumens Simeon and Antonii, two founders of Dubches monasteries, were at the origin of the text. Hegumen Efrem gave the composition its current three-volume structure. Finally, Murachev created the final version of *Povest*¹⁹⁶ and was actively distributing it among Old Believers (Zolnikova 2014: 290–291). Archaeographers also have an idea how the work was composed: the above-mentioned Simeon made a call to the inhabitants of the monasteries and close peasant communities to put down everything they knew about the sketes, life and death of elders and eldresses, and of course, about the miraculous events. That is why along with the detailed biographies and history of monasteries, a powerful flow of folklore infiltrated the pages of *Povest*. These materials were written both on paper and birch bark, edited, and merged with quotes from various written sources. However, Pokrovskii highlights that those traits fit the traditional Byzantine and Old Rus genre of hagiography (Pokrovskii 2014: 324–325). Presumably, Simeon's initiative established a practice of making records of memories about the deceased members of monastic communities, which eventually led to the creation of *Novoselie*.

There are several crucial dates in the creation of *Povest*. As I said, its first edition was composed by Father Simeon. In 1951, the monasteries were

¹⁹⁶ I should mention that Murachev made a copy of *Povest* for Pokrovskii which was finally published. Murachev also added more chapters to the manuscript at the request of Pokrovskii. It is not known if later additions by Murchaev were distributed among Old Believers as well. Similarly, the text could have been edited several times after the publication of the Murachev's version.

detected and vandalized by MGB¹⁹⁷ troops, who deported almost all the inhabitants out of the forest and destroyed the monastery library. Simeon, some other Dubches leaders and common inhabitants were sentenced to labor camps around the USSR, where Simeon died before they were released in 1953 (with the exception of those who also died in detention). However, the manuscript of *Povest* survived. It was found upon arrival of the displaced inhabitants and edited several times in 1958, 1962–1963, 1964–1968, 1991 by other authors (ibid.: 324–326).

The authors and time or circumstances of creation of *Novoselie* are not known. There is a place in *Povest* that mentions *otrosl* (a ramification) of a group of nuns from the main stem. *Novoselie* also starts with a reference to this place in the text. I give both quotes together for comparison:

It is also necessary to mention one ramification of this Rodoslovnaia. In Lai¹⁹⁸, mother Elizaveta lived together with the above-mentioned mother Alexandra, and then they parted: mother Alexandra moved to Tanaevka, and mother Elizaveta went over Biisk to the village of Ashpanak. And then mother Flina came there, she [Elizaveta – D.R.] received a monastic rank from her. And there, mother Elizaveta passed away, mother Polixeniia became hegumeness after her, and then, mother Ilariia. This one left the right way and followed the teaching of Zavialov, who changed the monastic order. <...> And mother Flina with mother Avsiiania <...> moved to Parbik. <...> From there, mother Flina moved to Bezymianka and then to Dubches. There were three cloisters at different places on the tributaries of the Dubches on the right side: a cloister of mother Tavifa on Malyi Togulches, of mother Valentina on Dunches, and of mother Flina on an island about three versts¹⁹⁹ from the cloister of mother Tavifa. <...> (Povest, II: 174)²⁰⁰.	Our Rodoslovnaia split to a slightly different branch. In Lai, mother Elizaveta lived together with mother Alexandra, they parted. And Elizaveta went over Biisk to the village of Ashpanak. Then, mother Flina came, she [Elizaveta – D.R.] received a monastic rank. After the death of mother Elizaveta, mother Polixeniia became hegumeness after her, and then, mother Ilariia, this one left the right way and followed the teaching of Zavialov, who changed the monastic order. And then, there were disagreements in the convent, and after time, a full devastation, everyone scattered. Mother Flina went to the Urals and received from an unknown father a blessing to rule the sisters. Then, she moved to Parbik, from there to Bezymianka, then to Dubches, they lived on an island about 3 versts from Malyi Togulches <...> Our mother Evanfia came to Parbik to mother Mastradiia, moving to Dubches she turned to mother Flina, to whom she was transferred by father Semion upon covering, on Dubches, he also blessed her eldership. <...> (Novoselie: 3–3 back²⁰¹).
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¹⁹⁷ *Ministerstvo Gosudarstvennoi Bezopasnosti* (Ministry of State Defense), an organization in Soviet Russia.

¹⁹⁸ I do not mention in which regions these monasteries were situated, because it is not significant for current research.

¹⁹⁹ An obsolete unit of length. 3 versts equal approx. 3 km 200 m.

²⁰⁰ Although the document has been published, I quote pieces written by Old Believers in the following way: there is a first word from the title followed by a number of a volume and a page from publication to quote the text itself. I quote archaeographers' commentaries in the afterword as regular publications.

²⁰¹ Because the manuscript is not published, I use the original numeration of pages, with the exception of Church Slavic numbers (i.e., letters of the Church Slavic alphabet used as numbers are converted into Arabic numbers).

The excerpt from *Novoselie* repeats *Povest* almost word by word and obviously the latter served as a source for the former. Therefore, drafting of *Novoselie* started after *Povest* or one of its later editions was composed. Also, the former covers a different period. If *Povest* starts from the foundation of the *Chasovennye* faction and finishes in the 1990s, then *Novoselie* starts from 1990s and finishes in 2000s.

In addition, I should briefly talk about the relationship between lay communities and monasteries, and male and female cloisters within the monastery. In contrast to Vyg, Dubches has positioned itself as an isolated place from the contacts with the world. It is true in many respects because this place is situated so deep in the forest that the closest non-Old Believer settlement is situated hundreds of kilometers away. Lay Old Believers also settled in the vicinity of monasteries. However, not everyone had access to monasteries, which has been essential for security reasons. It is still one of the most restricted communities in Old Belief. An infamous raid that happened in 1951 only confirmed to *Chasovennye* the correctness of the strategy of isolation. Another raid happened in the Fall of 2016, although this time nobody was arrested. Current administration of Krasnoyarsk Krai is very concerned about this community, probably, because it attracts a lot of illegal immigrants from the US, Brazil, and other countries in both Americas. There are, of course, the same *Chasovennye* from the diaspora who come back to Siberia to stay in the monasteries, sometimes forever. These people do not take care of documents and often lose them or burn them on purpose. In recent years, some Old Believers were caught by local police and deported. Eventually, the best solution the police could come up with was to raid one of the sketes.

However, the high number of immigrant Old Believers is a sign that connections between monasteries and lay communities have developed. People not only travel to stay there or visit their relatives, but they also donate a lot of money, provision, and materials to the monastery. One of the forms of charity is ordering prayers for the health of relatives or for the repose of their souls. These orders are distributed between the members of the skete who have to read an allocated number of prayers. This practice is often referred to as *namalivat* (pray up). Another form of donation is ordering books or icons (on the icon-painting school in Dubches, see Bykova and Prigarin 2019: 80–81). There are some specific assignments in which Dubches monasteries specialize in, such as building large displacement metal boats able to navigate in shallow waters. The monastery uses these homemade boats first and foremost for itself, but they also sell them because their construction perfectly fits to narrow and shallow tributaries of the Podkamennaia Tunguska.

Dubches male and female sketes are relatively independent, but still cooperation and close communication between different monasteries is required. The existing local gender contract demands the subordination of female sketes to male in terms of ritual practices (i.e., confession, blessing of nuns and hegumenesses, etc.). Labor is also divided accordingly: men usually deal with construction works, women gather berries, mushrooms, etc. Although every cloister provides

most of the necessities for itself (i.e., grow gardens, go fishing, etc.), I observed an icon-making workshop in a male skete. *Povest* reports that women decorate the icons with beads – *nizat ikony* (lit. to bead icons): “[Arkadiia – D.R.] was creative in beading icons, sewing silk veils for altar stands, painting Apocalypse with pictures, and leading the service and singing” (*Povest* II: 181)²⁰².

5.4. Close reading of the sources

Povest is originally divided into three volumes. Although it was compiled in Dubches monasteries, the events described there had been happening in multiple locations in the Urals, Western, and Eastern Siberia. The first volume highlights the foundation of *Chasovennye* Old Believers and describes the succession line in *nastavniki* of *Chasovennye* Old Believers. The beginning of this volume is based on ‘external sources’ such as Melnikov-Pecherskii, Nikolai Pokrovskii²⁰³ and some other authors have quoted, what makes it different from the rest of the text. However, there are some basic features that can be found further in the text. These are visiting the graves of the righteous elders, suffering (mostly, from the actions of the authorities), healing, and the behavior of the possessed:

And when a demon was cast out from one eldress, they held a service to pray to John the Apostle. During the service, a cowl of father Pavel was put on the possessed woman, and three people held her: father Timofei, mother Flina, and Ioann. And then the demon cried: “It burns me, it burns, I see Pashka is coming, he tortures me, tortures, release my hands, I will come out from the hands”, and he clapped screaming: “One, two three, six, nine”, and left. The woman, who recovered from the possession, should have taken care and abstain from going anywhere alone, but she went to pick some mushrooms and the demon entered her again (*Povest* I: 35).

²⁰² Some Old Believer women in Estonia also practice a similar decorative art. In 1920–1930s, Yevdokiia Dolgasheva from Kallaste stitched rather beautiful icons:

<...> All icons were stitched with silk threads so delicately that they couldn’t be distinguished from the usual oil painting icons. They were stitched by the wife of Iosif Dolgashin <...> She dreamt about capturing faces of the saints by the means of artistic embroidery, to create icons of ancient style with colored silk threads. Before going to work, she prayed for a long time, and, as she told me, Mother Mary visited her in a dream and blessed her on that way (Ratsevich 2007: 325).

Yevdokiia’s works are still available in Mustvee and Kallaste prayer houses but are not used for worship. Zoia Gunina is another icon-embroiderer currently living in Kallaste (Field notes, Tartu-Kolki 2017–2023, man). I consider the embroidering of icons described above as an important spiritual practice; however, I do not focus on it in the current thesis.

²⁰³ Pokrovskii was the head of Novosibirsk archaeographic research group that I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter. To be precise, Old Believers used quotes from 1984 edition of Pokrovskii’s popular book *Puteshestvie za Redkimi Knigami* (A Journey for Rare Books).

Volume II of *Povest* remains in the same hagiographical genre field but mainly covers biographies of hegumennes (abbesses) and nuns. It contains 52 chapters, describing life stories of more than 50 women. Most of the chapters are dedicated to a story of just one woman; sometimes the biography is split into two chapters, while some of chapters inform on multiple biographies. A certain number of chapters speak about men (e.g., about father Arsenii; *Povest* II: 240) or miraculous events (e.g., about the outflow of myrrh, an omen from an icon, the uncovering of relics, etc.; *ibid.*: 243–247). Perhaps, these stories were captured in separate chapters following the source. For instance, the story of mother Valentina (*ibid.*: 241–243) is followed by miracles told by her (*ibid.*: 243–245).

The third volume of *Povest* is different from the first two as it mostly contains stories about different miraculous events. Sometimes, they are also based on external sources, like newspapers or journals, and were not necessarily originating from the Christian context. But *Chasovennye*, probably, saw tokens of the divine presence in the material world in these stories. Besides that, the third volume also translates some life stories, mainly about possessed women.

If the second volume of *Povest* is dedicated to women, can a female author be distinguished in a text? I infer that there is no significant difference between male and female biographies, therefore, a female text cannot be defined. The flagrant feature of women's stories is that there is sufficiently more suffering from devil's possessions among them than among men (see also: Khristoforova 2016b: 9). Also, it is hard to say whose contribution in terms of primary sources (i.e., that were used for composition of *Povest*²⁰⁴) is stronger. There is no correlation between a gender of a described person and an author of a primary source since quite often women's writings were employed for composing male biographies and vice-versa.

There is a difference between biographies of earlier and later inhabitants of the monasteries and because it seems that the former demonstrated more miraculous abilities than the latter. For instance, *inokinia* Margarita was able to walk on water (*Povest* II: 175), meat given to an arrested²⁰⁵ *inok* Pavel mysteriously turned into fish²⁰⁶ (*Povest* I: 34), etc.

Unfortunately, it is impossible at the moment to reconstruct the primary sources since we are lacking their originals. It is also rather difficult to define the authors: some names are the same, but these could be different people or different writings of the same person. There are some exceptions for prominent writers such as mother Makedoniia (1859–1967), who is known as an author of multiple homiletic addresses and novels that formed the basis of many of the

²⁰⁴ These primary sources are referred in the manuscript as “the tale by...”, “the manuscript by...”, “the story by...”, or “X writes...”.

²⁰⁵ I remind that Old Believers was persecuted and its leaders were often arrested for spreading ‘the schism’.

²⁰⁶ Meat is proscribed for men and women in monasteries.

stories included in *Povest* and other works like *tsvetniks* and illustrated manuscripts (Bykova 2021: 144–146).

A typical structure of a biography in *Povest* can be regarded as follows, although none of the parts is obligatory or appears in every biography:

- Joining the monastery (often in early ages);
- Various obstacles in monastic life (quarrels in the family, temptations to leave, persecution by the authorities, etc.);
- (Il)literacy;
- Illnesses and physical suffering that are regarded as a divine test;
- Ability to foresee events (especially, one's own death);
- Detailed description of death and burials (e.g., reaction of possessed women), date of death and of commemoration;
- Posthumous miracles and commemorative practices.

It should be noted that this is not just a structure of a text but a structure of a narrative that allows the authors to turn routine actions, such as physical work or illness, into a story of implementation of Christian virtues. Hard labor in every sense of the word opens a path to salvation.

A similar structure is true of *Novoselie*, too. As I mentioned before, this manuscript represents a history of one of the branches of female sketes in Dubches. It is written as one volume that has two distinct parts. The preface basically copies the opening of the second volume of *Povest* and the brief story of the ramification that I already quoted above. It is followed by biographies of three women who were at the birth of the skete but who died outside the cloister in the Urals or Western Siberia. The second part of the manuscript starts with a separate chapter that describes the foundation of the skete. Then, biographies of 28 women are given.

If *Povest* included stories of only covered women, then *Novoselie* has an account of every woman who passed away in the cloister from 1990 until 2007 regardless of their age, status, or length of stay in the monastery. It allows us to conclude that *Novoselie* manuscript was composed much later than *Povest*. Apart from that, some of these women represent the emigrant community of *Chasovennye*, i.e., those who were born in China in 1940s or later in the United States and came back to Siberia in 2000s to join the monastic community. Therefore, we are dealing with a recent record on the history of the community.

The line of succession of consecrated women is represented in a form of a graph (pic. 17–18). There is also a chart that shows some information about the women depicted in *Novoselie* manuscript: date of death, date of commemoration, age when joining the cloister, length of stay, age at death (pic. 19–20). Besides that, events described in the manuscript are accompanied by illustrations, depicting the ongoing events, along with some photographs of late nuns,

the origin of which is not known²⁰⁷ (pic. 21). The text is decorated mostly with floral patterns or pictures of nature.

Interestingly, the text of *Povest* published by Pokrovskii does not have any illustrations or decorations at all, while the version I saw during fieldwork had, at least, floral patterns and some illustrations (pic. 22). I assume Pokrovskii either received a copy without illustrations or decided not to publish them for some reason. The first explanation is more plausible because Pokrovskii never mentioned illustrations in Old Believer books.

It seems that *Novoselie* provides more personal details than *Povest*. I attribute this to the need for commemoration of the deceased, i.e., these stories were gathered from people who had close relations with the late persons such as relatives, friends, caregivers, etc. In *Povest*, the layers of memory are more numerous and thicker to create a similar level of intimacy that *Novoselie* does.

It is important to note that both texts are based on numerous sources, including correspondence between monasteries and lay communities, between skete families, incl. private letters, written memoirs, etc. Oral narratives became one of the most significant contributions. Many of these sources were written and / or provided by women. Probably, in the 20th century there has been a tendency in different factions of Old Believers to turn to elderly women to write down their memoirs about the past events or important people. This goes for *A Story Told by a Nun Raisa about an Ancient Elder Nikita Semenovich* in a faction of *Stranniki* and for *A Book of Life and Suffering of Sym Old Believers* in a faction of *Titovites* by Natalia Sidorkina, both of which I already mentioned in the introduction of this chapter.

Pokrovskii also recognizes usage of the holy scripture, professional historical works, journals, and newspapers (2014: 327). This means that both *Povest* and *Novoselie* have distinct features of the medieval writing culture (collectiveness of the work, references to the holy scripture and traditional genres such as hagiography, etc.), but on the other hand, they use various mediators (like photos) to provide another level of reading experience.

Povest appeared in the context of Soviet repressions against the believers. *Chasovennye* had already had a sad experience of being persecuted. It was the reason for their daring attempt to settle in the completely unexplored land. This manuscript was created to prove the way of the *Chasovennye* monks against the background of Soviet antireligious repressions and more ‘comfortable’ (from the Old Believers’ point of view) lifestyle. It seems that the plan worked because until now Dubches sketes represent the most important spiritual center for the entire Old Believer community on the globe. Besides that, it showed some trends in the social structure of the community. Female agency becomes more and more important in the 20th and 21st centuries. Although I can only assume what motivated *Chasovennye* to create *Novoselie*, it seems that it was a demand from the inside of the community, where Old Believers pursued to recognize the

²⁰⁷ Presumably, some of them were extracted from criminal cases that were opened following the 1951 MGB raid on monasteries.

growing contribution of women in maintaining the tradition. Likely, it also speaks about growing independence of particular sketes.

Povest as well as *Novoselie* represent valuable sources for the history of religious everyday life and writing tradition of Old Believers. Orthodox ways of narration for sainthood provide a framework for inclusion of manifold vernacular concepts, classifying and reshaping them in order to distinguish between good and evil events. In both texts, this model was massively applied to private biographies of the people who are not recognized as saints. In this context, we can continue debates about lay literacy and Old Belief as a textual community (see Crummey 1993; Stock 1983). Another important topic that I am going to cover regarding the two texts is the history of women in Old Belief, which has been proved to be more complicated and independent from male skete communities than scholars used to think.

5.5. Literacy and women's writing practices in Dubches community

Dubches monasteries is an alive, isolated community that is hard to study with the usual fieldwork methods. However, written sources can give a hint into some aspects of internal monastic life. Especially, this concerns writing practices.

Big Old Believer monasteries frequently became centers of writing tradition or even schools, the most studied of which is probably represented by Vyg and Leksa. One of internal Leksa documents²⁰⁸ regulates the activity of workers in a local *gramotnaia kelia* (lit. literary cell), i.e., scriptorium. It was addressed to *staritsa* Agafia Naumova, who served as the head of this department²⁰⁹. Because Leksa was a female monastery, all the workers of the scriptorium were women. The document was clearly appealing to female workers, regulating some of the important aspects of their daily (work) routine, such as the necessity to attend services, to be present at the dining table, to keep on praying the *keleinoie pravilo*²¹⁰, etc. Their writing activity was also restricted:

If any *gramotnitsa*²¹¹ starts writing to her relatives or acquaintances, take a look <...> to whom and about what she is writing, and if there are no shameful letters, <...> and after checking the letters give them back <...> (Markelov 2014: 376).

²⁰⁸ The document was a part of *Vygoretskii Chinovnik* (An Order of Vyg), a compendium of internal instructions and regulations in Vyg and Leksa monasteries, combined into a single volume around 1840s. *Chinovnik* is a part of Ivan Zavoloko's collection in Pushkin's House in St. Petersburg (see Markelov 2014: 350–352).

²⁰⁹ Naumova was also a writer, whose traditional solemn greeting for Vyg literary school was dedicated to one of the Vyg elders, Daniil Matveev (Yukhimenko 2002a: 310).

²¹⁰ Lit. a cell rule. In Orthodox Christianity, rule means a sequence of prayers that a person is obliged to pray on a regular basis. For monks and nuns exists a special cell rule prayed, respectively, in a cell that is supposed to be fulfilled on a daily basis.

²¹¹ Lit. a literate woman. Here, the term signifies a female worker of a scriptorium.

Literacy or illiteracy of nuns is not the most common motive in their biographies. However, sometimes their skills related to writing are highlighted. Similarly, to lay communities, this means, first of all, an ability to sing and read out loud prayers and other texts during the service. This is supposed to be a common skill for everyone living in the monastery, because nuns should take turns in this task. Lack of skill could cause trouble for a person. For instance, *Povest* reports that a founder of women's cloister in Malyi Togulches, mother Tavifa (1886–1967) “shed many tears” because of her incompetency:

Her skills in literacy weren't very fluent, she only learnt at home to read Azbuka, evening service, and a kanon for the repose of the soul, and the rest she learnt in the cloister painstakingly. She struggled with literacy, and shed many tears for that, praying to God. And with the divine's help she managed to read, although slowly but pronouncing the words correctly without repetition. She learnt *Znamenny* chant and knew the service order well (*Povest* II: 204).

Tavifa's troubles with literacy did not prevent her from becoming a hegumeness. The narrator included this episode to show all sufferings Tavifa had to pull through to become a righteous person. Suffering as a motive appears often in the manuscripts in various contexts from physical labor and illnesses to emotional anguish but it is not just a motive. Suffering is considered by monastic *Chasovennye* as a necessary condition for salvation. Therefore, they were documenting cases when some people would be bullied for some reason. In the case of mother Margarita (1911–1954), bullying occurred due to her poor literacy performance:

[Margarita – D.R.] was assigned to mother Afanasiia. She underwent obedience, she could do any work with an axe. Her literacy skills were not fluent, she read only the Psalter, she suffered a lot of disgrace and shame because of that (*ibid.*: 188).

However, Margarita eventually earned her place in heaven:

In the summer of 7474, on February 27²¹², on Sunday, mother Anatolia with mother Akinfa lamented that she [Margarita – D.R.] was nastily gossiped about and lived in shame. They were arguing before lunch. But after lunch during the time of rest mother Margarita came into mother Akinfa's dream and said: Why did you talk about me that I was shamed? And she said: If only you knew what kind of reward is given there for this, you would grab this shame with two hands... And she showed those gestures (*ibid.*: 190).

Writing letters was also an important monastic practice that boosted literacy. Mostly, these letters were addressed to the relatives of the sender, but they were not necessarily meant to be only private. They could be read out loud, copied, and in some cases returned to the monastery, where they remained as a part of

²¹² 12 March 1966 (common era).

the literary heritage of Dubches community. As an example, I can give a short excerpt from a letter by mother Paolga (1977–1994), a 17-year-old girl, who came to the Novoselie cloister at the age of 14 and passed away about two and a half years later. Paolga sent her letter to her brother, trying to convince him to stick to the Christian way of life:

A letter to my brother. Life is not a bed of roses; it is full of thorns²¹³! Dear, you know this yourself. Two ways! Everybody wants to live, to have some fun, to laugh so badly... but... but this life is going to end so, so soon, and another, eternal life will start. And all that we earn here will wait for us right there. If here we blossom as a rose, then there the thorns of those roses will painfully spike us. And we will be spiked not for a thousand or 10,000²¹⁴ years but forever <...>²¹⁵ (Novoselie 118 back, see also pic. 23).

The two ways that mother Paolga mentions in her letter is a popular representation of Christian values in the *Chasovennye* community. These Old Believers often oppose a Christian way of life to a secular one by describing the two strikingly different roads. One of them is wide and easy to follow, but eventually it leads to hell. This *shirokii put* (the wide way) is full of temptation and devil's nets. The opposite *uzkii put* (the narrow way) is hard and harrowing but the one who follows it has a chance to be saved and earn eternal life in heaven. The metaphor of the two ways even has a visual implementation in the so-called *lubok*, a wall-picture with a short text. In case of Old Believers, such wall-pictures are used to preach Christian values. One of the most popular *luboks*, titled (by *Chasovennye* themselves) *The Two Roads, the Two Ways*, depicts the above-mentioned metaphor. Bykova and Kostrov who studied the visual culture of *Chasovennye* in the field, infer that this particular picture was created in one of the female sketes in Dubches (Bykova and Kostrov 2019: 10). It is likely that most of contemporary *luboks* have been drawn by women. That is why it is not unexpected to see the implementation of the metaphor in the written form.

The letter is not the only creation that remained after the early death of mother Paolga. The authors of *Novoselie* also included a poem *V Poslednikh Silakh* (In Last Strength) that Paolga composed, perhaps, when being already ill:

That is all, childhood is over.
That is all, it's four steps before death²¹⁶.
What should I do, tell me dear?!
How soon can I know myself. <...>

(Novoselie 121 back).

²¹³ Here Paolga uses a popular Russian idiom *Zhizn proiti – ne pole pereiti*, which comes from *Hamlet*, a poem by Boris Pasternak. For translation, I used an English idiom with a similar meaning.

²¹⁴ Paolga uses a Church Slavic number for a thousand but an Arabic number for ten thousand.

²¹⁵ A remarkable detail: the text of Paolga's message is framed by the shape of a letter.

²¹⁶ Paolga quotes a popular Russian war-song *V Zemlianke* (In a Dugout) by A. Surkov.

In this poem, Paolga also employs an image of the narrow way: “But it is hard to get there / By a narrow, tight, and weedy path” (ibid.). The text is followed by an inscription that the poem was copied after Paolga’s burials. This coincides with a common order in *Chasovennye* villages that all belongings of a person are distributed in the community, including all the writings. It is also quite common for Old Believers to use a form of a private letter for preaching. Quite often private letters addressed to one person would be read out loud before family members of the addressee. Old Believers tend to do it with letters from elders or other spiritual authorities, which includes monastery people. The latter often tried to compose ‘useful for a soul’, i.e., homiletic messages. From my own experience I can confirm that *Chasovennye* sometimes read letters they received from someone else to me²¹⁷.

One of the earliest examples of such form of a homily can be found in the correspondence between princess Urusova (see Chapter II) and her children:

Read, you all my shine, the Word of God, ask the books from your father and hide them, I bless you with them; the most precious are old books, you won’t find such now. I have sent to you, my shine, and I am blessing you with a book *Tsvetnik*, you all my shine, read it, don’t stay idle (Vysotskii 1915: 22)²¹⁸.

Besides letters, it was quite common to take notes from homiletic literature. As I indicated earlier, one of the prominent authors of *tsvetniks* was mother Makedoniia (1859–1967). This is how her writing skills are described in *Povest*:

Mother Makedoniia’s literacy was sharp, she knew the church service, but couldn’t sing at all, was keen on praying. She was strong in writing, she wrote well and fast, and that was her job, she had been writing all the time, anything father²¹⁹ asked for. She composed a lot of books, *tsvetniks*, *akathists*, and *kanons*. And she wrote with a great care and application, as she wrote herself at the end of the book *Velikoe Zertsalo*²²⁰ <...>: “The copying of this divinely inspired book, called *Velikoe Zertsalo*, was started with great care in the year 7424 on December 15²²¹, completed with great efforts in the same year on April 30²²² from the book *Zerkalo* of an ancient writing”; 367 pages <...>, 263 chapters. Mother Makedoniia wrote several homiletic tales, that are available in this book *A Tale of Miraculous Events* in the 20th chapter of Volume I; in the 6th chapter of

²¹⁷ It is certainly an early Old Believer practice. Knowing about it, Avvakum warns his family, what letters should not be read for the public (Barskov 1912: 41).

²¹⁸ N. Vysotskii, who found and published Urusova’s letters, comments that prince Urusov’s library presumably contained some old books that became rare because of the reform. Urusova recommended her daughters to use these old books and she also blessed her children with a *Tsvetnik*, which confirms that rare books used to be equal to holy icons (Vysotskii 1915: 35).

²¹⁹ Here: hegumen.

²²⁰ *The Great Mirror* is Russian 17th century translation of a popular Western European volume of homiletic stories.

²²¹ 28 December 1916 (common era).

²²² 13 May (common era).

Volume II: *A Story by Staritsa Arkadiia Nizhegorodskaia*, and letters to mother Maximilla and mother Sofiia, and in the 3rd chapter about mother Meletina; and in chapters 27 and 28 of Volume III. She had more miraculous tales, but they didn't survive as they were taken by the godless with a box of holy communion and different homiletic manuscripts <...> And she wrote quite a few homiletic letters, and the homiletic letters of her writing are still kept by hermits and laypeople. She could not preach orally but would write a very useful letter and she would help a lot. She used to write without glasses until old age. Father Antonii said about her: "Mother Makedoniia couldn't see well, she wouldn't recognize a person even close, but wrote without glasses". She told him herself: "I see a light ball, and it shines upon, when I write. Don't tell anyone about that till my death". It is clear from this that it was God's grace (Povest II: 182).

If Makedoniia used her writing skills for preaching among the laity, in the case of mother Anfisa, writing becomes a means of isolating herself from the world:

[Anfisa – D.R.] didn't talk to anyone without a need, met up rarely with guests <...> She wasn't keen on writing letters. She would just say: "What should I write? I have nothing to say". And also, she often read and composed homiletic *tsvetniks* for herself <...> (Novoselie: 193 back).

I suppose the practice of writing down memories about a late person has been established in, at least some, Dubches monasteries as a practice resembling the writing of obituaries in secular societies. That would explain how *Novoselie* appeared because all the biographies are listed according to the time of death. However, there is a bigger inconsistency in the style of these texts. What I mean is, the hagiographic genre to which these stories belong requires certain inclusion of certain patterns and formulaic expressions that would prove righteousness or saintliness of a described person. Therefore, some life details should be omitted or reinterpreted in a way that they would not show any doubts in the good qualities of that person.

Therefore, the original sources in *Povest* were not simply copied but sometimes edited in order to be consistent with the requirements of the hagiographic genre. That is why most of the personal stories have similar structure and some formulaic expressions can be found in regard to different people. However, in *Novoselie* this is not always the case. Although it also has a structure and specific expressions are used, *Novoselie* contains significantly more personal details. Sometimes it seems that the authors struggled to fit a personal biography to the standards of hagiography, which happens, for example, if a person in the monastery appeared too old and weak and could not contribute to the life of the community but required assistance and care.

The text dedicated to *babushka*²²³ Alexandra is based on original sources that rather express regret about her maltreatment. Alexandra came to Dubches in

²²³ The literal meaning of this word is grandmother; however, any older woman could be addressed this way. In the context of monasteries, it also defines the age of a woman and her

2003 being old and with serious health issues that were affecting her social behavior. In total, notes of four different people were combined in this text and below I provide excerpts from all of them. The first one was left by Alexandra's caregiver, the two others by nuns, who observed her living in the cloister, and the final one was written by a woman who unintentionally became an eyewitness of Alexandra's death.

When she came, she was accommodated in our cell, we lived a bit together and friction started among us. We would like to pray while working, but she was so talkative that we couldn't do it, and the devil²²⁴ didn't let her listen. <...> I was assigned to take care of her. I did not fulfill my obedience well, I was disturbed by her bad conduct, and besides that there was more disappointment. She was making noise in the chapel, and I was ashamed of her, as if she was my relative (Novoselie: 287 back).

B[abushka] Alexandra came to the cell in a very old age, she couldn't work at all <...> She was deaf, we had to speak directly to her ear. It was a tough life for her <...> She would come to take a look, she would ask and wouldn't get an answer, she could be even sent back, it was hurtful for her: "No one would speak to me", but how to speak to her, only to scream in the ear. She was actually walking around and praying (ibid.: 288–288 back).

Babushkas didn't know how to communicate with her, and young people enjoyed pestering her. They would tell her anything, she wouldn't get it, they would laugh, or they would pinch her. She would smile and say: "You are fooling around" <...> Sometimes she would start quarrelling: "Why are you playing around, am I a toy for you?" <...> Once <...> she lost her *bogorodichnaia lestovka*²²⁵, she walked around the entire chapel looking for it <...> She came up to the mother²²⁶ explaining that she lost *lestovka*, and she was praying to Nikola out loud, and she was staring at mother so imploringly, she looked like some kind of animal, who is hard to refuse, you would always give something. It seems she later found her lost item (ibid.: 289 back and 290).

[Hegumeness – D.R.] told one eldress to split the time and check on her [Alexandra – D.R.] from time to time, how she feels, but it is not necessary to sit beside the whole night. I was told to come at half past four or five, I can't recall, to take a look, and I could leave at the same moment. I, sinful, came at the said time, we put out the clean fire²²⁷ in the evening, only the oil lamp was burning. She [Alexandra – D.R.] seemed to be in the same state, she was lying and

status, as she was not covered, i.e., became a nun. A young unconsecrated girl would be rather addressed as *devitsa* (lit. young girl).

²²⁴ The author presumes Alexandra was possessed.

²²⁵ Lit. Holy Mothers' *lestovka*. According to Alexandr Kostrov, this kind of *lestovka* has 171 beads (Kostrov 2021: 124).

²²⁶ Here: hegumeness.

²²⁷ In Russian, '*chisty ogon*' – the fire lit without matches. It is usually kept in the oven and is used for lighting candles during a religious service. The fire is also lit as part of the farewell ritual when a person is assumed to pass away soon.

breathing. I stood a bit, took a glance, and for some reason I decided to pray a bit. It was a quiet, a night, everyone slept. But God sees us all, and here he arranged everything, although we didn't take care of it. You have to beg God, and God won't leave you. It seems b[abushka] Alexandra was wicked, but who knows the mystery of a heart apart from God, the expert on hearts (ibid.: 292–292 back).

In *Chasovennye* tradition, it is common that someone stays guarding a dying person. It is considered that certain prayers that a guard reads at this time, ease passing away by eliminating fear and pain. I gave these four excerpts above to show that due to her physical and mental condition, Alexandra was not quite included in the community. The memory of her was written down by almost random people, with the exception of the caregiver who mentioned that she had some vague connections to Alexandra when they both lived in the same lay village. Therefore, regardless of the social status, every inhabitant of *Novoselie* community is remembered in the text, which would be impossible in case if a regular practice of writing diaries was absent.

5.6. Enduring hard work and illness²²⁸

Life in Dubches monasteries was not easy, especially in the beginning, when monastic *Chasovennye* had to build up the place and provide nourishment with bare hands. Sometimes they were starving because they could not find anything to eat. This was partially because the community was moving towards the North, a region without any sustainable forms of agriculture, and where connections to other Old Believer settlements, that might potentially grant some support, were seasonal and often interrupted for natural reasons. Apart from that, the *Chasovennye* community did not want to reveal their whereabouts and, therefore, they had to survive on their own for a long time.

And then [upon resettlement – D.R.] they lived for 60 days without bread, baking flatbreads from turf with berries, drinking salted hot water. Father Georgii and mother Pavlina could no longer eat berries and salt, but only boiled berry juice. Father Georgii said: “I will not go to the world for bread, it's better to starve to death, as abba Dorotheus wrote in his 10th sermon” (Povest I: 106).

A hard-working individual becomes a valuable member of a community. Nevertheless, a lot of importance is given to the description of a working life not only because of someone's actual work contribution. *Chasovennye* believe that salvation must be earned by hard labor, which includes both faithful, prolonged praying and actual physical work. It is especially valued when a person has to endure serious illnesses:

²²⁸ I chose this term following Khristoforova who distinguishes between a disease as a ‘biological’ phenomenon, that occurs in Western medical discourse, and illness as a vernacular social and cultural concept (Khristoforova 2016b: 12).

[Mother Ripsiimia – D.R.] had poor health since childhood, often suffering from heart pain. She always sought for mortal memory and fear of God. She worked in obedience, notwithstanding she couldn't do the hard work, she hid it from everyone, in the evening she used to say: "I wish I felt better by morning to do work. I, sinful, was sometimes suggesting the seniors telling them that she couldn't cope. But she would forbid me: "I can, so I have to work <...> We shall rest over there, in the afterlife, and here we have to hurry up". It was difficult work for an ill person, she was hauling something all the time, hardly ever working indoors. Only on the cold winter evening she would come in, and again would start doing something like shredding the lathes for cups, scouring the wool, spinning, mostly, working for *startsy*. Everything she did after the *proshcheniie*²²⁹, at her personal time. She never drew, in the evenings she would seldom read something, she mostly worked (Novoselie: 82–82 back, see also pic. 24).

Same as enduring the hard work, health conditions are reported in almost every story, especially if a person lived long enough in the monastery, so that other inhabitants could observe them for an extended period of time. What was the pragmatics of this motive? *Chasovennye* wanted to show that a person complies with the Christian values and qualifies as a righteous inhabitant of monasteries. From their point of view, illness is an obstacle given by God to tempt a person to leave the right, 'narrow' way. The sick would like to escape the holy place and come to the worldly hospital to receive the proper treatment. Those who do that risk dying without repentance and holy communion. They die losing God's grace and could not be properly remembered, i.e., it is forbidden to pray for such person collectively. On the contrary, those who stay in the monastery might die from an illness, but they earn a better place in the afterlife, because they abandoned mortal coil:

[Mother Faina – D.R.] had an internal illness for many years and thanked God (Povest II: 234).

In the year 7475, on February 12²³⁰, mother Enafa's arms were sore, on Saturday night she couldn't pray *pravilo*. And then she asked mother Anatoliia²³¹: "Mother, pray for me, for the sake of Christ, so that God would work out the useful: either my hands would get well, or I would get sicker". On Sunday morning, she woke up, as arms now don't hurt, they didn't hurt then (ibid.: 238).

Progression of the illness and anticipation of death often triggered the conversion of a guest to the full monastic life: "In winter, [mother Evnikia's –

²²⁹ The daily routine in the monastery is strict. The day usually finishes by a practice called *proshcheniie* (forgiving) when everybody asks for forgiveness from the hegumeness in case they offended someone during the day. After the practice, time for personal things is sometimes allowed, e.g., to write letters, diaries, clean personal belongings, etc.

²³⁰ 25 February 1967, Saturday (common era).

²³¹ Enafa was asking the late mother Anatoliia to pray for her. Further in this chapter I will elaborate on this practice.

D.R.] legs were sore, swelling, the dropsy appeared, she asked for a robe²³², (ibid.: 235). Here, illness serves not as a punishment but rather as a sign that a person should fulfill her path and convert into monastic life. After taking the vows, it is forbidden to leave the monastery, unless it is permitted by a hegumen or hegumeness. In this regard, a chronic illness feels better than a sudden illness. Although the former causes serious suffering, the latter does not allow one to prepare for eternal life.

Apparently, a story of a runaway woman captured by Egor Skovoroda for *Mediazona* gives an alternative point of view on the treatment of illnesses in the monasteries. This woman, Elizaveta, was sent to Dubches by her relatives from Oregon in 2000, when she was 15 years old. She had no knowledge of Russian and, by her words, was not aware of the fact that her relatives wanted her to stay there forever. After 15 years she decided to leave Dubches:

At this time, I developed asthma, and they told me that I would die soon and get to the heavenly kingdom. Then, all those years, 11 years, I was ill, and I couldn't die. I lived, and I live better now. But they told me that I would die soon. The longer it lasted, the more I was ill, especially the two last years. Last spring, in 2015, I couldn't even comb my hair. I didn't have any energy <...> I was ill for so many years. And they didn't let me get treatment. At first, they allowed a bit, but then they told me God sent you this, this is your cross to bear. You just have to suffer, and you mustn't be treated (Skovoroda 2017).

It is likely that inhabitants of monasteries keep a diary record of their physical pains and illnesses. That would explain why in the quote about Enafa's sore arms, an exact date is given. However, I assume, the goal of taking down these notes was to inform the community about the healing. Enafa prayed to late Anatoliia, and Anatoliia helped her, because the next day Enafa was fine. This is practical information that in the afterlife Anatoliia received some sort of ability to heal, that her prayers there were heard. As Zolnikova points out, an ability to heal is one of the indicators of sainthood, albeit by the lack of clergy *Chasovennye* cannot allow proper canonization (Zolnikova 2014: 350).

Povest provides numerous examples of records of this kind, i.e., when a sick person reports the date when they experienced pain or caught an illness, what kind of treatment they used (praying to a late member of a community, applying a piece of cloth to a sore spot, drinking melted snow / earth from a grave dissolved in water, etc.), and how it helped. Graves are regularly visited: it is common to come and *proshchatsia* (lit. to apologize) at the graves, i.e., pray for the late person and ask for forgiveness for conscious and unconscious grievances. Below, I quote only a few of them. For some reason, *Novoselie* does not have these kinds of notes.

It is time to remember the illnesses of mother Tafiva. Since the time she came to the cloister of mother Fekla, she had serious headaches. <...> Her second illness

²³² This refers to the clothes that consecrated people are wearing in the monasteries.

from the first days of monastic life – sore legs, the so-called *volos*²³³. She was rarely walking without her legs being bandaged, the wounds were bleeding and festering. The third illness, she could not sleep on the right side, only on the left side, and because of that she had a bedsore on the left hip. Only a few knew about this illness, she barely talked about it, but endured all the illnesses thankfully <...> Old women often brought some earth from the grave of mother Alexandra and put it into boiled water, and everyone drank this water, so did mother Tavifa like this water, she even said: “Where is that water of Christ?” (Povest II: 205–206).

This was told to us by mother Filonida: I had a headache since the Epiphany Day, and on January 9 I was pulling potatoes out of the pit, and I got sick, my side got hurt and the neck, and I could not bend. Four days it hurt <...> There was a memorial day of mother Tavifa on January 12, and eldresses brought some snow from the grave of mother Tavifa, melted it and drank for health. And I asked them: “Why do you drink this water; do you wish to die?” I was unreasonably laughing at them. And it occurred to me as well that I could drink this water, because Tavifa also had headaches and pains in the neck, and she would probably help me. But this thought was gone soon and locked up in disbelief: “Nothing would help, perhaps”. So, I didn’t drink it at lunchtime, but the sisters did. And in the evening, although with disbelief, I drank it <...> And when I woke up in the morning, I thought, why does neither my head, nor neck, nor side hurt? <...> And I hardly remembered that I drank water in the evening, and probably, mother Tavifa healed me. And only then I thanked God, and after four days already I did not feel any pain (ibid.: 207).

Year 7476. I, sinful elder Anatolii, announce to the Glory of God, on January 26²³⁴ at 3 o’clock at night my chest suddenly started aching under the left nipple, and under the right nipple it was aching even more. So, after finishing my usual *pravilo* I went to bed, and the pain was there. Thus, I woke up, conducted the morning service, but the pain was still there. And I, sinful, started thinking about this unexpected illness, and also that it occurred in such an important area, in the chest. It came to my mind to drink some water mixed with earth from mother Tavifa’s grave, with the hope that thanks to mother Tavifa’s prayers, God would ease the pain (ibid.).

And²³⁵ then I was miraculously healed for the fourth time. In the summer of 7475, on September 8²³⁶, I got a sore arm, because I pressed the juice too hard. The arm hurt, was swollen and I couldn’t bend it, but I had to thresh the rye <...> And then I remembered about mother Alexandra. I went to her grave, prayed to her, and rubbed the sore arm with the grave’s earth. It became better, it stopped throbbing, but the pain in the shoulder remained. And after that I remembered about the shirt of mother Alexandra, I covered the sore arm with it

²³³ A horsehair worm.

²³⁴ 8 February 1968 (common era).

²³⁵ The story by the same mother Filonida.

²³⁶ 21 September 1967 (common era).

by night and tied it. I woke up in the morning and the arm stopped aching by the prayers of mother Alexandra, thank God for everything (ibid.: 228–229).

Interestingly, the given examples comprise the succession chain between the healing nuns: at first, mother Tafiva turns to late mother Alexandra to heal her illness. Later, mother Tafiva herself becomes a healer. Although I picked up examples from the same location and time frame, *Povest* contains more stories about different healers and practices of interaction with relics, which in the context of Dubches are substances (melted snow, earth) or belongings (items of clothes). There are occasions when parts of a body would be taken as a relic, but these cases are rare. Also, the grave earth is distributed in the lay communities as a healing substance.

Inclusion of commemoration practices into *Povest* and *Novoselie* continues the Old Believer literary tradition. Commemoration at the graves of zealots along with the creation of martyrologies displayed a characteristic of Vyg writing tradition (Yukhimenko 2002a: 192–226). As it is unfolded in *Povest*, a lot of practices, including worshiping and regular visits of graves, were established in the Urals and later with some modifications transferred to Dubches. This includes possessions and reactions of possessed on interaction with relics or blessed people. I mention possessions in the context of illnesses because it is close to the vernacular understanding of the problem among *Chasovennye*.²³⁷

It is not clear if the social status of the possessed remained the same as that of the rest of the community. For example, mother Alexandra from the quotes above in this section was also possessed, but after her death she was venerated as a healer. Mother Tavifa, in whose cloister Alexandra used to live, called her *velikaia chudotvoritsa* (great thaumaturgus):

On July 15²³⁸ after *otpusť*²³⁹, mother Tafiva tugged on my [father Antonii's – D.R.] cowl and said rather clearly: "Know you all, mother Alexandra is a great thaumaturgus". And I, sinful, dared to ask: "How did you know that?". She replied: "I don't know how to explain but be aware that she was a great thaumaturgus". And she repeated this three times. And after she added that, probably, mother Anatoliia is no less a thaumaturgus, but I don't know about her (ibid.: 206).

From this point of view, possession is suffering similar to any other illness, and in the afterlife a person can receive the same blessing for enduring it. This is what happened to the above-mentioned mother Alexandra:

Dominika Savishna (*chermorizitsa* Dosifeia) says: I felt a bad smell from mother Alexandra after she passed away (she was possessed). But when her body was

²³⁷ For the discussion on medical and anthropological interpretative models of possessions, see Khristoforova 2016: 116–175.

²³⁸ 28 July.

²³⁹ Dismissal – the final word in the end of the divine service.

carried to the burial site, Dominika was walking behind, and saw: a demon appeared from the feet of the people following the coffin and slowly dashed or floated towards the side entrance <...> And after the burial (reports mother Akinfa), when I visited mother Alexandra's grave to read a *kanon* <...> I felt a smell of an exuberant frankincense from her grave (ibid.: 226).

The possessed hinder the holding of a service, bother the praying people, scream, try to interrupt the holy singing. On the other hand, their behavior confirms the presence of the divine: if the evil spirit makes them react this way, it means it does not feel good about what is happening around. Therefore, possession serves as a marker of holiness of a person or a place:

Father Mina remained on Parbik, father Simeon came to Bezmyanka, some more people arrived the following spring. Hegumeness sent me for him <?>, but the sick (chernorizitsa Afsiiania – D.R.) shouted at me, don't go Tanyka and don't take him, she screamed at me so many times, don't go, don't take the suffocating. After a while, I took him to the chapel, and the sick was put there. And she immediately fell on the ground and the devil screamed, why did you bring the suffocating, I can't stand him. The devil screamed for a long time; she was foaming at the mouth. Mother Mastradiia said, if you can't stand, then quit. The devil's shouting, I will, I will, but stays. Then, mother Mastradiia said, father, put your gown on her. He came up and put it on, and when he just laid the gown on her, the devil yelled, you suffocated me, and as if the gun discharged. She [Afsiiania – D.R.] opened her eyes and started reading a prayer. Father Mina's gown was very dirty, and he sweated when he came here on foot. Gowns have never been washed, they have been heavy from dirt, demons are probably afraid of them. Then, this eldress didn't suffer from the devil. We made it into the fall, sisters went to the lodge to break the flax. She was at home, but she decided to ask to go visit them. Hegumeness didn't let her go, but she left. And there she was scared by the big shaggy dog, it jumped at her, and she yelled. At this moment, a demon went into her, and she again became sick (Novoselie: 59–59 back, see also pic. 25).

Father Mina and his dirty gown appeared to be physically unbearable for the devil. However, it is not in his power to keep the result of healing forever. When the same woman breaks the monastic rule (if hegumeness does not grant her permission to do anything, in particular, to leave the territory of the cloister, then a person is strongly prohibited from fulfilling her intentions), devil regains power over her body and comes back as the story unfolds. *Povest* has a similar record that belongs to a lay community, which means that these beliefs are shared outside the borders of the Dubches monastery:

A devil was pinned on water, and Yevdokiia drank the water without crossing herself, at that moment the devil entered her. The Devil is afraid of a cross: Yevdokiia reads all the *kanons*, but the devil doesn't let her read a *kanon* to the Cross. If someone crosses her with two fingers and reads "Oh, the Most Holy Mother of God" for two times, she will raise her arms and the devil in her will say: "I give up, you pierced me". When the devil speaks in her, the voice coming

out of her changes to a high-pitched voice, her eyes bulge, and she becomes kind of messed up. The devil doesn't like it when readers are corrected during the service, it yells. Yevdokiia's husband Sergii lived weakly²⁴⁰, but when she became possessed, he joined the brotherhood. And now he holds the position of *nastoyatel*. Gostev Sergei Lvovich (Povest III: 132).

5.7. Making monastic body

Micropractices that I observed in lay communities have a similar goal, however, monastery requires another type of devotion or, rather, techniques that reshape bodily and moral regimes. This new monastic body is supposed to be, of course, selfless, self-deprecating, and wise, in terms of ability to deal with omnipresent temptation. Although this chapter has discussed the concepts of obedience (labor), possessions, enduring illnesses, or writing, which all play a great role in remastering the lay Christian body into a monastic body, I should focus on some more specific practices that, on one hand, reflect changes in a bodily regime, and on another, function as triggers of change.

Before being 'covered', Dubches women have to go through a preparatory stage called *shestiny* (a derivative from a Russian word *shest*, i.e., six) because it lasts for six weeks. During *shestiny*, future nuns stay in absolute isolation, pray a lot, keep a strict fast, and sometimes write diaries, *tsvetniks*, etc.:

They were slow to cover her [Neonila – D.R.], because she was very ill and old, but for her burning desire she sat down the three *shestiny*²⁴¹. For consolation she was allowed to pray with *shestinniki*²⁴². But in the last winter she started suffering a lot and before the Great Lent she was covered. She was sitting or lying during *shestiny*, praying. After, she even came several times for a common meal. And she said that I am ashamed to show up in front of other people in a gown, that she just understood that it was an angel's robe, it is not just some rug to put on yourself, you have to keep all your promises (Novoselie: 141).

She was asking for so many years to be covered, but she was too young, she wasn't even 20 years old <...> Then, her turn came, and they were put in *shestiny*. She was so happy; it was hard to put it in words. As she writes in her notebook, there is no greater happiness in the world than to get the robe <...> There were six of them in *shestiny*, and then the long-awaited day arrived to get the angel's robe, she was covered on her name day. She turned 21. And she was named *chernorizitsa* Devora <...> She, probably, learnt how to fight bad thoughts and arrogance, she was mostly praying. She visited the graves every day, asking mothers to let her die before the Antichrist comes. <...> She came to me and asked to pray so that she wouldn't finish *shestiny* and die, and I say, but

²⁴⁰ He did not abide by the rules.

²⁴¹ It is not quite clear why Neonila had to spend three times in *shestiny*. I assume she was allowed to stay and pray with *shestinniki* but never covered, not because she failed the test but because of her age as it is stated in the excerpt.

²⁴² People, who prepare to receive the angel's robe, i.e., become nuns or monks.

you have to work a bit as a nun too, and she reluctantly agreed. She liked it so much to be in *shestiny*, it is a totally different world there for those who understand. Nobody will have anything like that in the entire life, it is a great God's grace and an incomprehensible spiritual happiness. <...> In *shestiny*, she wrote a *tsvetnik* and drew some pictures, she left a memory of her, and also, she wrote some sort of diary, how they lived in *shestiny*, how her soul rushed to God <...> (ibid.: 176 back – 178).

As preparation for the future monastic life, the initiates might write down some kind of self-guidance document that they would use in times of despair. Presumably, after death these notes go to the shared use. This is what, for instance, Simeon, the founder of Dubches sketes, wrote down for himself in 1921 right after taking monastic vows and years before moving to Eastern Siberia:

From now on I pray *pravilo* in the evening, I won't go to bed without praying *pravilo*, and before *pravilo* after the evening service to read a bit, three pages, and then to pray *pravilo*. To stand with fear during prayer and to listen motionless. Then, keep a great silence, don't be idle and do rebuke yourself. When you conduct the service, serve Christ wholeheartedly. Don't indulge yourself at a meal, but rebuke yourself, thinking that you don't deserve your brothers and the food. Avoid the sweet meal, don't eat at lunchtime. And when you conduct the service, never forget to rebuke yourself. Read after the evening service, then pray, then read more (Povest II: 97–98).

I quote Simeon's self-guidance document because it became a guideline for the entire community as I suppose. A lot of bodily practices, that are often found in the text of both *Povest* and *Novoselie*, overlap with Simeon's directions or, at least, they are reflected in his notes. Of course, women were writing similar guidelines for themselves.

It is quite common for Old Believer elders to give detailed instructions to their congregation on how to pray. These instructions consider every tiny movement within the prayer as meaningful and emphasize how it should be performed. For instance, one of the earliest instructions of this kind was sent by Avvakum to boyarynya Morozova in a letter:

It seems to me you gave up on night prayer <...> Our days are not happy but sorrow. Recall: when you were born, you didn't cheer but cried coming from mother's womb. And every child does the same, signifying the lamentable life, as the days belong to sorrow, not to the celebration <...> So are you, my lady, cry your earthly life and your sins, because God has called you into being and reasoning; but cheer up as well, when, getting up at night, make 300 prostrations in 700 prayers of joy and spiritual happiness <...> Get up at night – don't make your people wake you up, but get up yourself without laziness, – and fall down, bow to your creator. And remember by night the bows: when you get on your knees, hold your head straight, when it is a prostration, then bow your head to the ground. At night, you do the knee-bows, when you do 100 prayers standing

on your feet, then it is *Glory and Now, Hallelujah*²⁴³, and here there are three prostrations. It is always a prostration for “It is truly right”. At Holy Easter and Pentecost, and at night – regular bows. And between Christmas and Epiphany – bows. And every Saturday and Sunday, and on holidays – bows. If only on Holy Saturday before Easter – these are knee-bows (Gudzia et al. 1979: 156–157).

From my fieldwork experience I can conclude that these techniques (i.e., what Avvakum introduced to Morozova) are common in Old Belief regardless the faction. They are also used by lay and monastic communities. The only exception is the knee-bows. It looks like Avvakum meant a third type of bows that is not used by Old Believers for some reason. It could be an alternative name for prostrations (or great bows) as well.

Inhabitants of monasteries were quite instructive about the state of mind that they should keep during praying and performing other activities. This is also reflected in notes intended for personal use:

Chernorizitsa Alexandra, pray, don’t be lazy. When you start praying, think: only stench evolves from me, only pus, face it, don’t be kind to yourself, this is vanity and pride, don’t forget your true self, beware about your salvation, you put on a gown, beware about how you wear it <...> (Povest II: 223).

This note *tsernorizitsa* Devora made for herself and carried in a small bag with her, and from time to time read for consolation (copied from her timeworn piece of paper). Christ, pray for me sinful, I will remember God. Lord, hear my prayer, when I pray for you in the day and in the night. Lord, do not leave me, sinful, alone. Lord, forgive me nasty <...> hold it, hold, hold it, and till the death hold it (Novoselie: 182–184 back, see also pic. 26–29).

One of the emotions that eldresses are willing to master according to these notes is humiliation. Self-humiliation is one of the pivotal elements in Simeon’s guidelines, and a very frequent expression in monastic biographies. It includes a motive of praying with tears and a motive of referencing to oneself as “nobody”:

[Mother Alevtina – D.R.] poured torrents of tears during praying or singing, and it was amazing that her voice didn’t change when she sang or read, but tears were flowing down her cheeks (Povest II: 209).

Mother Fekla lived an active life, prayed at the service, prayed a double *pravilo* in her cell. Her praying was often heard with great tears and a heartfelt yell, she often cried at the service in the chapel (ibid.: 197).

When she [Anfisa – D.R.] felt sorrow, she often said: “Serves me right, I’m just the worst.” <...> She spent all the time taking care of the kitchen garden, she never complained that she was always there. She was once asked how it felt in

²⁴³ Abbreviations for widely used Orthodox prayers.

the kitchen garden, she replied: “I am all good, I am just nobody” (Novoselie: 191 back – 192).

Although it looks like these two motives reflect the actual practice, i.e., that Dubches inhabitants²⁴⁴ could really burst into tears during prayers or consider themselves as ‘the worst’, it is possible that both of these expressions are rather a phrasing, a formulation that looks appropriate in the context of *Povest*. I assume that it should be considered as both. It is quite possible that spiritual affirmations set up by Dubches forefathers could lead to the establishment of specific bodily techniques like crying or humiliating language. At the same time, it is not necessary that they were executed by everyone or followed all the time as the manuscripts suggest.

Dubches nuns were also carefully writing down the number of prayers they managed to read:

Her [Elizaveta’s – D.R.] prayer addressed God and God’s Mother. Beside the regular prayers, she prayed *polutornitsa*²⁴⁵ to God’s Mother, at midnight she did prostrations, 50 *bobochki*²⁴⁶ of *It is truly right*, and 50 *bobochki Of Thee Rejoice*, and 50 *O Mother All-Glorified*²⁴⁷, and 15 Lord’s Prayers (Povest II: 248).

At that time, she [Mastriidia – D.R.] had her own praying – *akathist*, 40 *sorokousty*²⁴⁸. She said: I heard, if someone prays 40 *sorokousty*, this soul won’t go to hell (ibid.: 229).

She [Anfisa – D.R.] was mostly praying, she was asked: “You, probably, pray up?”. She says: “If only I could pray enough for my pass”. And after her death, a tiny prayerful book was found – 200 monastic *pravilo*²⁴⁹ (Novoselie: 193 back).

[Devora – D.R.] prayed her *pravilo* till the end. And she had a lot of finished monastic *pravilo*: 50 bows, 205 prostrations, 55 *pravilo* without *nachal*, 54 *pravilos* not quite finished, 225 *lestovka* to the God’s Mother, one *sorokoust* (for a sinful soul of Daria), 185, probably, looked like *kanons*. And 364 *pravilo* (ibid.: 179 back – 180).

What is interesting is that those technical notes were, in fact, carefully transferred into a greater book (they even kept the illegible note of Devora that was

²⁴⁴ Men were also crying during praying as the source reports.

²⁴⁵ A type of *lestovka* that consists of 150 beads (Kostrov 2021: 124).

²⁴⁶ Lit. beads.

²⁴⁷ Abbreviations of different prayers directed to the Holy Mother.

²⁴⁸ A forty days’ prayer for the health or for the repose of the soul, read during the service or at home by relatives of the deceased or hired readers. *Chasovennye* from lay communities often donated money to the monastery in exchange of prayers. The text specifies that Mastriidia was repeating a *sorokoust* prayer 40 times. Since it used to be a personal prayer of Mastriidia, this *sorokoust* probably consisted of reading the Psalter.

²⁴⁹ *Inocheskoe pravilo* – the same thing as just *pravilo* – a number of prayers every monastic person is supposed to pray every day.

interpreted as “probably kanons”). Besides that, it was common to fix useful prayers that could help in specific situations:

At the time of sorrow, she [Meletina – D.R.] prayed three *polutornitsa* one by one to the God’s Mother – and God gave some joy. She instructed me, sinful (writes mother Anatoliia): if something unfortunate happens, do like this (Povest II: 197).

After being sick, she [Anatoliia – D.R.] said, I suffered from a blasphemous spirit the entire winter, and was close to despair. And then, father Ioann came to our place, I confessed him my trouble, and he instructed me to pray this way: “We worship your Cross, Lord, and glorify your holy resurrection”. And when I prayed this long enough, worshiping the Cross of Christ, by the power of Honored and Life-Giving Cross, I broke free from the blasphemous demon. Also, father Ioann said, when the enemy makes you desperate, tell him: “Although I am a perished soul, but of an All-Giving Father” (ibid.: 212).

5.8. Summary of Chapter V

The concept of a textual community does not imply focusing on the gender of its members. It is just a community without gender specifications in both classic definition by Brian Stock (i.e., a textual community is united around an oral interpretation of a religious text, see Stock 1983: 90), or its implication by Robert Crummey to the early opposition of Nikon’s reforms as conservative “intelligentsia”, whose goal was to disseminate a “limited repertoire of recon-dite writings” (Crummey 1993: 707). However, as I tried to highlight in this chapter and elsewhere in my research, writing is one of the conservative domains in Old Belief that is not supposed to be overtaken by women.

However, there are time and space for women to become writers. The premises of life in Dubches monasteries allow that. I tried to show various practices that developed in the community that facilitate writing. The basic ones belong to everyday practices such as reading or singing liturgical texts during the communal service and counting the number of individually read prayers. This basic skill of reading is important because it allows a person to get acquainted with the Church Slavic language, its grammar and vocabulary. Eventually, understanding of more complex homiletic texts, that usually serve as a source and inspiration of one’s own essays, becomes easier after such a training.

Different types of personal diaries are also important and have a twofold function. On one hand, they are needed for commemoration and fixation of miraculous help. That is why it is common to write about own illnesses, especially if the persons were healed with the help of relics or prayers of the deceased inhabitants of the monastery. On the other hand, they are needed as instructions, e.g., what were the words a young nun put down for herself to fight the feeling of sorrow and isolation when she decided to abandon the life ‘in the world’? What prayers helped if the ‘blasphemous spirit’ attacked a person?

These questions are not only moral but practical, too. Of course, the practice of writing letters should not be forgotten. Formally, this is a private correspondence between a monastery inhabitant and their relatives. However, Old Believer tradition moves them to the public domain if words in these letters turn out to be useful for the soul.

Dubches nuns have allocated time for personal needs when they can write, and a space in a cell, albeit it is not private. However, time and space can be understood from the historical perspective. Persecution of Uralic and Siberian *Chasovennye* in the 20th century stimulated them to perpetuate their own history, and find a place hidden enough to do that. *Povest* was created under these circumstances. I assume, it also created a need for commemoration in units of the monastery and a literary form that, in its turn, gave rise to the emergence of *Novoselie*. Although these questions require further research, I suggest that the latter, contrary to *Povest*, was composed by *Chasovennye* women only.

CONCLUSION

My thesis questions if female agency challenges the conservative field of Old Belief either in practical or in symbolical way. In particular, I observed how Old Believer women fulfill duties of religious leaders, how they implement micro-practices in their daily routine, and how they become writers. My research is based on materials coming from the communities of Russian Old Believers that are situated in Southern Siberia (including such regions as Altai, Mountain Shoriia, Tuva, and Krasnoyarsk Krai) and Prichudie, a region in Estonia. In my research, Siberian Old Believers are represented by a group of *Chasovennye*. In its turn, Estonian Old Believers include factions of *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy*. By religious leadership I mean performing religious services, what includes such sacraments as baptism, confession, and holy communion; maintenance of traditions and domestic rituals; writing practices, creation of homiletic texts. I have observed a variety of sources. First of all, this research is based on my fieldwork materials. Secondly, I extensively used documents from several archives in Estonia and Russia. Thirdly, I analyzed manuscripts created by Old Believers with a focus on literature about women, especially written by women themselves.

Observing two different factions of Old Belief from two different regions, I can conclude that both of them are based on the culture of exceptions (see: Belousov 1979) but it always strives for order. Old Believers are constantly looking for the ‘initial Christianity’ that has been spoiled and ruined by such heretics as Nikon, and yet it is alive among the last remaining believers. Old Believers are on the constant run, adapting to times and locations to find out the last possible ways of practicing their faith. As I show in Chapter IV, this ideal is hardly reachable, therefore, it should be revised and revisited by religious leaders who seek to restore at least something, at least to some extent. Thus, they pay attention to small details in religious and daily life. Micropractices are of extreme importance for Old Believers (see Chapters III and IV).

Besides that, Old Believers sustain a particular performance of rituals and reading of texts with a great symbolic importance. A ritual should be performed in a correct way, and Old Believers observe those details with great care and great attachment. In the case of *Chasovennye*, it is also necessary to protect the ritual purity of the community by avoiding certain types of contacts with the outside world. In this construction, women’s agency is not quite appropriate for certain types of religious performances. Indeed, there are cases where women lead the religious ceremony, baptize children, hear confessions, but those things are better be done by men (see Chapter II).

I argue that the fact that women can take an active role as religious leaders in their communities does not necessary challenge this worldview. It is not only because of the culture of exceptions. Sometimes, a norm can shift depending on the economic, political, and social situation in certain regions (see Chapter I). On the other hand, there are spaces such as Dubches monasteries that not only

allows but even pushes women to master traditionally male skills such as writing (see Chapter V). However, symbolic status of women turns out very helpful in different circumstances. Quite often women protect symbolical boundaries of a community or preserve community per se, preparing a place to be restored one day. Below, I give an overview of the conclusions I made in my research.

In Chapter I, I focus on how post-Soviet traditionality was produced by Soviet modernization. I apply a concept of gender contracts, i.e. unspoken rules of economic and social reproduction applied to men and women accepted in the society, to figure out how reshaping of territories impacted drastic changes in social reproduction in Old Believer communities. I figured out two basic variants of gender contracts in Siberian villages of *Chasovennye* denomination. I argue that settlements in which traditions seem to be more preserved appeared as sites of traditionality due to geographical distribution of Soviet development. Some places like sites of goldmining or fur hunt required not only sufficient manual labor but also a certain gender order that was aligned with the distribution of gender roles common in Old Belief.

In order to prove the above said, I question the restrictedness of group boundaries. It is true that Old Believers have always limited communication with strangers. This was established *po zakonu*, i.e., by religious law. Nevertheless, this was not a great obstacle for interfaith marriages before the 1917 Revolution. In Soviet times, a barrier between Old Believers and non-Old Believers became more impenetrable, since average peasant skills and qualities were then considered as a part of religious values of future marriage partners. This refers to manifestation of local gender contracts. Therefore, the group became more restricted, although it abided with the typical perception of the Old Belief. The fact is that Old Believers, who took women outside the community, had no doubts that those women could be converted. Marriages of Old Believers with the outsider women were possible before the Soviet modernization took place in late 1920s. But then, the gap between Old Believer community and general public grew. What used to be a part of labor practice common for peasantry (i.e. in case of women taking over domestic work, cooking, and gardening), turned to be a set of Christian virtues and belonging to certain communities, where not only religious knowledge but also working skills and routines were transferred from generation to generation.

Regarding this, it is possible to talk about relocation of peasant working practices from secular sphere of labor to the circle of religious values. In particular, this affected women. If Soviet state policy forced emancipation in women, they had to stick to now outwarded practices in Old Belief. For example, skirts and headscarves were common female working and everyday clothes, but since Soviet time this dress-code was already perceived as vestige. However, this was a time for Old Believer women to emphasize that traditional clothes mark them as Christians, i.e., it represented religious values.

Gender contract in Estonia might also be called modernized, but the process of modernization took a different path than in Siberia. First of all, moderni-

zation started earlier, in the 19th century with the development of the economy based on seasonal work. This type of economy required that both men and women were engaged in paid employment. This was a time of friction, when older generations felt disappointed in younger ones, because the latter started behaving not in the traditional ways. Moreover, during the Soviet period serious frictions also started to happen regarding the transfer of religious knowledge between generations. Likewise, local gender order was reshaped. If previously, older women (mothers-in-law) were considered as heads of families, then in Soviet time this status passed into the hands of wives. However, Soviet antireligious policy in Prichudie turned out to be less harsh than elsewhere, and took part much later than in Siberia, which allowed Old Believer communities to remain almost fully functional. Therefore, feminization of Old Belief in the region took other forms and happened after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Post-Soviet transformations of local gender contracts were also problematic for maintaining the old ways. Younger generations were even less involved in local life in the villages because they tended to move out of the region. Therefore, it seems that practicing Old Belief was not considered as something valuable or important for them. Current active members, on the contrary, return to their places of origin upon retirement, thus developing a distinct feeling of belonging and nostalgia that eventually allowed them to catch up and take over after the older generation was slowly passing away. Women played a huge role in this process.

In Chapter II, I address history, practices, and symbolic ideology of female leadership in Old Belief. As I discuss in the Introduction, a part of the literature on female leadership in Old Belief is based, to a greater extent, on a romantic image of a democratic and gender-equal religious movement. In most cases, such attitudes appear because of misunderstanding of vernacular discourse and local religious practices. I argue that active participation of women in religious life of Old Belief creates tension between the semiotic ideology that requires strict gender division, and simultaneously meets the demands of the time.

It seems that the story of shift from *Fedoseevtsy* to *Pomortsy* in Riga and Pskov grasps the controversy between negative public assumption of Old Believer teaching and practices as well as willingness to emphasize positive changes in their communities. ‘Women’s issue’ becomes highlighted again in this regard. It also shows how strong vernacular commitments regarding impurity and gender divisions could be. This means, semiotic ideology of Old Believers sets up boundaries between male and female nature, which, in its part, takes different forms on the vernacular level. Female and male agency is attributed with different qualities that affects the idea of who can perform what rituals and in what circumstances.

Female leadership is a subject of speculations and debates not only outside Old Believer communities. As a rule, when the number of women running parishes increases, it revives rumors about the decline of faith and loss of piety. On the other hand, women step forward in response to external challenges. Therefore, a logic of necessity starts to prevail. Although Old Believer women

take over in religious life of communities, Old Belief still remains a territory of male domination in terms of semiotic ideologies. The same holds for both Siberian *Chasovennye* and Estonian *Pomortsy*, regardless of the fact that the latter are mainly women. Also, it should be noted that the positions of men and women in charge were considered differently. Compared to men's rule, female leadership discovers a logic of exceptions, though it is widespread and in some regions is more represented than the male one.

Regarding female leadership, it should be acknowledged that the institute of eldresses have never been as much developed as the male one. When a word *nastavnitza* or any similar terminology is used in vernacular context, it is often due to the momentum of language. It is more likely that this person occupies the role similar to that of *nastavnik* but not that she was serving as an actual *nastavnik*. Similarly, *Bespopovtsy* elders are often called *popy*, i.e., priests, although they do not consider themselves as such. Mostly, female leaders were taking care of religious services in the communities and taking part in funerals as singers and readers of necessary liturgical texts. It seems, another common thing was teaching children how to read Church Slavic books, which is not directly related to leadership though. Notwithstanding multiple controversies and restrictions, sporadically women were performing other duties, such as baptizing children (this is more common for *Chasovennye* in Siberia, but less accepted in Estonia), performing marriages, and hearing confessions. The latter is more prevalent in female monasteries, where abbesses had the right to accept confessions from other women.

In Chapter III, I address an issue of ritual purity important for Old Believer communities. This is especially a characteristic of *Chasovennye* Old Believers in Siberia. Old Believer tradition require that a tableware kept in a house should be divided into two groups: *dobraia chashka* that is supposed to be used by Christians, i.e. Old Believers, and *mirskaia chashka* for outsiders. Since Old Believer women are responsible for the household, their knowledge and skill of keeping the tableware separated allow the entire community to escape defilement.

The fact that territorial groups of *Chasovennye* have different understandings of rules of ritual purity and confront each other because of this speaks a lot about female religiosity in this tradition. Since *Chasovennye* practice patrilocal exogamous marriages (i.e. between members of different territorial groups), women move to their husbands' homeland after marriage. Women then have to follow the rules of their husbands' communities. For example, this refers to the rules of feeding the indigenous population of the territories where Old Believers live. As my materials show, it is common for Old Believers to refuse to give even the *mirskaia chashka* to Altai or Tuvan people. However, when this interferes with rules of a husband's house, indigenous people are fed (Nikitina 2013). This adaptation requires certain skills and moral decisions, since a married woman has to abandon the rules of her own family. Sometimes this leads to conflict. When daughters visit their parents, they have to bring their own kitchenware in order to cook and eat separately, because they no longer

belong to the same *chashka*. Although everybody understands the inevitability of such alterations, it is barely possible to avoid debates and quarrels around eating separately.

Such restricted religious groups as *Chasovennye* Old Believers are supposed to protect themselves not only from strangers, but also from dangerous symbolic dirtiness that can spoil their spirituality. My research shows that vernacular notions of ritual purity and everyday religious practice do not break external contacts, but, on the contrary, refine social structure inside the group. Records from Siberia (Altai, Tuva, Krasnoyarsk region and Mountain Shoriia) demonstrate that a religious restriction for collective eating with non-Old Believers does not lead to immediate proscription of such contact and practices of hospitality. The strictness of the bowl rule goes back to bookish representation of the rule. However, this does not mean that the rule remains declarative, since *Chasovennye* regularly go through purification rituals to return to the fine bowl status. I propose that the core action in this practice is not the table restriction itself, but confession and completion of punishment. It is almost impossible to avoid breaking the rule, but the moral obligation of a true Christian is to get back from a state of worldliness as soon as possible.

It should be taken into account that *Chasovennye* distinguish between two types of contamination. The one that is connected to the bowl rule refers to the theology of the Antichrist, meaning that *Chasovennye* presume that living outside the community of Christians is itself sinful and requires redemption. Therefore, in the case of the bowl rule a state of worldliness rather than defilement is implemented. The term *mirskie* derives from the notion of *obmirshchenie*, what is in vernacular usage expressed by the verb *obmirshchit(sia)*. In this sense, interaction with humans differs from interaction with objects, such as unclean vessels, uncovered tableware, etc. The latter is regularly expressed through the terms *poganiy*, *zapoganit*.

I argue that a burden of commitment imposed on women increases their dedication to the community. While men answer only for their own state of worldliness, women have to confess about tableware as well. They are obliged to work out repentance for their transgressions even if it was their husbands' request to give fine tableware to guests from the world. These seemingly routine practices become instrumental in providing religious activity for women. It is very important to conclude that the model of guesthood that I have discussed in this thesis basically shows male attitudes towards the intersection of social duty, moral rules, and symbolic purity.

Giving a closer look on how external pieties are practices in Old Belief, I argue in Chapter IV that the implication of rules is based on two major processes – recycling of a rich Cyrillic tradition, which justifies the practice, and exploration of emotional as well as intimate side of the tradition, which is mainly related to memories of childhood, parents, family, ancestors. In some cases, the latter is related to establishing new social ties.

A project of Zavoloko and activity of the *Revnitely* society in Latvia and Estonia represent a case when Old Believer theology of decorum meets with the

romanticized interpretation of a national tradition. An image of Old Believers as 'true Russians' served for many years as a role-model and source for inspiration for artists and writers. Ethnographic research has been biased in the similar manner too, considering Old Belief as a 'live museum' of Russian old ways and material culture. Although Old Believers have always been trying to stay aside from such ideological constructions (what is, in particular, expressed in reluctance to share knowledge about their tradition or a zealous attitude to even a hint of misrepresentation), Zavoloko tried to make sense of Old Believers being a part of a greater Russian culture.

Although I did not observe the cited in section 4.5. case of Visitor Center of Prichudie equally as detailed as Zavoloko's project, I find it important in terms of shifts, reinventions, and reinterpretation of local tradition. An ethnographic research of material culture in Prichudie has been conducted thoroughly, so that it is possible to use it for reconstruction of lost elements, such as folk costume. However, knowledge of local women is based on personal memories and random interventions, such as council decisions or letters from elders that might argue against some of the existing practices. In recent years, Old Believer communities in Prichudie have been influenced by the Pomortsy center in St. Petersburg, but it also tries to establish its own 'vernacular canons', e.g., all black prayer dresses in Malye Kolki prayer house with a particular manner of veiling heads. In this case, external pieties include not only abidance by Old Believer law, but also an aspiration of family traditions.

I focus on role of *Chasovennye* women in development of contemporary writing tradition of Old Believers in Chapter V. Old Believers are known as people for whom literacy has been of great importance. They were collecting old manuscripts in Church Slavic to find approval for their teachings and to defeat the official Orthodox Church, at least in the eyes of their followers. Literacy in Old Believer tradition mainly means a good knowledge of texts for the divine service and an ability to correctly combine them. Another level of literacy includes a circle of ancient texts in Church Slavic that a person reads during life. There have been also numerous authors (predominately male) among Old Believers. Two types of writing can be distinguished: coping and writing itself, when a manuscript may include fragments of other works, especially of founding fathers of Orthodox Christianity or quotes from Gospel, but which are combined in an original way and interspersed with thoughts of the author themselves.

Dubches manuscripts I observed represent a notable exception. First of all, women prepared a lot of primary sources that were used for compilation of bigger texts. I also assume that the whole manuscripts of *Novoselie*, has been composed from the beginning to end by women living in the described cloister. This became possible due to certain practices (including reading, writing, and reciting of texts) and bodily as well as moral regimes in the monastery that facilitated a necessity to take notes, keep diaries, etc. I would say, however, that the most important conclusion to me regarding the writing practices of women

in Dubches monasteries, is that textuality is permeated into the fabric of social life of this community.

In the end of the Conclusion, I would like to address again an issue of public imagination. Russian ideologists of all time and political formations have always tried to find a medium of changes in Old Belief. For conservative imperial intellectuals they posed an alleged threat to the tsarist regime. Liberal intellectuals hoped to find a seed of 'native democracy and liberty'. In Soviet times, they gained a reputation of fanatics, although, later Soviet humanitarian scholarship rediscovered Old Believers from another side – as keepers of older artforms and mindset. Contemporaries of the 21st century saw in Old Believers true Russian people.

However, none of those frameworks describes adequately the essence of Old Belief. Even a broad historical perspective on Old Believers as a piety movement does not completely coincide with ethnographic reality. A movement brings a flavor of temporality, an urge for changes, fighting with obstacles on the way for salvation. Its spatiality is a political power, since ideally, a movement yearns to occupy cities and the countryside. If temporal aspect is available in Old Belief in terms of eschatological expectations, then spatial aspect falls short from the expectations. Old Believers preferred to disperse in the crowd, hide in the mountains. Quite often their identity fluctuated.

We have to admit that habit and monotonous practice form the cornerstone of Old Belief. Being an Old Believer means being boring. Pray, marry (or do not, in the case of *Fedoseevtsy*), and follow several dozens of routine rules, then you can say you are an Old Believer. That is why national identity can overlap but rarely becomes a foundation of Old Believer identity. National identity sticks to you along with many features such as language, background, and finally, passport. Old Believer identity can be lost if the practice is abandoned.

If Old Belief regulates everyday life of its members so crucially, what role do women occupy in this construction? Here, a strict gender division is assigned. However, the fact that Old Believer women actively participate in religious life of their communities, taking over the duties that by law are assigned to men, has given researchers and the general public an impression of freedom granted to them. Mostly, these ideas emerged between the late 19th and the early 20th century, when freedom was predominantly understood as an opportunity to occupy different public positions.

To a certain extent this discussion resembles the debates around the position of women in Islam. There, a question of their subordination to the male dominated order is also discussed, and an answer is given that lies in the freedom to choose your own religion. All changes, that women in Old Belief gain, happen rather occasionally due to specific circumstances. Things can go back if new circumstances are favorable for male agency (as it happened in Malye Kolki, Estonia).

In terms of salvation women are stigmatized, at least discursively. Unfortunately, I cannot endorse whether women themselves share the same idea about female salvation as some of the men. It is beyond doubt that the demands

to follow rules are more severe for women than for men. For example, women have to attend all services same as men. Women's everyday housework is also conceptualized as spiritual debt, and maintaining ritual purity is one of the greatest concerns in this sense. I am referring to the so called 'bowl rule', that implies eating separately from non-Old Believers and to use tableware (of any kind, including cups, spoons, forks, plates, pans, and pots) that is not shared with anyone else except the community members. If a stranger uses an item of Old Believer tableware, it would be considered as defiled. Women are mostly responsible for tableware in Old Believer communities, and they are actually punished by self-obligation to make a certain number of prayers for defiling bowls. Women have to confess about defiled tableware to a *nastavnik*, who gives an order for praying. Probably, the virtuality of *epitiimia* forces women to be strict about all religious rules in general, which in turn influences their image as the most dependable adherents of Old Belief. That is why a woman had to think twice before giving an Old Believer cup to a stranger.

At the same time, popular image of Old Belief is also female. I should provide a recent (spring 2022) infamous example of two Russian television propaganda workers, Ekaterina Shugaeva (NTV) and Ekaterina Andreeva (Channel One), who took part in a photoshoot posing in folk costumes of *Semeiskie* Old Believers from the Siberian region of Buryatia. In the photo caption, they claimed that by this photoshoot they oppose 'Russian values' to European 'pseudovalues' (Shugaeva n.d.; see pic. 30). Such ideological statements have nothing to do with that 'boring' identity I described above. As one of my Siberian interlocutors put it: "Our faith is trampled. Nobody would convert into it." He was talking about numerous proscriptions that are familiar to many Old Believers since childhood or thoroughly mastered in case of conversion as an adult.

SOURCES

Quoted interlocutors

Estonian interviews

- Bolshie Kolki 2021, woman – N., born 1949, an Old Believer woman from Bolshie Kolki. Recorded on August 1, 2021. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Kasepel 2020, woman – A.P., born 1951, and Old Believer from Kasepel. Anna used to run the museum of Old Belief in Bolshie Kolki. Recorded on October 26, 2020. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Malye Kolki 2021, woman – A.G., born 1957, an Old Believer from Fedoseevtsy community in Malye Kolki. Recorded on October 23, 2021. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Tartu-Kolkia 2017–2023, man – Pavel Varunin, born 1961. An Old Believer artist and a head of the Union of Old Believer communities on Estonia. Personal correspondence and communication within 6 years. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Tallinn 2020, woman – A.F., chair of an Old Believer congregation in Tallinn. Recorded on September 13, 2020. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Voronja 2021, woman – Z.K., *nastavnitisa* from Voronja in her 70s. She gives tours for tourists in the Voronja prayer house. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.

Siberian interviews

- Andryushkino 2018, man – D., a young Old Believer in his 30s from Andryshkino, Krasnoyarsk Krai. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Chulesh 2017a, woman – G.O., an Old Believer from Chulesh, Shoriia, in her 50s. Recorded on February 15, 2017. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Chulesh 2017b, woman – K.D., an Old Believer from Chulesh, Shoriia, in her 60s. Recorded on February 15, 2017.
- Erzhei 2017a, man – I.D., an Old Believer from Erzhei, Tuva, in his 60s, who has been excommunicated from the community for receiving pension. Recorded on August 13, 2017. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Erzhei 2017b, man – P.Yu., a brother of *nastavnik* of Erzhei, He also conducts services in the community's prayer house. Recorded on August 12, 2017. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Erzhei 2018, man – I., a young Old Believer from Erzhei, Tuva, in his 30s. Recorded on Jan 20, 2018. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Kilinsk 2017, woman – N.K., an Old Believer from Kilinsk, Shoriia, in her 50s. Recorded on February 17, 2017. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Kyzyl 2018a, woman – P.P., an old woman (around 80 years old), who serves as a congregation leader in Kyzyl, Tuva. Recorded on April 27, 2018. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Kyzyl 2018b, woman – U.Zh., an Old Believer in her 70s from Kyzyl, Tuva. Recorded on April 29, 2018. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Oktyabrskoe 2015, woman – K.M., an Old Believer and a healer from Oktyabrskoe, Altai. Recorded on August 10, 2015. Interviewers: Esta Matveeva, Mariia Chernova.
- Saryg-Sep 2018, woman – T.K., a 60-year-old Old Believer from Saryg-Sep, Tuva, works at the House of Children's Art. Recorded on March 7, 2018. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.

- Sizim 2018a, woman – K.Yu., an elderly woman from Bezymyanka, Krasnoyarsk Krai, who lived for 12 years in Dubches monasteries in 1937–1951. At the moment of interview lived in Sizim, Tuva. Recorded on January 19, 2018. Interviewers: Aleksandr Kostrov, Danila Rygovskiy, Alena Storozhenko.
- Sizim 2018b, woman – V.Yu. an Old Believer in her 40s from Sizim, Tuva. Recorded on January 19, 2018. Interviewers: Aleksandr Kostrov, Danila Rygovskiy, Alena Storozhenko.
- Tikhonkaia 2015, woman – R.N., born 1934, an Old Believer and an indigenous Altai person. Recorded on August 13, 2015. Interviewers: Elena Malaia, Mariia Chernova.
- Verkh-Uimon 2015a, woman – M.K. is an Old Believer from Verkh-Uimon. Recorded on August 10, 2015. Interviewer: Danila Rygovskiy.
- Verkh-Uimon 2015b, woman – T.N. is a 50-year-old head of a secondary school in Verkh-Uimon, Altai. Her grandmother was a famous *nastavitsa* in the village. Recorded on August 11, 2015. Interviewers: Elena Malaia, Danila Rygovskiy.
- Zamulta 2015a, woman – K.Sh. is one of the authoritative Old Believer women in Zamulta, Altai. Recorded on August 10, 2015. Interviewers: Elena Malaia, Danila Rygovskiy.
- Zamulta 2015b, woman – Ye.Z. an Old Believer from Zamulta, Altai. Recorded on August 12, 2015. Interviewers: Elena Malaia, Mariia Chernova.

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- ERA – Eesti Rahvaluule Arhiiv (Estonian Folklore Archive)
ERA, Vene 15, 41–49 – Yevdokiia Akamanovna Matrosova, born in 1905 in Zhelachek (Piirisaar), an Old Believer.
- ERM – Eesti Rahva Muuseum (Estonian National Museum)
ERM EA 299: 1–69 – Rikhter, E. (1959). Etnograafilised teatmed 14. Kallaste elanikkonna klassid ja eluolu.
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SUMMARY IN ESTONIAN

Naised vene vanausuliste kultuuris: religioossed praktikad ja avalikud ettekujutused Siberi ja Eesti vene vanausuliste kogukondade näitel

Siinse uurimuse teema käsitleb üldisemalt naiste kasvavat rolli vene vanausuliste religioossetes praktikates ja kirikuelu juhtimises, keskendudes vanausulistele nii Eestis kui ka Siberis. Täpsemalt on minu tähelepanu keskmes pomoorlaste²⁵⁰ ja fedossejevlaste²⁵¹ (Eestis) ning tšasovennoje²⁵² (Siberis) vanausuliste kogukonnad. Vanausk on konservatiivne religioon oma karmide reeglitega soopõhise tööjaotuse kohta. Näiteks ei tohi vanausulised naised esineda kirikujuhi ega sõnakuulutaja rollis. Ometi on aga nii, et naised täidavad mees-tele pandud kohustusi. Lisaks eelnevale on vanausuliste hulgas keskmiselt rohkem naisi kui mehi, eelkõige just Eestis ja mõnes üksikus Siberi piirkonnas. Selle kõigega seoses pean siinse uurimise eesmärgiks järgmist: erinevaid allikaid (oma välitöö materjale, ERMist ja mõnest Venemaal asuvast arhiivist dokumente, rahvaluulelisi ja etnograafilisi märkmeid, vanausuliste käsikirju, jne) analüüsides, kirjeldada mille abil ja millistel asjaoludel leiab erinevates tegevustes (st jumalateenistuse läbiviimine, kirjutamine, välise vagaduse nõudmiste täitmine jmt) ellu viidud naiste agentsus väljapääsu vanausu konservatiivsest usuväljast. Minu uurimisfookuses on ka see, kuidas erinevad sümbolid ja sotsiaalsed hõõrumised, mis tulenevad naiste rolli suurenemisest vanausuliste kogukondade elus, naiste agentusust ümber kujundavad ja naiste usupraktikaid mõjutavad.

Kuna olulisim küsimus, millele sinne uurimus püüab vastata, on see, kuidas vanausu agentsus on üles ehitatud, iseäranis naiste agentsus, rajaneb uurimuse analüüs antropoloogi Saba Mahmoodi välise vagaduse (ingl *external piety*) kontseptsioonile (Mahmood 2012). Mahmoodi arvamus järgi ei tähista juuste katmine islamis naiste agentsuse puudumist. Naiste jaoks on märksa tähtsam järgida religioosseid eeskirju, kui nõuda vabadust selle sõna läänelikus tähenduses. Vanausk on keskendunud usu nn välimistele ja esemelistele aspektidele, kuigi mõned diskursused peavad neid vaimse arengu osas ebaoluliseks. Näiteks on rohkeid reegleid järgivate vanausuliste jaoks tähtis see, millised rõivaid nad kannavad, kuidas teenistuse ajal õigesti sõrmi ristata, millal ja kuidas kummardada jne.

Saba Mahmoodi kontseptsioon haakub Elizabeth Perezi argumendiga, et suured rituaalid nagu ristimine või jumalateenistus ei pruugi olla nii olulised kui väikesed rutiinsed tegevused, mida ta nimetab mikropraktikateks (Perez 2016). Mikropraktikad võivad hõlmata igasuguseid harjumusi, praktikaid ja kehalisi

²⁵⁰ Vene sõnast 'Pomorje', regioon Põhja-Venemaal Valge mere rannikul, kus asusid selle rühma esimesed suured keskused.

²⁵¹ Rühma asutaja nime järgi (Fedossij).

²⁵² Vene sõnast 'tšasovnja' ehk kabel.

tehnikaid. Näiteks uurib Perez toitu valmistamist ja suhtlemist, mis toimub köögis *lukumí* ehk *santería* (afrokariibi usund) rituaaliks valmistumise osana. Perez väidab, et sellistel mikropraktikatel on suur roll üksikisiku religioosse identiteedi kujundamisel ja religioossete traditsioonide säilitamisel, vastandina „siirderiitustele ja rituaalidele suure R tähega“ (ibid.: 212).

Vanausuliste puhul hõlmavad mikropraktikad tohutult erinevaid vorme, näiteks on nende hulgas rituaalse žestina ristimärgi tegemine kahe sõrmega. Enamikus vanausuliste kogukondades on normiks, et mehed peavad kandma lõikamata habet ja laskma juukseid lõigata, naised aga ei tohi oma juukseid puudutada, vaid katta neid salliga. Väitekirjas vaatlen sellist vanausuliste suhtumist riietumisse ja välimusesse, kohaldades Nadežda Beljakova ja April L. Frenchi poolt kasutusele võetud terminit „sündsuse teoloogia“ (*theology of decorum*) (Beliakova and French 2018).

Eestis on kaksteist vene vanausuliste kogudust. Üks neist on Tallinnas, teine Tartus ja ülejäänud kümme Peipsimaa väikestes linnades ja külates. Need vanausulised jagunevad kahte rühma: fedossejevslased elavad Väike-Kolkjas ja Rajal, pomoorlastele kuulub kümme ülejäänud kogudust. Vanasti ei tohtinud fedossejevslased abielluda ning abiellunud usklikud pidid jumalateenistuse ajal seisma niisama palvelas, kuni lapsed, vallalised ja lesestunud palvetasid, lõid risti ette ning kummardasid maani. Erinevate vaadete tõttu ei segunenud fedossejevslased pomoorlastega, kes omakorda ei pidanud abielu patuks.

Kui külastada praegusel ajal Eesti vanausuliste palvelaid, siis võib täheldada, et olukord on muutunud. Silma torkab see, et palvetavad ja teenistusi viivad läbi pigem eakad naised. Ainult pooltel kogudustel on vanemateks mehed ehk *nastavnikud*. Tihti on need ainsad koguduse elus aktiivselt osalevad meeste-rahvad. Fedossejevslased ei tee vahet, kes on abielus või mitte: kõigil on lubatud palvetada, sest inimesi on liiga vähe. Nastavnikuid kutsutakse ka *batkadeks* (isadeks). Naissoost nastavnikud kannavad sedasama meessoole osutavat nime-
tust, kuigi vene keeles kõlab see veidralt.

Väike-Kolkjas ristas veel hiljuti kohalikku kogudust juhtinud naine lapsi ise ja luges isegi teenistuse ajal pühakirja. Nüüdseks on see naine surnud ning teenistusi peavad kaks meest, noorem ja vanem, kelle sõnul laste ristimine ja teenistusele ajal pühakirja lugemine on tegelikult naistele keelatud. Varem teenistusi läbiviinud naised pidid ise tunnistama, et rikkusid reegleid, aga vaatamata sellele oli nende tegevus Väike-Kolkja vanausu säilitamisel kohalike vanausuliste arvates vooruslik ja nende panus suur.

Olukord Siberis on täiesti teistsugune. Siin on vanausulisi arvuliselt rohkem kui Eestis ning need rühmad on hulga mitmekesisemad ja kirjumad. Tšasovennoje rühm on kuulus selle poolest, et nende rohkearvulisi kogukondi leidub ka Siberi kõige kaugemates nurkades: Tõva, Altai ja Šoria mäestikus, Krasnojarski krai metsades ja paljudes teistes asupaikades Uurali mäestikus, Siberis, Lõuna-Venemaal ja Kaug-Idas. Olgu etteruttavalt öeldud, et tšasovennoje rühm on levinud üle maailma ning nende kogukonnad asuvad ka Uus-Meremaal, Argentiinas, Brasiilias, USAs, Kanadas, kuhu olid vanausulised sunnitud põgenema

Siberist ja Kaug-Idast bolševike revolutsiooni ja antireligioossete repressioonide eest.

Tšasovennõje vanausuliste kloostrid asuvad sügaval taigas, täpsemalt Dubtšesi jõe kaldal. Kuigi asupaiga nimi on teada, siis Google'i kaartidelt seda ei leia. Mungad ja nunnad pagesid taigasse 1930. aastatel tollase sundkollektiviseerimise eest. Siin on elu tänaseni väga raske. Dubtšes on Podkamennaja Tunguska lisajõgi, mille kaldad kujutavad endast kõige põhjapoolsemat piirkonda, kus saab tegeleda põllumajandusega. Vanausulised peavad tegema kõrgeid peenraid – isegi kõrgemaid kui Peipsimaa vanausuliste kuulsad peenrad, vastaval juhul võib igikelts taimejuuri kahjustada. Siin on tavaks paigaldada kasvuhoonetesse küttekahana ahi, kaevates see mulla sisse. Hoolimata rasketest looduslikest tingimustest on Dubtšesi kloostrites elus hoitud vanavene kirjutustraditsiooni, mis on alguse saanud vene keskaegsest kirjandusest.

Siberi tšasovennõje vanausuliste palvelad erinevad Peipsimaa vanausuliste palvelatest. Siberi palvelaid täidavad eri soost ja vanusest vanausulised. Liturgilisi raamatuid loevad nii naised kui ka mehed, aga nastavnikud tohivad olla ainult mehed. Seetõttu esmapilgul tundub, et tšasovennõje vanausulised on konservatiivsemad kui Eestis elavad pomoorlased või fedossejevslased. Ent erandiks on see, et Siberi naistel on lubatud lapsi ristida. Väikestes külates, millel oma nastavnikku ei ole, tohib kohalikke lapsi ristida oma nastavniku poolt spetsiaalselt selleks õnnistuse saanud naine. Võib tekkida õigustatud küsimus, et kuidas see soopõhine kohustuste jaotus on korraldatud ja miks need reeglid eri paikades nii tugevasti erinevad? Neile küsimustele pakun vastuseid oma väitekirjas, mille olen pühendanud naiste rollide uurimisele Eesti ja Siberi vanausuliste kultuuris.

Siberi tšasovennõje vanausuliste külasid kirjeldatakse tihti paikadena, mille elanikud säilitavad oma traditsioone muutumatul kujul. Üks põhjusi, miks selline mulje on tekkinud, on nn traditsiooniline soopõhine tööjaotus, kus majapidamine langeb suures osas naiste õlgadele, sest mehed tegelevad jahinduse, kalapüügi ja teiste sarnaste tegevustega. See on tinginud arusaama, et tšasovennõje vanausuliste traditsiooniline eluviis justkui ei ole palju muutunud ehk teisisõnu – seda ei ole 20. sajandi jooksu ajakohastatud. Tegelikult on nimetatud olukord tekkinud mitmete ühiskondlike ja majanduslike tegurite tagajärjel, mis on mõjutanud suurel määral ka vanausuliste arusaamu soorollidest. Tuleb tõdeda, et nõukogudeaegne nn moderniseerimisprojekt mängis vanausuliste soorollide muutumises põhiosa. Ja seda isegi külates, mis säilitasid traditsioonilise elustiili ja töökorralduse.

Traditsiooniline soopõhine tööjaotus jäi suurel määral nõukogude ideoloogia varju, sest riiklik majandus vajas loodusvarasid, mida hangiti sageli mitteformaalsete suhete abil. Nimetatud suhted vastasid ka vene vanausuliste vajadustele, seda nii nende usuliste vaadete kui ka tavapärase tööritiini mõttes, sest taigakülates oli mitteformaalsel ja horisontaalsel majandusviisil tähtis roll.

Uurimuses analüüsin soopõhist teooriat soolise lepingu kontseptsiooni abil, täpsemalt seda, kuidas luuakse ning transformeeritakse traditsioonilisust. Soolise lepingu kontseptsioon hõlmab väljakujunenud soolise tööjaotuse põhi-

mõtteid sotsiaalse elukorralduse osas. On ütlema tagi selge, et sooliste lepingute konventsionaalne iseloom eeldab seda, et ühiskonnas eksisteerivad ootused meeste ja naiste kohta rohujuure tasandil. Rootsi ajaloolane Iivonne Hirdman nimetab neid ootusi „ümberlükkamatusteks“ (ingl *irrefutabilities*) või „ilmseteks seisukohtadeks“ (*obvious statements*) asjade korralduse kohta. Riigi võimuses on neid ootusi tuntavalt mõjutada. Just selles tähenduses räägivad Venemaa soouurijad Elena Zdravomõslova ja Anna Temkina nõukogude etakraatilisest (etakraatia on riigikord, kus riigil on täielik kontroll kõigi ühiskonna elualade üle) soolisest korrast (Zdravomyslova ja Temkina 2007). Kõiki kõnealuseid vanausuliste külasid saab jaotada kahte kategooriasse: kas traditsioonilise või moderniseeritud soolise lepinguga küladeks. Valdav osa traditsioonilise soolise lepinguga küladest on Siberi tšasovennoje vanausuliste kogukonnad, moderniseeritud soolise lepinguga kogukondade hulka kuuluvad Eesti vanausulised ja tšasovennoje vanausuliste külad Altai mägedes, samuti mõni üksik Tõva Vabariigis.

Aga miks on jäänud mõni vanausuliste kogukond nõukogudeaegsest moderniseerimisest puutumata? Asi on selles, et neis kogukondades hangiti loodus- ja maavarasid, mille järele oli sama suur vajadus kui sovhooside ja kolhooside toodete järele. Seetõttu sobis traditsiooniline soopõhine tööjaotus mõlemale osapoolale – nii vanausulistele kui ka nõukogude võimukandjatele. Nii toimus küll moderniseerimine, aga see käis omamoodi. Mõned külad, kuhu vanausulised elama kolisid, näevad samuti väga traditsioonilised välja, kuigi vanausulised nende külade rajamises ja üles ehitamises ei osalenud. Näiteks Krasnojarski krais asuv Sandaktšes rajati möödunud sajandi kolmekümnendail aastail nõukogude faktooria ehk karusloomajahinduse asupaigana. Sandaktšes rajati sellisesse piirkonda, kuhu samal ajajärgul põgenesid Uuralist ja Lääne Siberist tšasovennoje vanausuliste mungad ja nunnad, kes olid Dubtšesi kloostrite asutajad. Sandaktšesi faktooria asub kloostritest umbes 100 kilomeetri kaugusel, mis võimaldas kohalikel vanausulistel olla munkadele sisseseadmisel abiks.

Vanausuliste kultuur arenes sarnaselt Šorias. Seoses esimese viisaastakuplaaniga hakati siin kaevandama kulda ja teisi maavarasid ning seetõttu vajati suurel hulgal tööjõudu. Kaevandatud maaki saadeti toona äsja viisaastakuplaani raames ehitatud Kuznetski metallurgiakombinaadile. Šoria naaberpiirkonnas Altai tegeleti peamiselt põllumajandusega, kuid selles piirkonnas alustati kollektiviseerimist. Seepärast otsustasid sealkandis elavad tšasovennoje vanausulised kolida Šoriasse, kus neil oli võimalik end riigivõimu eest kommunismi ehitamise varjus peita. Kokkuvõttes võib järeldada, et paralleelselt nõukogude ühiskonna ehitamisega kasvas mitteametlike majandussidemete osatähtsus. Vaatamata sellele, et tagakiusatavaid vanausulisi nõukogude moderniseerimine otseselt mõjutas, oli ometi mõnes paigas võimalik traditsioonilisust säilitada. Ennekoike oli see seotud traditsioonilise tööjaotusega.

Vanausuliste olukord Eestis ei kujunenud Siberi olukorraga sarnaselt. Nagu eelpool öeldud, toimusid murrangulised muutused vanausuliste eluviisis nõukogude perioodil. Sellega kaasnes põlvkondade katkestus, sest noortele ja keskealistele oli kirikus käimine keelatud. Samas pidasid vanema põlvkonna esindajad enda kohustuseks usulistest reeglitest kinni pidada. Mehed vastutasid

ametlike, ilmalike rollide eest ning seetõttu kasvas oluliselt nõukoguse ajal naiste roll usuelus. Eriti teravalt tuli see esile pärast Nõukogude Liidu kokkuvõtteid, mil piisava usulise kogemusega mehed olid surnud ja jumalateenistuste korraldamist jätkasid naised. Teisest küljest aga mõjutas soolist lepingut ka märgatavalt uus poliitiline ja majanduslik kord. Eesti Vabariigi ajal vanausuliste külades sündinud põlvkond sai piiride avanemisega võimaluse reisida ja töötada kogu maailmas. Noored kolisid Soome või Rootsi ega kippunud kirikusse. See tingis olukorra, kus jumalateenistusi peavad tänaseni peamiselt vanad naised. Ka suuremal määral moderniseerunud Siberi vanausuliste kogukondades, näiteks Altai vanausuliste mägikülades, on sooline tasakaal sama ebavõrdne nagu Eestis, kuigi sealsed elanikud kuuluvad tšasovennõje vanausuliste hulka.

Oluline on mees pidada asjaolu, et palvelaid juhtivate naiste seisund erineb suuresti meeste omast. Nende naiste kohta kasutatakse vernakulaarses kontekstis sõnu *nastavniitsa* (naisõpetaja) või isegi meessoole osutavat tähistust *batka* ja nad täidavad palvelates meestega sarnast rolli, kuid neil pole meestega täiel määral samu õigusi. Ka Siberis lapsi ristivaid naisi kutsutakse sageli nastavnikuteks, ka neil on lubatud jumalateenistusi läbi viia, ent ometi tohivad nad seda teha ainult oma külas. Eesti palvelaid juhtivaid naisi peetakse ametlikult kohusetäitjaks, mis tähendab ühtlasi, et nad ei tohi lapsi ristida ega kedagi pihile võtta. Kohusetäitjad võivad olla ka mehed, aga seda vaid ajutiselt ja juhul, kui neil ei ole veel piisavalt kogemusi ja nad peavad veel ametit õppima (nt valmistub Tallinnas selline mees praegu nastavnikuks saama).

Väitekirjas vaatlesin detailselt nn kausireeglit. Vanausuliste kodudes on kasutusel kahte eri sorti nõud: vanausuliste endale ja võõrastele. Siberi tšasovennõje vanausuliste külades on see komme tänini säilinud, Eestis aga hääbunud, kuigi vanade etnograafiliste kirjelduste järgi oli nn kausireegel levinud ka siinkandis. Vanausulistel ei tohtinud koos mittevanausulistega süüa ega kasutada söömiseks nende nõusid. Seda loeti patuks ning vanausuline, kes reeglist üle astus, pidi tegema karistuseks nii palju kummardusi, kui nastavnik talle määras. Lisaks sellele ei tohtinud patustaja karistuse kandmise ajal ka koos oma perega süüa, isegi siis, kui pere ei olnud kausireeglit rikkunud. Ka räägitakse, et karistuse ajal oli Eesti vanausulistel meestel kombeks magada saunas, oma naisest eraldi. Palvelas tohtis patustaja ainult püsti seista, aga ei tohtinud ei kummardada ega risti ette lüüa. Pärast karistuse täitmist pidi üleastuja palvelasse tulema ja vabandust paluma.

Enamasti on tavaks, et kui vanausuline mõnest reeglist üle astub, siis on talle kirikusse sissepääs mõneks ajaks keelatud (otsustab alati nastavnik). Siberis on sarnane religioosne praktika nii tugev, et see kajastub isegi keeles. Näiteks on ütlemine, et vanausuline on „heas kausis“ (vene *в доброй чашке*) ehk ta ei ole reegleid rikkunud. On ka vastupidine ütlemine: „ta on ilmalikus kausis“ (*в мирской чашке*) ehk inimene ei kuulu enam vaimulikku seltskonda ning temaga toitu jagada ei tohi. Kui inimene sureb „ilmalikus kausis“ olles, siis talle kiriklikku matusetalitust ei peeta, kuigi tema sugulased võivad kodus hinge-
palveid lugeda.

Kausireegel puudutab naisi rohkem kui mehi, sest enamasti toimetavad nõudega naised, ja neid kahte sorti kausse ei tohi mingil juhul segamini ajada. Eri sorti nõusid ka pestakse eraldi. Nõud peavad olema puhtad nii selle sõna otseses tähenduses kui ka eespool kirjeldatud usupuhtuse tähenduses. Vanausuliste nõusid on keelatud viia nn roojastesse kohtadesse, nt sauna, asetada neid põrandale või kasutada loomasöödakünana. Naisi ei karistata mitte ainult selle eest, et nad võõraste inimestega koos söövad, vaid ka nõude ebaõige hoidmise eest. Viimast iseloomustab hästi järgmine näide.

Kohtusin 2018. aastal Dubtšesi jõe kaldal ühe perega nende kodus. Tulin külla koos paljude kolleegidega, mistõttu tekkis küsimus, kas perenaisel jagub ilmalikke nõusid. Selgus, et tasse ei ole piisavalt. Peremees sõnas oma naisele lühidalt: “Pane see tass ka valmis”. Naine aga vastas: “Eks mina pean palvetades andeks paluma”, aga tassi andes lisas: “Kõik, mis on laual, on teie oma”. See tähendas, et ta andis meile loa võtta toitu ja nõusid. Peremees avaldas aga meile, et “kolis hiljuti meie vennaskonda”, sest oli käinud pulmas, kus ei olnud võimalik kausireeglit järgida. Vaatamata reegli rikkumisele pidi tema naine talle ikkagi alluma.

Läti pomoorlase Zavoloko väljaantud ajakiri *Родная Старина* ja tema juhitud seltsi (*Кружок ревнителей старины*) tegevus Lätis ja Eestis kujutavad endast juhtumit, kus vanausuliste kombelisuse teoloogia kohtub rahvusliku traditsiooni romantiseeritud tõlgendusega. Vanausuliste kui “tõeliste venelaste” kuvand oli aastaid kunstnikele ja kirjanikele inspiratsiooniallikaks ning eeskujuks. Ka etnograafilised uurimused on olnud samamoodi kallutatud, pidades vanausku vene vanade kommete ja materiaalse kultuuri “elavaks muuseumiks”. Kuigi vanausulised on alati püüdnud sellistest ideoloogilistest konstruktsioonidest kõrvale hoida (mis väljendub eelkõige vastumeelsuses oma traditsiooni kohta teadmisi jagada või innukas suhtumises valeandmete esitamisse), püüdis Zavoloko vanausuliste kultuuri mõtestada ja kujutada seda vene kultuuri olulise osana.

Väitekirjas analüüsin ka Siberi vanausuliste loodud kirjalikke allikaid. Minu huvikeskmes on Dubtšesi kloostrites elavate naiste kirjutatud tekstid. Vanausulised on kuulsad oma keskaegsete kirjutustraditsioonide hoidmise poolest. Nad säilitavad vanu kirikuslaavikeelseid raamatuid, kopeerivad neid ning loovad uusi käsikirju. Kuigi vanausuliste hulgas oli varem vaid üksikuid naisautoreid, siis on see hämmastav, et nüüdsel ajal on naiste osakaalu tõustes taiga kloostrite kirjutuspraktikad nii laialt arenenud.

Väitekirja viimases peatüks vaatlen kahte käsikirja, millest “Uurali ja Siberi Paterikon”²⁵³ on publitseeritud teadusväljaandena (Pokrovskii 2014) ning teise- ga “Novoselje kloostri sugupuu”²⁵⁴ tutvusin Siberis ekspeditsioonil olles. Mõlemad allikad kirjeldavad Uurali ja Siberi tšasovennoje vanausuliste kloostrite ajalugu ning hõlmavad kloostrite elanike biograafiaid, mis järgivad keskaegse hagiograafia traditsioone. Nimetud käsikirjad loodi peamiselt kohalike allikate

²⁵³ Ven. *Урало-Сибирский патерик*.

²⁵⁴ Ven. *Родословная обители „Новоселье”*.

põhjal, s.t kasutati kloostrielanike päevikuid, kirju ning mälestusi. Suurema osa moodustavad neist naiste kirjutised. Kuigi paterikon tähistab kirikuisade ja pühade elulugude kogumikku, siis vanausuliste kogumik räägib palju naistest: käsikiri koosneb kolmest osast, millest teine osa on pühendatud nunnadele. Seni arvatakse, et „Uurali ja Siberi Paterikon“ on meeste kirjutatud (Zolnikova 2014). „Novoselje kloostri sugupuu“ kirjeldab aga ühe nunnakloostri lugu. Selle põhjal leian, et viimane on algusest peale naiste kirjutatud teos.

APPENDIX

ILLUSTRATIONS

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- Pictures 31.** V. Plotnikov, *At the mother's gravesite*.
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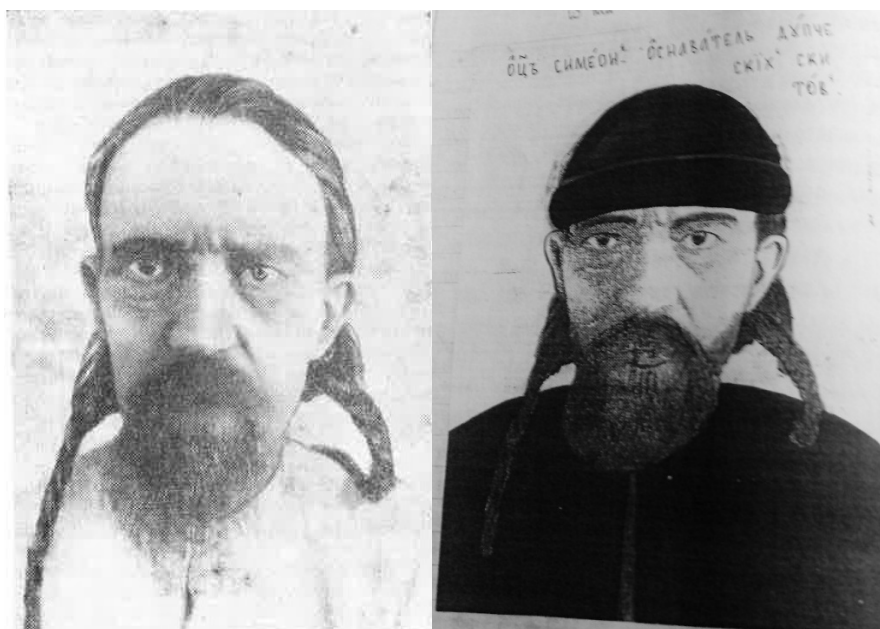
Picture 1. *Na Volge* by M.V. Nesterov. Source: *Rodnaia Starina*, 1928, № 3, 8.



Picture 2. Singers of left choir in Old Believers temple in Rajushi (Raja), Estonia.
Source: *Rodnaia Starina*, 1928, № 3, 21.



Picture 3. Singers of temple in Yuriev (Tartu), Estonia.
Source: *Rodnaia Starina*, 1928, № 3, 21.



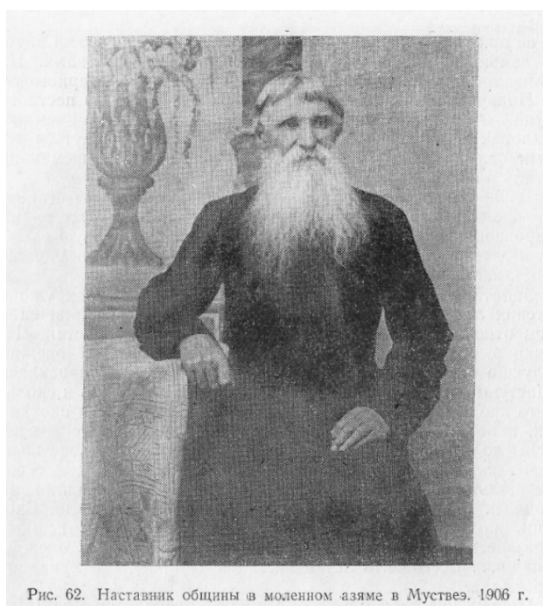
Pictures 4–5. Two portraits of father Simeon, a founder of Dubches monasteries. Photo on the left was published in the antireligious journal *Science and Religion* (Shamaro: 1963: 23). Photo on the left is a sketch made after the previous photos by an anonymous Old Believer illustrator and included in *Novoselie* story. Source: *Novoselie*: 29 bac).



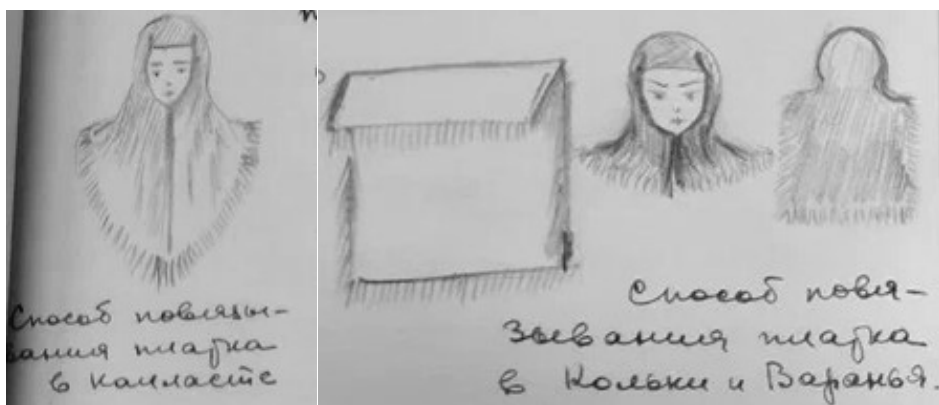
Picture 6. *Lestovka*, praying beads of Old Believers. Source: Eesti Rahva Muuseum, ERM B 231:3, <http://www.muis.ee/ru/museaalview/685580>.



Picture 7. *Fedoseevtsy* women in prayer clothes. Source: Rikhter 1976: 163.



Picture 8. Old Believer *nastavnik* in prayer clothes. Source: Rikhter 1976: 165.



Picture 9–10. Forms of head veiling in *Pomortsy* communities (*na ugol* ‘at the angle’) and in *Fedoseevtsy* (*napopolam* ‘in half’). Source: ERM EA 299: 47. The author’s picture captions read “A way of tying a scarf on head in Kallaste” and “A way of tying a scarf on head in Kolki and Voronja” for *Pomortsy* and *Fedoseevtsy* respectively. However, my interlocutors never referred to Voronja as a *Fedoseevtsy* place or a place where square headscarves had been worn. Voronja native women does not have any recollections of that either.



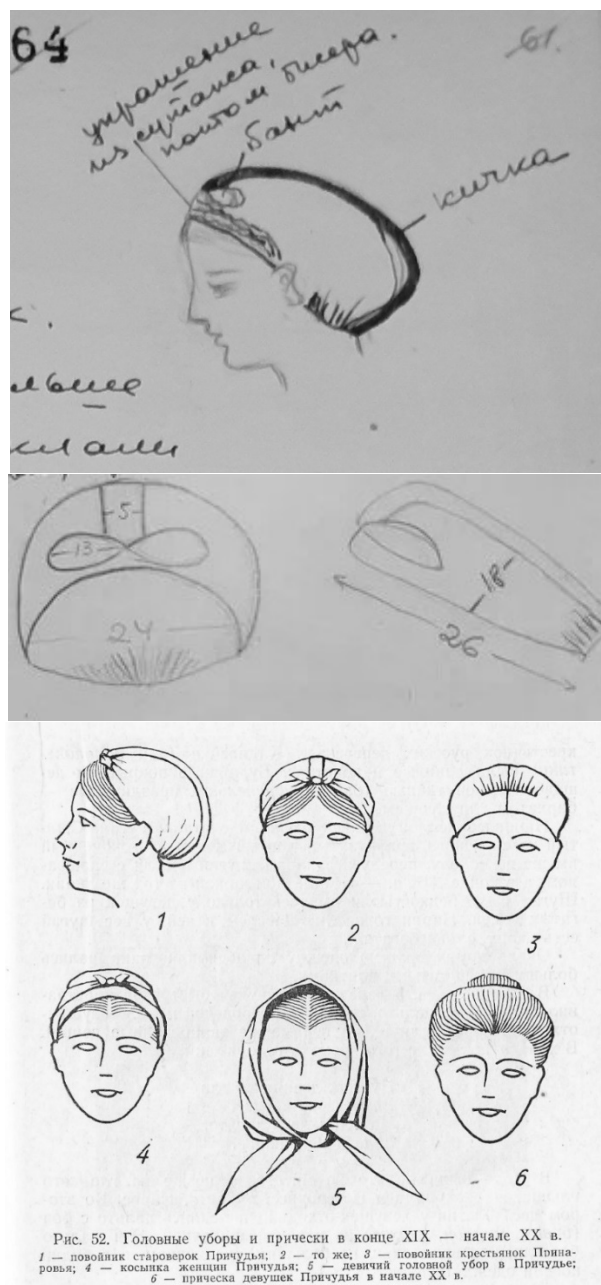
Picture 11. Teatime at *Revnitely Stariny* meeting with visitors from Lithuania, June 19, 1931. Source: *Russkie Latvii*. Retrieved from: <http://www.russkije.lv/ru/lib/read/the-meeting-of-lithuanian-visitors.html>



Picture 12. Afterlife punishment for rule-breakers. Left caption: “Torment for beard-shavers”. “If a man shaves a beard and dies like that, then demons stab him with a bodkin all over the body” (From a *Pomortsy* illustrated manuscript). Right caption: “Torment for daubing daces with ointments”. “If wives who daub their faces with ointments die, then demons scratch faces with iron hooks”. Source: *Rodnaia Starina*, № 7, 1928: 22.



Picture 13. *K Molitve* by M.V. Nesterov. Source: *Rodnaia Starina*, 1928, № 3, 9.



Picture 14–16. Female headwear in Prichudie. Source of the upper picture: ERM EA 299: 62. Source of the middle picture: *ibid*: 124. Source of the lower picture: Rikhter 1976: 145. Interestingly, Rikhter stated in the field diary that *povoinik*, a married woman headwear, was decorated with soutache, beads, and a bow. A band attached to the bow was called *kichka* (ERM EA 299: 62). However, in the publication it visually looks like as if *povoinik* is tied at the forehead.

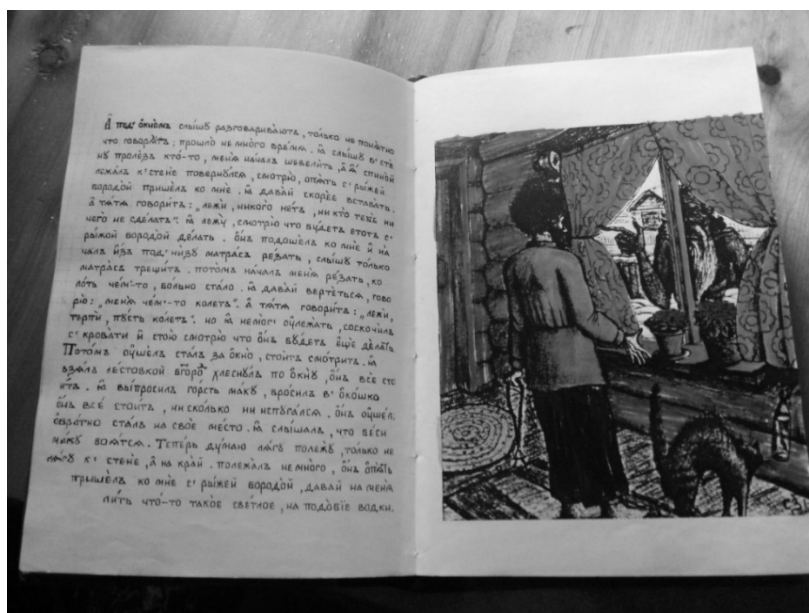
ПОКОЙНЫЕ НАШЕЙ ОБИТЕЛИ									
№	Имя	Дата рождения	Дата смерти	Год	Почин	Почин	Почин	Почин	Почин
1	Ирина	1930	3 апр	21 мар	18 л	54 г	72 г		
2	Ирина	1934	31 мар	19 апр	53 л	19 л	72 л		
3	Павлыга	1934	11 июл	26 окт	14 л	25 л	71 л		
4	Кира	1935	24 авг	12 июл	35 л	4 г	39 л		
5	Евкла	1936	9 нояб	10 дек	71 г	4 г	75 г		
6	Ришмиа	1936	5 сен	12 дек	19 л	16 л	35 л		
7	Антонина	1936	13 июл	22 окт	17 л	2 г	19 л		
8	Пелагия	1937	28 окт	3 нояб					
9	Евдотия	1938	5 сен	14 июл	17 л	62 г	79 л		
10	Нешниа	1939	26 авг	29 мар	76 л	8 л	84 г		
11	Бера	2000	21 авг	3 авг	60 г	5 л	65 г		
12	Марья	2000	17 дек	28 дек	76 л	1 г	77 г		
13	Трифена	2000	12 авг	4 дек	17 л	63 г	79 л		
14	Зинаида	2001	11 окт	27 мар	74 л	2 г	76 г		
15	Павла	2001	28 окт	18 июл		3 г 4 м			
16	Анисья	2002	9 дек	15 авг	65 л	4 г	69 л		
17	Любовь	2002	17 сен	19 мар	50 л	8 л	50 л		
18	Анастасия	1992	10 мар	23 сен	61 г	7 л	68 л		

№	Имя	Дата рождения	Дата смерти	Год	Почин	Почин	Почин	Почин	Почин
19	Анастасия	2002	29 окт	30 июля	68 л	2 м	68 л		
20	Евдокия	2005	19 мар	22 июл	14 л	5 л	20 л		
21	Лидия	2004	13 дек	17 июл	14 л	3 г	17 л		
22	Андрей	2004	4 мар	23 июл	17 л	6 л	23 г		
23	Алевтина	2005	10 мар	9 мар	16 л	5 л	21 г		
24	Евгения	2005	24 дек	22 апр	32 г	6 л	38 л		
25	Хиония	2005	5 окт	19 дек	43 г	4 г 4 м	47 л		
26	Ксения	2006	18 мар	7 апр	52 г	6 л	58 л		
27	Исидора	2006	13 июл	24 апр	65 л	7 л	72 г		
28	Татьяна	2006	12 авг	5 окт			64 г		
29	Александра	2007	13 июл	15 мар			82 г		
30									
31									
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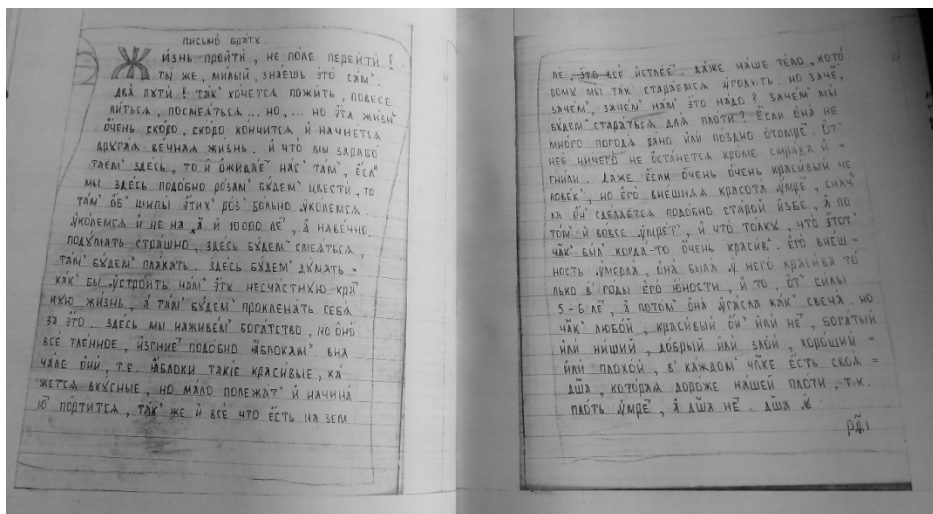
Pictures 19–20. Commemoration chat of late nuns. Source: *Novoselie* 11 back – 12.



Picture 21. A Photograph of Dubches nuns: *Chernorizitsa Trifena*, *chernorizitsa Porfiria*. Source: *Novoselie*: 48 back.



Picture 22. Illustrated version of *Povest Chudesnykh Sobytiy*. Source: Field notes, 2018.



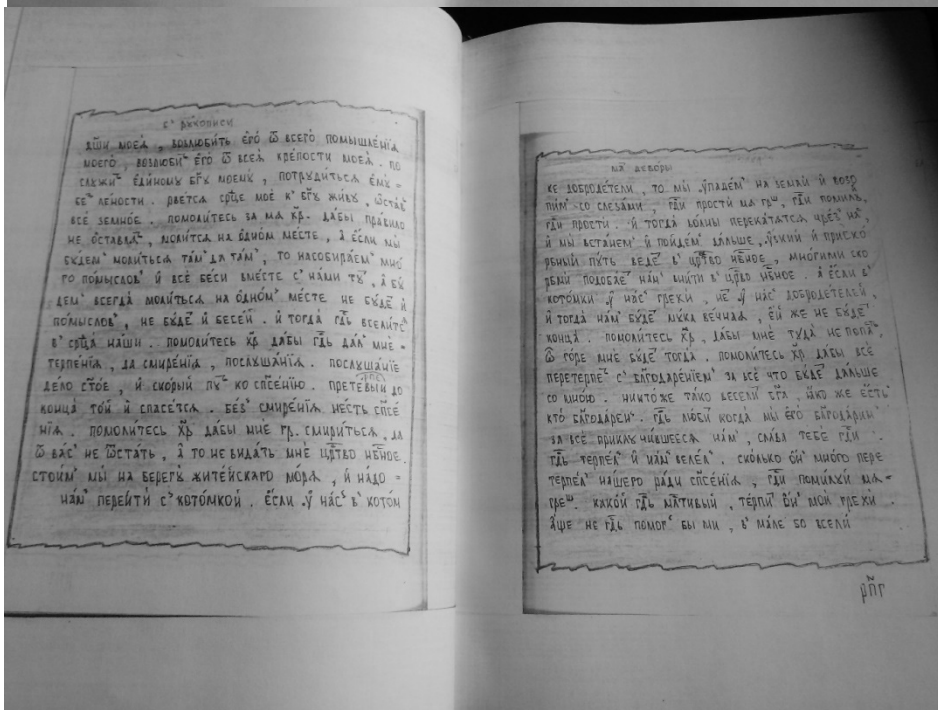
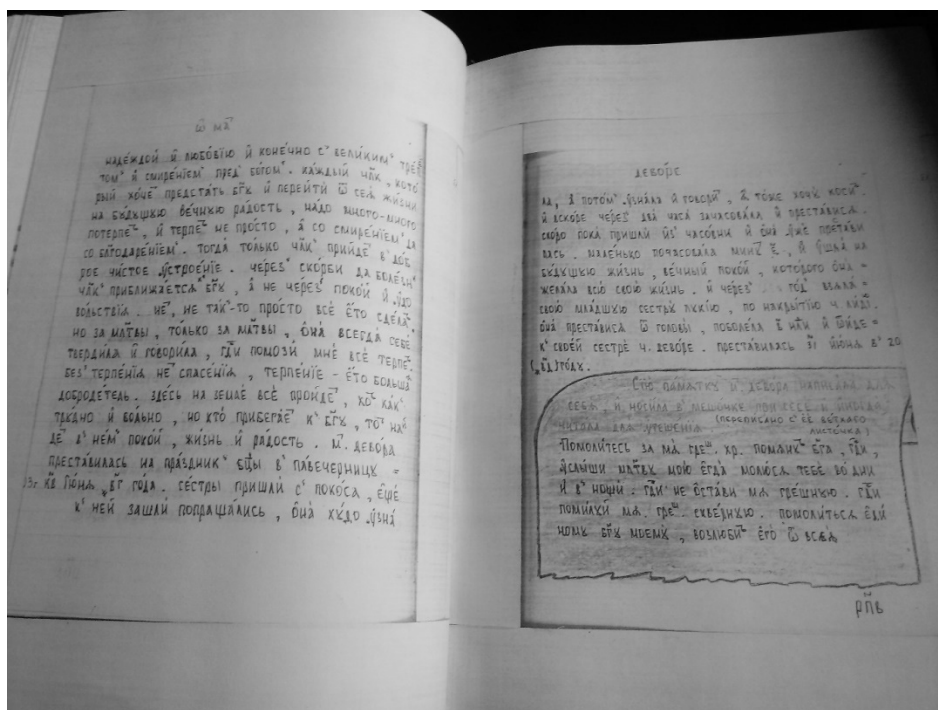
Picture 23. A first two-page opening from mother Paolga's letter to her brother.
Source: *Novoselie*: 118 back – 119.

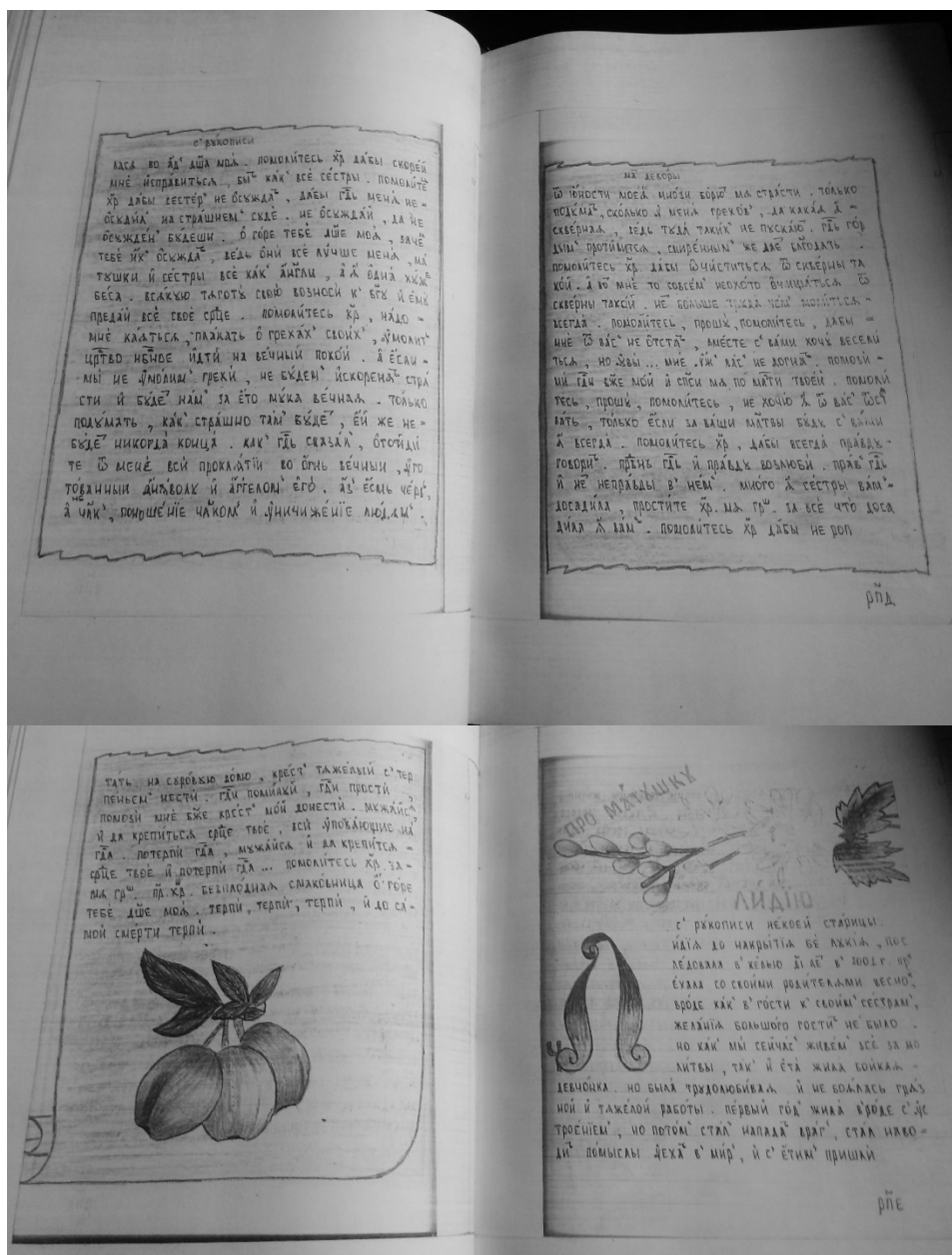


Picture 24. Mother Ripsiimia at work. Source: *Novoselie*: 83.



Picture 25. Father Mina expels a demon from a possessed nun. Source: *Novoselie*: 60.





Pictures 26–29. A note of *chernorizitsa* Devora that “she made for herself and carried in a small bag with her, and from time to time read for consolation”.
Source: *Novoselie*: 182–184 back.



Picture 30. Screenshot of an Instagram post featuring Ekaterina Shugaeva (NTV) and Ekaterina Andreeva (Channel One), two Russian propaganda workers, wearing a folk costume of *Semeiskie* Old Believers of Buryatiia. The post was made on March 11, 15 days after beginning of a full-scale assault of Russia on Ukraine. Shugaeva contraposes Russia with what Russian propaganda presumes under the Western values: “Being Russian today means to challenge the Western system with 50 genders, totalitarian political correctness, and hypocrisy <...> Today we are together with the Old Believers in Buryatiia. There are Russian traditions, Cossack bravery, Buryatian slowness, Siberian diligence, and Mongolian hospitality <...>”. Source: Shugaeva: n.d..

По старинѣ.



„На могилѣ матери“

Картина В. А. Плотникова.

Pictures 31. V. Plotnikov, *At the mother's gravesite* (date not known).
Copy published in *Rodnaia Starina*, № 3, cover page.



Pictures 32. Mikhail Nesterov (1862–1942), *To the prayer* (date not known).
Copy published in *Rodnaia Starina*, № 3, 9.



„На рѣкѣ Варзугѣ“.

Картина Н. А. Плотникова.

Pictures 33. N. Plotnikov, *On the river Varzuga* (date not known).
Copy published in *Rodnaia Starina*, № 3, 10.

GLOSSARY

<i>batka</i>	vernacular term for <i>nastavnik</i> in Estonia that is applied for any gender, although grammatically this is a masculine noun.
<i>dobraia chashka</i>	also ‘chistaia chashka’, tableware of Old Believers that is not used for sharing.
<i>kichka</i>	see ‘shashmur’.
<i>lestovka</i>	Old Believer type of prayer beads. The word origins from the Church Slavic <i>lestvitsa</i> , ‘the stairs’, that represents steps of devotedness to God. <i>Lestovka</i> consists of <i>bobochki</i> (beads), each of which corresponds to a certain prayer, depending on the size of the bead.
<i>mirskaia chashka</i>	tableware that Old Believers give to strangers.
<i>nastavnik</i>	elder. In lay Old Believer communities, it is a person that has enough knowledge and was blessed by other elders to hear confessions, baptize children, distribute the holy communion (in case of <i>Chasovennye</i>), conduct the service, etc.
<i>nastavnitsa</i>	female <i>nastavnik</i> or eldress. Functions of eldresses are usually narrower compared to men.
<i>podrushnik</i>	tailored rectangular piece of cloth that serves as a mat for prostrations.
<i>poganaia posuda</i>	usually animal feeders, sauna buckets, everything that is put down on the floor, used for laundry or other dirty work, i.e., not for feeding humans.
<i>poyasnoi poklon</i>	waist bow.
<i>shashmur</i>	also ‘shashmura’, ‘sashmur’, ‘kichka’. Headdress of a married woman. A term is spread in Siberia.
<i>zemnoi poklon</i>	prostration.

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