

How young people visiting the Lutheran Church of St. Anna in Saint-Petersburg perceive its religious community.

*Paper done by Tatiana Bannikova, Egor Kuzovchikov,
Anastasia Bogatyreva, Fatih Can Islak (BPS-213)*

Introduction

Nowadays, the Russian authoritarian regime heavily relies on religion and primarily on the Russian Orthodox Church which helps to sustain its stability. Nevertheless, Russia is a multi-confessional state and despite the dominance of Orthodoxy and the state's reliance on traditional values, many different religious minorities exist. The primary goal of our work is **to analyze how young people visiting the Lutheran Church of St. Anna in Saint-Petersburg perceive its religious community**, which could become a basis for a broader research on how religious minorities fit in the existing socio-political space of contemporary Russia. In the **first** chapter we will describe the methods used and justify the choice of these methods. In the **second** part we will focus our attention on general preconditions of the research. The **third** one will be concerned with the participants of the research, their contribution to the work and the description of their background for general understanding of the following analysis. **Fourth** section will be dedicated to a discourse analysis of the ethnographic research conducted. **Final** chapter will outline the difficulties each of the participants faced and some general outcomes of the work done.

Part One. Methodology.

For conducting our research we used a combination of several qualitative methods, in particular **ethnographic participant-observation** and **discourse analysis**. Both of these methods are aimed at revealing the invisible. The observer's job is to investigate and deconstruct what makes the possibilities of one person's actions, thinking and speech seem so secondary and so self-evident that a person usually does not ask questions about how this happens at all, while at the same time creating the feeling that other people's ways and methods are different and unusual. To visualize and study observational data in context, discourse analysis is used, which explores the role of language in how people come to categorize their social world and make the “cultural” (that is, constructed) seem “natural” (often still said to be true and always present) in everyday use (Pader 2006). The result of

participant observation in our case are field notes collected during the service at St. Anna Lutheran Church in St. Petersburg. To them we will apply the analysis of discourse as a method of highlighting the levels of perception. Ethnographic research, as well as discourse analysis, carry many similar features that complement each other. In both cases, there is **a question of cultural background and immersion in the environment**. Ethnography and discourse analysis are similar in that they pay or should pay great attention to **how the analyst treats the data**. Because of this, the researcher in any case has to maintain a certain **distance from the object of study in order to be able to identify the representations** that make up the discourse and to identify the multilayering within it (Neumann 2008). To put it another way, observation with a result in the form of field notes is an intrusion into an alien discourse in order to study it from the inside. This differs from Lacan's principles of "the discourse of Hysteric undermines the status quo of the discourse of Master" and the inconsistency of Hysteric (Lacan 1969), but rather allows you to smoothly enter the environment and explore a different object with a minimum area of touch and intervention. We do not criticize or question the existing discourse, but **we examine it as its members and as outside observers**. This all brings us back to Iver Neumann with his layering of discourse (Neumann 2008), where we see the correlation, in our case, of the discourse of the Lutheran Church and the discourses of observers.

Part Two. Preconditions.

State-church relationships intervenes strongly with the values that individuals perceive as important. Although the primary goal of a christian teachings is to spread such values as peace, love, forgiveness and equality, the religiosity of people is more or less associated with authoritarianism, nationalism and militarism, which contradicts what the Church was primarily established for (Roccas & Schwartz 1997). A person's formal exposure to religion (such as church attendance, for example) and the type of religious orientation (divided primarily into two groups: religious fundamentalism and quest religions) which a person classifies themselves to are a main indicator of values that these people will stand for (Osborne & Sibley 2014).

To figure out how the religious minorities in Russia are perceived by the younger generation in the existing system of values which are promoted by the authoritarian regime relying on the Orthodox Church, we conducted ethnographic research in the Lutheran Church of St. Anna in St. Petersburg. It is worth noting that this research is time-consuming and must be

conducted for a long time, so for the observation we took only field notes from the first services the participants visited. This particular religious institution was chosen for several reasons. **Firstly**, it is the religious minorities Church which organizes its activities in the Orthodox-centered authoritarian regime. **Secondly**, it is a nontraditional place in a sense of church organizations, because it primarily functions more as a creative space than a Church. **Thirdly**, it brought attention of many representatives of a younger generation which visit the church for both the concerts and exhibitions and the God's services. Next, we conducted a discourse analysis of the field notes written by two representatives of our team to see the difference in perceptions of values and the Church itself between religious and nonreligious persons.

Part Three. Participants.

First step of our work (mainly, the ethnographic research) was conducted by two members of our team: **Egor** and **Tanya**. Second step (mainly, the discourse analysis) was conducted by **Nastya** and **Fatih**. To better understand their perception of the Church we need to outline their personal characteristics.

Egor is a 19-years-old male who was baptized in an Orthodox Church and raised in the Orenburg region (main spread religions in which is Orthodoxy and Islam) of Russia by the Orthodox parents. He has never considered himself a religious person before moving to St. Petersburg when he started to visit a religious course once a week in the Church of St. Anna to better understand the nature of the religion, but now he is preparing to go through the process of confirmation in the Lutheran Church.

Tanya is a 19-years-old female who was raised mostly by a grandmother with Orthodox religious views and grew up in the Republic of Bashkortostan, which is one of the national Muslim republics of the Russian Federation. She always perceived religion as something fake, a toy, so for a long time she adhered to atheistic views. With the move to St. Petersburg and the change of environment, she began to feel spirituality more strongly. Now she can describe her views as faith in the Universe, Fate and Tarot cards. She was visiting the Lutheran Church of St. Anna only as a place for exhibitions and for the first time in her life she attended a religious service.

Nastya is a 18-years-old female who was baptized in an Orthodox Church at a very early age. She grew up in the Stavropol region, where Orthodoxy is prevalent, despite the fact that the territory is a part of the North Caucasus. Having not been raised in a very religious family, she does not attend any church and generally holds rather atheistic views, although she is familiar with Orthodox customs. During her time at university, scientific worldview became increasingly dominant, predetermining her attitude toward religion more as a phenomenon to be researched rather than something to be directly involved in. She has never visited the Lutheran Church of St. Anna, but perceives the church more as an exhibition space rather than a religious place because of the information on social media.

Fatih is a 21-years-old male who was raised in a cultural-religious minority family called *Alevi* in Turkey; coming from a non-religious family where the religion is not really practiced they are still strongly connected to this close knit minority community. Being raised in those minority neighborhoods; the interaction of him as a minority with the primary dominating belief system allowed him to provide insights about the minority relationships with the dominating religion.

Part Four. Discourse analysis.

In this part we will try to compare the field notes by Egor and Tanya, using such a method as discourse analysis. It's worth starting with the fact that they both describe their experience at the Lutheran Church of St. Anna as "unusual". It should be noted that both Tanya and Yegor, when describing the church and what was happening there, were guided by the image of a typical Orthodox church and took it as the basis for comparison. Consciously or unconsciously they showed in their texts that the church differs from their common idea of the church, which by virtue of their background is Orthodox. For example, in Tanya's text there are such words as "surprisingly," "unexpectedly," and "unusual". Also, we may notice the phrase "*compared to the Orthodox Church*, there were a lot of people here". Comparisons to the Orthodox Church are even more common in Egor's text. For example, he writes: "some huge popcorns hovered in the air that was also *very unusual for the ordinary Church*...it smelled like popcorn too...*I used to smell laden in Orthodox churches* that I visited before, so it was quite *unusual for me*", "this place was not only a Church, but rather a creative space...*that would be even forbidden in a simple Orthodox Church*", as well as "all the walls were hung around by paintings of Christ...not really icons that *I used to see at Orthodox Churches*". Another interesting detail is that both Tanya and Egor have no trouble using

concepts to describe Christian practices and people in the church since they grew up with Orthodox relatives. For example, Egor uses words such as "altar", "communion", "sermon", which are also relevant to Orthodoxy. In addition, they both say "pastor", referring to the person who conducts sermons, which is relevant only to Catholicism. This indicates their more or less advanced level of awareness. On the other hand, Tanya attended a service where everything was explained to those people who were not accustomed with Lutheran traditions. In any case, obviously it is difficult enough to remember all of these terms from the very first time, so it is clear that she was familiar with most of them even before her visit to the Lutheran Church of St. Anna.

Also, we want to note that Egor probably felt generally more confident while being in the church than Tanya did. At least, we do not see in his text any words related to the description of anxiety or any discomfort. While in the beginning of Tanya's text we noted this sentence: "I've been to Annenkirche before, but *now I felt awkward and uncomfortable*, I didn't know where to go and the high arches were slightly pressing on me". Perhaps this has to do with the fact that Tanya had visited the Church of St. Anna before, seeing it as a creative space rather than a religious place. Now, when she went to a religious service, she was expected to behave in a certain way, and for fear of missing something or doing something wrong, she felt uncomfortable. Given Tanya's worldview, which includes concepts such as spirituality and belief in the universe, this sense of unease was most likely due to a fear of somehow disrupting the natural flow of things in a religious community she was unfamiliar with. It is unlikely that this feeling was due to Tanya's skeptical attitude toward the church. On the contrary, we can observe a high degree of openness and willingness to accept some new practices and experiences. For example, Tanya writes: "Although the pastor said that it is not necessary to observe everything, but *it was interesting for me to try*. I sang hymns, got up, sat down, and even prayed several times".

Also, more detailed and expanded descriptions of Lutheran customs, interior details, and church history in general are noticeable in Egor's text. Many of these details he learned directly from the people working in the Church of St. Anna (for example, he spoke with the pastor). Thus, Egor writes: "these popcorns as well as some cinema glasses ... above were dedicated to the exhibition for the 300 years of the Church *as I found out in the previous dialogue with the staff*", "later in a dialogue with the pastor it was said to me that the Church were not renovated since the dissolution of the USSR, as it have not been used for years",

"the altar itself was green, the religious pastors' robes were white with green ornate; lectern was green as well ... later *I talked to the priest and asked why*". So many social interactions of Egor with other people in church also supports the idea that Egor felt quite confident being in the place. Moreover, he was not just interacting with churchgoers like himself, but with people who are supposed to have more authority and a higher position, such as the priest. At the same time, there is absolutely no description of any hierarchy in Egor's account. Thus, the impression is that the interaction is on an equal footing, even though the pastor has more knowledge of religious matters and has authority after all.

Another interesting detail that can be seen in both Egor's and Tanya's texts is that they describe the Lutheran Church of St. Anna as a place where there are no strict rules or prohibitions. For example, Egor writes: "*there were no restrictions for the clothes*, anyone can come in what is comfortable for them: without obligatory skirt and scarf around their hair for women ". Tanya also notes that "the pastor said that *it is not necessary to observe everything*". Thus, the Lutheran church is seen as a freer place in which you are not required to observe age-old traditions like wearing a headscarf. The image of the Church as a modern and free religious space emerges. Egor also noted the relevance to him of the sermon being preached: "there was also a sermon about wakefulness that I liked as *I found some applicability to it in my own life* and my deep care of the *productivity* that I try to perform". Since productivity is a fairly modern concept, the Lutheran Church shows that it can really be relevant to the passage of time. This factor is important in attracting young people to this religious community. Speaking about the age of the people in the Church of St. Anna, Tanya notes that she noticed a lot of young people there: "I even met friends from our university ... the helpers in the church were also *young girls my age*". Also, she says that "*the pastor was a young and very cheerful person*". Based on these notes, it seems that people representing a religious minority in the person of Lutherans visiting the Lutheran Church of St. Anna are still mostly young people. Although Egor at the same time does not make any notes about the age of visitors and people working in the church, turning his attention to other things.

As we have already noted, Egor writes a lot about the visual component of the church, describing its interior. He also adds photos to his story so we can see what he is talking about. Tanya, on the other hand, does not describe the interior in much detail. She pays more attention to the description of her emotions during a visit to the Church of St. Anna. Thus, she writes "I realized that *I was crying* ... the live choir and organ music *made me feel*

goosebumps". Also, it is interesting to note how Egor and Tanya show their attitude to visitors during the church service. Tanya writes "people stood around as one and prayed, *it was an amazing feeling of unity*", although a little later notes that she was "alarmed" that the person next to her behaved too actively. Egor also notes the interaction of church visitors: "there was a part where all people started to cheer everyone in the room, shaking the hands of their neighbors, hugging them, and wishing them "God's peace". Adding to the point about the absence of a pronounced hierarchy in the Lutheran Church, Egor notes that not only the parishioners were interacting with each other, but the pastor also tried to be in contact with people: "priests ... were even walking around the room to as many people as it was possible".

An important factor that promotes communication within this religious group and the acquisition of closer ties by Lutherans is eating and drinking tea after church service, as both Egor and Tanya write about. For example, in Egor's text we see such a sentence: "*everyone was welcomed to join a tea and coffee drinking* in the same room after the end of the service ... apart from drinks there were many cookies, pizzas, another food for free for people that would like to stay". Tanya also notes this detail, while expressing her positive attitude: "*I was pleasantly surprised* by the tradition of giving postcards to new arrivals and distributing tea, coffee and gingerbread after the service. *It was something incredible to me, like a little miracle*". In general, in the text by Tanya, we see her openness, emotionality and willingness to feel what the religious community that gathered in the Lutheran Church of St. Anna feels. At the same time, she does not hide uncomfortable emotions that do not really fit into the overall picture of what she liked in the church. For example, she writes that "at the moment of reading the Bible, *I got a little bored*". But despite these details, we still got the impression that the Lutheran church in the eyes of Tanya and Egor is a pleasant space where, in general, anyone can feel comfortable, since the atmosphere is quite conducive to this. Moreover you are not obliged to comply with any strict rules, for violation of which you will be punished. Egor's text does not even have a glimpse of any negative emotions like anxiety or awkwardness. On the contrary, he focuses on the moment of service when people began to contact each other, which also feels like some kind of unity. The next sentence shows it well: "*people were so kind, cheerful*, celebrating the God and the world around them, wishing the best for the closest ones". Tanya, despite the fact that she was previously unfamiliar with the traditions of the Lutheran Church and went to the Church of St. Anna only for exhibitions, was able to join the community and imbued with their customs, since the idea of spirituality is close to her. At the end of her text, she leaves this note: "Despite the lack of sleep and

hunger, *I felt a certain presence of spirituality and forgiveness in me*. I don't know if I will return to the Annenkirche service again, but I know for sure that *I want to feel this presence of unusual universal understanding, calmness and warmth in myself*". Egor describes his emotions more restrained, paying more attention to the structure of the church, as if presenting to us the place where he likes to be, telling its history and traditions. And he also sees in visiting the Lutheran Church of St. Anna more practical application, at the same time as consolation. He says that he was presented with a postcard, like all visitors, on the back of which was written "Eventually everything will be fine". Thus, it seems that all these practices that exist in the Lutheran Church create an atmosphere of kindness, comfort and probably a sense of community (of course, for people who are looking for it).

Part Five. Conclusion and Reflections.

This part we would like to start with outlining the difficulties that we faced while conducting this research. The main problem we are facing is the most typical for ethnographic research. The problem of **positioning oneself during observation**. Adopting the popular positivist framework of research, it is believed that participant observation should be neutral and objective in order to read complete information. It is also implied that for the quality of the study, it must be carried out for a long time (several months or even years). Time becomes a challenge in the pursuit of objectivity. Within the framework of the established task, we could not qualitatively increase the time spent in the Lutheran community, so we had to be content with small notes from a one-time visit. Social and cultural empathy is also a difficult point in the study. There are two different opinions about the observer in ethnography. **The first** is the opinion already described above about neutrality and detachment, and **the second** is the opinion that a complete and in-depth understanding of the environment and community can be understood only by fully immersing oneself in the object of research, thereby adopting the patterns of the group you are observing (Pachirat 2018).

So we can observe these debates in the manifestation of the personalities of our observers. Egor cannot be fully called an independent observer, since he is a parishioner of the church. This puts a shade of bias on him when working "in the field", but this is what allows him to assess what is happening in the service more deeply and meaningfully. Tanya faced another problem - the lack of background about Lutheran customs created a feeling of discomfort and lack of understanding of what was happening in the beginning. This was partly corrected by a special kind of service, where every step in the service was explained. Also, the general

conformity of what was happening forced her to participate directly in the service, moving away from the role of a bystander (it is worth noting that this atmosphere of conformity was not the main trigger in participation, personal interest and a desire to try herself in an unusual role of a parishioner also played a big role).

Among the difficulties we encountered during the discourse analysis, we would like to note, firstly, the diversity of schools and approaches to discourse analysis, which makes it difficult to determine what is relevant exactly to our work (for example, we immediately abandoned the CDA). Secondly, there was a fear due to lack of experience to replace the analysis and explanation with a simple description of the content of the sources. At the same time, we did not want to give any explanations without a strong foundation and be fantasists. So, the difficulty was not to slip into a simple enumeration of facts, while avoiding inventing interpretations out of nothing.

To conclude, we conducted a small study which can become a good foundation for the future research on how these religious minorities fit into the existing Russian authoritarian regime. For a larger work we would develop and expand the results we already gained by taking into account problems outlined above and trying to overcome them.

Bibliography

1. Egor's Field Notes:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1_ov-X7pxgFAsRinMMBqabxLYpIIzndZe/edit
2. Tanya's Field Notes:
<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1CL6Ccof1W7e1jMIMAonU4IOFwQBOW810UV4WSOMk8HI/edit>
3. Lacan's Seminar XVII (English translation; New York: Norton, 2007)
4. Neumann, I. (2008) "Discourse Analysis", in Klotz, A. and Prakash, D. (eds.) *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan
5. Osborne, D. & Sibley, C. G. (2014). Endorsement of system-justifying beliefs strengthens the relationship between church attendance and Right-Wing Authoritarianism. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 17(4), 542-551

6. Pachirat, T. (2018) *Among Wolves. Ethnography and the Immersive Study of Power*. New York: Routledge.
7. Pader, E. (2006) "Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility: Explorations Beneath the Surface of Public Policies", in Yanow, D. and Schwartz-Shea, P. (eds.) *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*. M. E. Sharpe Incorporated.
8. Roccas, S. & Schwartz, S. H. (1997). Church-State Relations and the Association of Religiosity With Values: A Study of Catholics in Six Countries. *Cross-Cultural Research*, 31(4), 356-375.