

**TOSKA, NATION, AND RELIGION IN RUSSIA:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THREE INFORMANTS INTERESTED IN RELIGION**

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Jonathan Flatley (2001) describes the Russian word *toska* as meaning, roughly, *melancholia* – though he also points out that it is a word that Russians feel is somehow essentially Russian, and says something about Russian-ness itself. *Toska* speaks to the contemporary post-Soviet structure of feeling, and may produce a myriad of English translations, such as: anguish, depression, longing. It also speaks to the idea of no longer being within a place, relationship, or situation. Sheila Fitzpatrick (2004) calls *toska* “a kind of yearning sadness,” and Nabokov (1990) writes, “no single word in English renders all the shades of *toska*. At its deepest and most painful, it is a sensation of great spiritual anguish...at less morbid levels it is a dull ache of the soul...a longing with nothing to long for...”

Toska appears throughout discussion about post-Soviet life, and it is often coupled with expressions of a “communist nostalgia.” Unlike the English, *melancholia*, it is possible to make *toska* into a verb (*toskovat*). Flatley (2001) glosses this verb with *longing*. In this sense there is a melancholic-longing as members of the Russian public continue to desire the benefits formerly associated with life in a collective enterprise (Shlapentok, 1999). As Caroline Humphrey (2001) suggests, this longing transforms into social anxiety when met with the idea of the existence of prosperous outsiders (individuals living outside of community social spheres).

Churches in Russia can potentially mitigate the feeling of *toska* by presenting both a vision of the world and a social group that relieves or transforms the feelings associated with *toska* – whether these feelings be longing, anguish, social anxiety, or so forth. This paper will draw upon ethnographic data from members of religious organizations in Russia (Orthodox, Mormon, and Campus Crusade for Christ) to argue that public structures of post-Soviet emotional expression work to imbricate the melancholic states of potential converts with their “conversion” across various forms of spiritual practice. As Russian-ness itself is conceptually linked with *toska*, individual uses of the term *toska* in the context of missionary projects and religious activities, are often bound up with interpretations of one’s national identity that imply a dissatisfaction with the current state of Russian society. Russian religious projects and, importantly, foreign missionary projects, find resonance where the potential convert’s individual aspects of *toska* can be resolved, explained, or relieved.

As *toska* is frequently intertwined with the idea of “nation” in the minds of post-Soviet Russians, I will begin this paper with a brief historical discussion of Russian nationalism before providing ethnographic examples of *toska* which invoke nation. The examples are intended to examine the varied and individualised relationship between *toska* and religion that arises for Russian people in differing situations.

Nationalism in Russia

Contemporary Russians, suggests Hosking (1998), come upon an “ineluctable paradox” when they try to understand what happened to them in the Soviet Union. He indicates that this paradox continues to affect the thoughts of Russians as they consider the past and the meaning, or

even existence, of current Russian nationalism. Rowley (2000) contends that prior to the present day (the period after the Soviet Union) it is misleading to apply the term *nationalism* to Russia. Despite a large "homogeneous population," a clearly defined homeland, a common language, and a common religion, argues Rowley (2000:24), nationalism failed to develop because the Russian "discursive universe did not include the concepts that are essential to nationalist thought." Rowley claims that during the Tsarist period Russia's "political and intellectual elite were not nationalists but imperialists" (Rowley, 2000:25). Suny (1993:25) argues that "nationality was not a significant consideration for the Russian imperial state-builders," and Hosking proposes that where "*national imperialism*" arose [emphasise added], it was not directed toward nurturing a Russian nation, but toward the preservation of the government through "greater administrative unity and coordination" (Hosking 1997:397). It is perhaps in this historic dichotomy between Russian as a so-called culture and Russian as a style of governance that the contemporary language retains the terms *russkii* ("to describe the language, the culture, and the life of ethnic Russians as distinct from non-Russians" Hosking, 1997:451) and *rossiiskii* ("to describe the state, the territory, the multinational empire" Hosking, 1997:451). Hosking suggests that during the tsarist era "the building of an empire impeded the formation of a nation" (Hosking 1997:XIX). Rowley suggests that political discourse in the empire conceived of the world in universalist, religious categories of thought (2000:32), and that the "particularism and secularism of nationalism were incomprehensible to the Russian elite" (2000:32).

Since an empire is a state that administers a number of different nations, the Russian empire could not follow a programme of nationalism (even of Russian nationalism) without undermining its own existence. A state that rules a number of peoples must represent itself as upholding universal values or laws that apply to all human beings. In other words, an empire posits a universal humanity that has precedence over any other sort of national or regional identity. The language of nation, on the contrary, holds that there are no universal human values and that a human's most essential nature is in his or her membership in a nation. Even when an empire identifies itself with a people, the characteristics of that people cannot be relative and self-centred; that people must be portrayed as the bearers of a universal message or civilization (Rowley, 2000:32).

Consequently Russian tsars employed a universalist and religious ideology that never stirred up Russian nationalism -- nor did tsars ever represent themselves as ruling within the interests of the Russian people (Rowley, 2000:32). Instead Russianness was identified with the values of the Orthodox Church and not with the interests of the people. To this end "Russians were not important in themselves, but because they were considered to be the bearers of a holy and a universal idea. It was their duty to lead -- and perhaps to sacrifice themselves for -- others" (Rowley, 2000:32). This sentiment was the message of the nineteenth century Slavophiles, who, according to Riasanovsky,

felt certain that their mission, the mission of Russia, was of universal significance, and was bound to save the whole world. They buttressed their theories by identifying Russia with Orthodoxy, and by proclaiming that it was the historical destiny of Russia to create a new society based on the true principles of faith. The message was obviously of a universal import, and the Slavophiles were careful to describe the national and all the other interests as subordinate to the religious principles (1965:180-1).

Dostoevskii, for example, asserted that, "the Russian soul, the genius of the Russian people

is perhaps the most capable among all other peoples to fulfil in itself the idea of universal union and brotherhood" (cited in Cherniavsky, 1958:634)

Following the argument of Rowley, it is likely that the tsars would favour not a policy of Russification, but rather of Rossification -- "the development of an unswerving loyalty and direct attachment to the person of the tsar, by God's will the sole-power-holder (*samoderzhets*) and head of the Church" (Kristof, 1967). Nevertheless, it is interesting to speculate in Dostoevskii and the Slavophile agenda as to whether, for them, the idea of *ruskii* had become co-terminus with the tsars' project of rossification -- in other words, the extent to which such parties saw the success of the multinational empire as a legitimation of their group identity.

At the end of the tsarist era, Lenin, in opposition to the Whites, who desired restoration of the empire, called for national self-determination. Pipes (1964) suggests that Bolshevik success was largely due to the nationality policy. However, as Hosking details, Lenin's strategy of appeal to nationalism was not aimed at Russians, but instead resulted in the policy of *korenizatsia*¹ -- an "affirmative action" programme that declared war on "Great Russian chauvinism" (Hosking, 2006) and, at the expense of the potential development of Russian nationalism, "deliberately set out to foster the flowering of non-Russian nationalities by awarding them ethnically named territories -- the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic, the Bashkin Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic and so on, by training indigenous cadres to run these republics and by using the language of their nationalities as a medium for education, propaganda and culture" (Hosking, 2006). Where non-Russian nationalities did not exist, they were manufactured. Tishkov explains that ethnographers were sent into the regions to collect data on language, religion, customs, economy, etc, with which to fashion or synthesize nationalities into existence in place of tribal conglomerates (cited in Hosking:1997:452). However, there was no such nation engineered for Russians. As Yuri Slezkine suggests, "the Soviet Union was a communal apartment in which each nationality had its own room and got on with its own life. The Russians on the other hand occupied the hallway, the kitchen, and the bathrooms, they ran the place and got in everyone else's way, but had no room of their own" (cited in Hosking, 1997:452). As with the message of the Slavophiles and tsarist regime, Russia under the Soviet Union was again to act out a messianic vision and subordinate national interest to the supranational mission. Rowley (2000:34) writes, "the Soviet leaders did not break out of the boundaries imposed by the discourse of empire and merely recast the Russian empire's old universalist and religious categories of thought in the equally universalist language of international socialism."

As for Russians under the tsars, as bearers of a holy and universal idea, the justification of the Soviet state was never the well-being of its citizens but the victory of communism (Rowley, 2000:35). Solzhenitsyn claims that the interests of Russia were sacrificed to the interests of empire by both tsars and communists (Solzhenitsyn, 1995). In this fashion, it can be argued that Soviet society, like its predecessor before it, never developed a cohesive sense of nationhood, and like its predecessor eventually collapsed for this very reason:

what failed in 1991 was the primacy of Soviet identity over national identity (Rowley, 2000:35). The dissolution of the USSR into independent republics was a nationalist event in its essence: an empire dissolved as nations and states became congruent. Furthermore, the most notable -- indeed the seemingly crucial -- occurrence was the appearance, for the first time in history, of Russian nationalism (Rowley, 2000:35).

Scholars debate the definition of nation -- compare for example Benedict Anderson (1983),

¹ *Korenizatsia* means a "return to roots" or literally something like "rootization".

Ernest Gellner (1983), and Karl Deutsch (1953) -- and so in turn, despite claims that Yeltsin succeeded because he played the "nation card" (see Dunlop 1993) it does not mean that contemporary Russian nationalist discourse is now uncontested. As Rowley points out "the old universalist and religious vocabulary of tsars and Slavophiles has not yet disappeared. The notorious expressions of Russian imperialism by Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and Gennadii Ziuganov are most well known, but there is also a widespread literature on Russian national consciousness that stresses Russia's universal/religious mission to serve and protect other peoples" (Rowley, 2000:38). Nor is there a consensus among the population that the government is acting in the interests of the nation. Hosking (2000:461), concludes his article "Can Russia become a nation-state" with the words "if one or two of the leading Russian financial magnates could bring themselves to follow his [George Soros's] example and invest in this way in a peaceful civic Russian nationhood, they could do much to strengthen the stability needed for sustained economic growth and the development of civil society." The arrest and incarceration of Mikhail Khodorokovsky in 2003, however, is seen by some Russians, at least a number of my informants, as having occurred precisely because Khodorokovsky's charitable work² was undermining the effort of the government to maintain a corrupt status quo. Furthermore, Shlapentokh's work (2003) suggests that different segments of the population have experienced and/or interpreted radically different visions of "nation" since the collapse of the Soviet Union. In Russia after the USSR, says Shlapentokh, there was "no self-restraining civil society, and thus the slackening of the external control of the communist state not only resulted in the freedom for political activity and cultural/intellectual pursuits, but also in social meltdown" (Shlapentokh, 2003:157). For the nouveau riche in Moscow there was a "twisted form of nationalism that saw the new Russian sexuality as evidence of the country's strong international standing" (Shlapentokh, 2003:157), and perhaps even the provinces outside of Moscow, witnessing the rise of prostitution, criminality, and the trade in Russian wives, reworked the Slavophile idea that Russia was the world's salvation and/or the Soviet idea that communism was for the world, to suggest that now the West depends upon Russia's "superior genes" (Shlapentokh, 2003:139). According to Shlapentokh, in Russia under Yeltsin, "eroticism was spiritualised and culturalised in a sort of twisted way, as it was now believed that it ensured Russia's prominence in global affairs. In the nation's discourse, political and economic power were now replaced with sexual power, along with alleged Russian spirituality, as symbols of the country's still leading position in global affairs." (2003:139)

As this brief history of nationalism in Russia indicates, there has not been a clear trend or narrative of nationalism in Russia for several generations, and even the supposed arrival of nationalism with Yeltsin has come to signify a "twisted" national narrative, which according to Shlapentokh, speaks to the continued instability of Russian society. As this paper will suggest, varied interpretations of national sentiment paralleled with the readings of *toska* cited above (for example as a longing with nothing to long for or the feelings of no longer being in a place), as well as the statements of nostalgia put forth by various informants, reveal associations with the past that, in so far as we examine religious experience, speak to a desire to recover or discover objects, if not feelings, that will make the past, present, and future meaningful.

Out of Place

Vera Mikhailovna is the wife of an administrator at Samara State University. She is in her

² Khodorokovsky, a billionaire, founded the organization "Open Russia" which advocated for human rights and political freedoms in Russia until its assets were frozen by order from the General Prosecutor in March of 2006 (C.J. Chivers. "Yukos founder's charity is targeted", *International Herald Tribune*, 17 March, 2006)

early forties. Her son began university in the Autumn of 2005, her daughter is five years old and currently attends a private pre-school that focuses on foreign language training. Vera was my language teacher for a period of my doctoral field research (2004-2006). For the first nine months I was living in Samara I would travel to her flat every morning for two hours of Russian language training. Occasionally, when the conversation drifted some distance from grammar, Vera would reminisce about years past, and equally as often, would delight in seeming to speak factually for the whole of Russia on matters of “russkii mentalitet” and “russkaia kultura.” In particular she was concerned with post-Soviet society and the problems of capitalism.

I was rummaging through a book store with Vera one afternoon, and on the wall she spotted a hand drawn poster inviting people to join a philosophy discussion group. Vera took this sight as evidence that “Russians have already had enough of the capitalist experience and now want to seek something deeper.” The poster reminded her of a lecture on education that was going to take place in the coming days at the Samara Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet, and so in her excitement she suggested that instead of meeting for language lessons we attend the presentation. The talk was to be given by, in Vera’s words a “dinosaur of education” – that is to say, a senior official in the ministry of education that was responsible for reforming the education system after the Soviet Union. The dinosaur was going to speak in the lobby of the theatre. He drew, what to my mind, was a surprisingly large crowd for a summer morning – but then there was to be a “cultural show” after the talk. Prior to the presentation Vera introduced me to several colleagues she had gone to university with and had previously worked with in various teaching capacities. By the time the flood of distinguished guests had taken their seats we were relegated to a balcony overlooking the foyer. The speaker was introduced by a colleague over a faint and scratchy microphone. He [the senior official] began speaking, but the sound was so bad that people in the lobby started shouting because they could not hear. Several people shouted “concert first! concert first!” and so the man had to stop talking and allow everyone to shuffle into the theatre for the entertainment.

The concert, in addition to music, featured several dance companies in various national costumes, such as cossack and tartar. Between the dances actors read from war time diaries which, for example, detailed famous stories of small groups of soldiers repelling sizable portions of the Nazi tank attacks on St. Petersburg and Moscow. Vera leaned over to me and exclaimed that this whole thing was “kvasnoi patriotism.” Kvass is a traditional and popular summertime drink in Russia, made with fermented bread. During the summer months in Samara kvass stands appear on street corners and the vendors range from old women with glass jars dispensing their home brew to uniformed sales staff hawking professionally produced variants, often sold from large, brightly painted, tanks pulled behind cars with KBAC stencilled in bold letters. To call something kvasnoi, (an adjectival form of kvass) is to accuse it of extreme nationalism and at worse a sentimentality that toys with your emotions but lacks genuine sentiment. After the concert the dinosaur was suppose to give his presentation, but he claimed that he was so moved by the dancing and the readings that he did not want to talk about education. He spoke for thirty minutes about the strength of the Russian people and the future of Russia. I did not absorb much of the speech, as Vera was entertaining me and others by constantly pointing out places in his musings where phrases like “Our Great Nation” would have, several years prior, been “Our Great Party.” To her mind the man’s speech was a typical Soviet construction. As we headed away from the theatre she claimed that she had been disappointed by the occasion but that it was situations like these that kept alive a feeling of “*toska* for the Soviet Union” (тоска по Советскому Союзу). Perhaps the kvasnoi aspects of the event did toy with her emotions, or caused her to recall events that had had

an emotional impact in her past, for as we walked she began to make, with what seemed to be bitterness in her voice, sweeping statements about the destructive presence of the “capitalist shark” in Russia.

Later, in her flat, she suggested that *toska* for the USSR was felt because the Soviet era not only encompassed many happy times in her life, but also because of what Soviet idealism could have been: she said that the philosophy of the system had crystallized within it many centuries of humanity’s ideals. However, it has now become obvious, claimed Vera, that Russia, even during the Soviet Union, had always been an Asiatic type economy characterized by ongoing revolts, uprisings, riots, and mutinies. “In one thousand years of Russian history,” she said, “six hundred years have been war and only four hundred of peace...it was never important what the man at the top was called – tsar, chairman, president – it was a strong hand.” She pointed out that at the centre of these revolts – and in other areas of Russian life as well – are battles between talented people and the mediocrity (посредственность): “In Russia the talented often cannot realize their plans and may take to drink or narcotics. The conflict between these two people always exists and the mediocrity become aggressive when they see talent” -- this is why, suggested Vera, Pushkin was killed and perhaps also why Khodorokovsky was imprisoned. For Vera, there is no system in Russia, instead “everything depends on the person” -- in other words there is not an established method to balance power. She pointed out that president Yeltsin eventually became known as tsar Yeltsin, and of course previously the Soviet leaders were unrestricted in their fantastic plans. For example, Khrushchev, after visiting America and eating corn established a corn growing programme in Russia despite the completely inappropriate climate. In Vera's opinion attempts to recast Russia's historic “Asiatic mentality” into propaganda for various projects leads to absurdity and irrationality: “as the Soviet era progressed the message of ideals that was coming from the top began to spiral further and further away from reality...when the Soviet Union fell the capitalist glamour that replaced Soviet propaganda on television was also way out of touch with reality -- both were unattainable.”³

Whilst Vera maintains critical opinions of both the Soviet Union and contemporary Russia, she speaks highly of certain aspects of the Soviet Union. Like many of my informants she fondly recalls summers spent at Pioneer camps and subsequently, when she matriculated into the Komsomol, she remembers teaching at these camps. For Vera these experiences form her understanding of what she believed to be the promised “bright future” of communism. Occasionally when she spoke about her work at these camps she would produce from her dresser drawer a decades-old red neckerchief and put it on for the rest of the day. She also mentioned the

³ Elsewhere this idea that Asiatic authority produces absurdity manifests itself in jokes and news. I was discussing with one informant the news of the day -- a submarine trapped in a sort of fishing net at the bottom of the sea. After several days of in-action the Russian government took up an offer from the British Navy and allowed a wire-cutting mini-sub to descend and free the trapped submarine. My informant, a hospital anaesthesiologist, pointed out that reports from the submariners said they had remained trapped on the bottom until the mini-sub freed them, whereas military leaders at a press conference during the rescue operation had said, prior to the arrival of the British equipment, that the Russian Navy had raised the submarine first to a level 100 meters below sea-level, and then to 60 meters. When the sailors later questioned this account, a commander told them that “you simply did not know that the sub was being raised.” The anaesthesiologist, and the St. Petersburg Times, both drew upon jokes to explain the mentality of the commanders. The paper reported that the commanders were still operating with a Soviet version of authority and offered the following scenario: “a private asks his lieutenant if crocodiles can fly. The lieutenant says ‘of course not crocodiles walk on land.’ The private replies, ‘but our commander says they can.’ The lieutenant answers, “well ok, they can fly, but they just fly close to the ground.” The anaesthesiologist related the submarine incident to a different joke -- from shortly after the first moon landing: “A state official addresses a group of cosmonauts and says, ‘the Americans have landed on the moon. We shall have to out do them -- you will be landing on the Sun!’ The cosmonauts were shocked, ‘but we will be burned to death.’ The official replies, ‘so you think the communist party is that stupid! Of course you will be landing at night.”

joy she took in spending the first month of each university year harvesting potatoes. On the farm Vera says they [the students] struggled to live without hot water, shared nine or ten to a room, and yet took pleasure in watching the piles of potatoes they harvested grow from day to day. In this way she characterizes suffering (historically the term suffering was used by peasant farmers to denote the short but, physically intense periods of cultivation between the long winter months) as a key element of Russian life, given the long history of war, the brutality of winter, the challenges set forth by Marx and Lenin, and so forth. To her mind, suffering during the Soviet Union was systemic, and despite the corruption and problems, it was endured for society as a whole. In today's Russia, suggests Vera, suffering is a pointless normality -- but gains the sufferer very little. Today's Russians, says Vera, do not see the point of working in the system (or lack of system) that now exists. She says that apart from oligarchs, oil traders, and criminals, people in Russia are waiting for the next big thing to happen -- they are lazy but when the time or opportunity comes they will work intensely, i.e., they will suffer for something. She fears that in the future people will look back on her generation and realize no contribution was made to society. She disagrees with the claims of Yeltsin after the end of the Soviet Union -- which suggested that Russia was never the spirit of an empire or the drivers of the Soviet Union, but rather had always been a nation consumed and trapped by alien empires. Instead, Vera points to the work of V.C. Solov'yov who declares that the Russian idea denied its national limits and intended an organic connection of Russian people with different peoples, their cultural -- historical unity or "all unity" (Solov'yov, 1992). She also looks toward the idea of Chekov's -- that the most important thing in the world was the communality of mankind. In this sense, Vera continues to long, as Shlapentokh, (1999) has suggested of many Russians, for the reappearance of a community social sphere.

Vera claims that she contemplated religion intensely after the end of the Soviet Union. She says that for religious converts, their bright future is not within society, but is to be found in heaven. On rare occasions during my fieldwork, Vera took her daughter to an Orthodox Church and lit candles. She says that in her case the candles were not lit to ask for the help of saints as other people might do, but rather to remember dead relatives. This practice, she says, feels better to her than attending a service or praying, because even if heaven cannot be explained, or may not even exist, we are assured an aspect of immortality as our ideas, and our maintenance or augmentation of the world around, no matter how small, influences the future. She claimed that after visiting many other churches, she found that the sentiment of the Orthodox Church best reflected her understanding of spirituality: In American churches, claims Vera, the joy of Christ is depicted -- his miracles and the order he instituted through his doctrine, the "Kingdom Vision" that missionaries talk about. She believes that, for Americans, God is order. Whereas, in the Russian church, she said, Christ is known for his suffering -- he was abused by people but still pursued his idea, and thus his resolve significantly affected the world.

Toska, as a description of a feeling or range of possible feelings, is, like other feelings "bound to and modulated by social knowledge" (Grafman, 2000). For Vera, her social knowledge spans 40 plus years, motherhood, the collapse of the Soviet Union, and so forth. To the extent that the world she longs for, the bright future she briefly encountered in her youth, is no longer a possibility, she may be left feeling that her impact upon the world has been lost -- particularly as she cites a fear that her generation made no impact. To this end her *toska* is the feeling of being out of place and of nostalgia for her visions of the past. For younger informants, who shall be introduced below, the *toska* they feel is modulated by different social knowledge and individual experience and in this regard emphasizes different aspects of the feeling of *toska*.

Melancholy

For Alisa, and other converts to Mormonism (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), melancholic aspects of *toska* are cited in their conversion processes. Julia Kristeva suggests that all imagination is melancholy (cited in Midttun, 2006:168). In Kristeva's model discontent with ones current world is what nurtures imagination -- the melancholic artist, for example, creates a new world to replace the one he is dissatisfied with. In the same vein, Ruti (2005) writes that "melancholy prepares the ground for inspiration." In Alisa's case, Alisa alludes to a past of loneliness and melancholia before her encounter with Mormonism, and she suggests that Mormon missionaries, and later her understanding of Mormon doctrine, inspired her to reinterpret one of her dreams as religious evidence -- thus leading her to baptism. Perhaps, though not necessarily, as a result of her baptism and interest in the Church, she offers descriptions of Russian culture, via the music that she writes and the discussions we have had, that highlight the effects of what she has called a "society without soul". Alisa's story, whilst suggesting that melancholy may foster imagination or prepare the ground for inspiration, points to the process that connects these two concepts of melancholia and inspiration within a historical narrative.

Alisa was baptised into the Mormon church at the start of my fieldwork in Samara. She is 20 years old and currently studies German at a language academy. Her father died when she was 12. Her 32 year old brother lives at home and is unemployed. He says that he does not like Mormons or Americans and often makes a point of filling the kitchen with cigarette smoke whenever Alisa invites missionaries to the flat. He considers himself a patriot and claims that Americans harmed the Russian way of life – making it more difficult for Russians to live. He says that things were fine in the 1950s and 60s. Alisa's mother is 54 years old and comments positively about the visits from missionaries – for she states that they are always friendly towards her. She says that she may accompany Alisa to the LDS (Latter-day Saint) meetinghouse some Sunday in the future, but has no plans to read the book of Mormon.

Alisa is fond of, what she terms, goth culture. Friends of hers formed a goth band approximately a year before she joined the church. Alisa remains the singer -- though reports that their meetings are increasingly intermittent since she became Mormon. Nevertheless, according to Alisa, their music has evolved into deathmetal as none of them had a clear understanding of goth music at the time they formed. Additionally, metal has proven easier to both play and sing, but as she admits, the lyrics are terribly difficult to understand. She says the songs could be expressions of *toska* but she prefers to use the phrases: *dukhovnoe stradanie* (духовное страдание, spiritual suffering) and *dukhovnow muchenie* (духовное мучение spiritual torment/anguish). Her music, she claims, reflects the problems she, and other young people, face in Russia. In particular she is concerned with the lack of spirituality, or more particularly the inability of people to hear the voice of the Holy Spirit, and what she interprets to be its effect on society. Since joining the Mormon Church she has stopped drinking and smoking – a change she attributes to her belief in the prophecy of Joseph Smith. She says that without a spiritual system in place young people have little guidance and many temptations in today's Russia. She points to the case of a girl from her building who was found dead: The police determined it was a murder and questioned the drug addicts who frequently sleep in the stairwells. The drug addicts claimed that they could not be responsible because they had no memory of the incident. Subsequently the police, according to Alisa, were too apathetic to initiate a proper investigation, let alone bother arresting the addicts for drug abuse. Alisa believes the behaviour of the police, like that of the drug addicts is indicative of a "society without soul" (*obshchestvo bez dushi*, общество без души).

Alisa says that many Russian people try to copy Europeans or Americans and this is not

good because it is not Russian, but at the same time these people think that Russia and Russian culture is better than other cultures and countries. She wonders, in this case, what such people think Russian culture is meant to consist of and states that she is not one of the people that privilege Russian culture, for she poses the question "how can one culture be better than another?" However, she also says that in the future she would like to live in Germany. According to her it is acceptable for her to prefer Germany over Russia because her ancestors were German. Alisa believes that the Russian nation ought to turn to Russian culture rather than try to import a different culture. Though, regarding her conversion to an "American church," she says that Mormonism is not American, it is universal, unlike, for example, the Russian, Ukrainian, or Anglican churches -- which are all national.

Alisa says that before joining the church she rarely went out to meet friends -- instead she spent the evenings speaking German to herself before the mirror in her bedroom. She says that for a period of many months she would do nothing apart from attend her language course and read. She claims that she had never felt closer to death than she did during that period, and that the feeling of *toska* became much greater than she expected (Тоска, ожидала гораздо большего). There was another girl on her course who Alisa says was also melancholic. They would occasionally meet one another. One evening the girl invited Alisa to a concert. This was to be her first contact with the Mormon Church. Neither of them knew that it was a Church function, and Alisa cannot actually recall how her friend came to learn of the concert. Alisa remembers being shocked by the "Mormon smile." As she puts it: "a young person, it was Elder Robertson, approached me and stuck his hand out. I took it and we started talking. He asked many questions and his companion listened because he did not speak Russian yet. I thought this behaviour strange." She explains that she was happy to receive a copy of the book of Mormon -- and agreed to meet the missionaries in a week's time. She began reading the book after returning home that night and quickly learned that a vision she had had some months ago, during her period of depression, fit a description of events documented in one of the book's first passages. She said:

So in the time of great troubles in my life I had been praying one night, I hoped God would answer me -- and he did! I saw a dream, a strange one, about a ship. There were people who believed in God and who didn't...they quarrelled and a storm began, some of them started praying while the others were in panic and did nothing, then the face of Jesus Christ appeared in the sky, he looked down and there was calmness and love in his face, but nobody among the people could see him, it was only for me, like God -- always with us, and then the storm was over... I later read the same story in first Nephi.

She told the missionaries about this dream during their first meeting and they testified to her that it was a promise from Heavenly Father that the book of Mormon was true. They asked her, only the following week, if she would consider baptism. She said that she ought to finish reading the book first. One of the missionaries replied, "do you need to eat the whole cake to know that it is good?"

Three months after attending the concert she was baptized. She recalls this time, between her introduction to the church and her baptism, as a period of excitement, making new friends, and wonder. The new interpretation that the missionaries had offered for her dream inspired her to investigate Mormonism. To this end her dissatisfaction with life, i.e., her *toska* -- or perhaps ultimately the feeling of wonder, and possibly happiness that replaced *toska* -- prepared the "ground for inspiration." She began attending church activities, such as English language classes, family

home evening⁴, and scripture study. She says that the missionaries introduced her to two other members that attended her language academy and these two kindly invited her to travel with them on the tram to and from the academy. She now counts these two women among her friends. Alisa continues to invite missionaries over to her flat as often as possible. During my time in Samara she frequently rang me up and exclaimed that she had a great idea -- to arrange discussion meetings for myself and some missionaries at her flat⁵ -- this usually entailed her spending a significant amount of time phoning missionaries and rearranging her schedule so as to make it possible for all of us to meet. She would enlist the help of her mother to prepare food for the occasion. The missionaries that initially worked with her say that they appreciate her enthusiasm, but are worried that she is too dependant on them socially. They claim that, not infrequently, an apparently serious investigator (i.e., potential convert) or member will stop attending church once the missionaries they are familiar with are transferred to a different location; missionaries speculate that because they are friendly and willing to talk to anyone, it is depressed and lonely people that they end up spending the most time with.⁶ Alisa readily admits that she was lonely and melancholic before joining the Church. Despite her eagerness to have missionaries around, she insists that these feelings were due to spiritual and not social deprivation. It remains to be seen whether she continues in the church once the visits from missionaries stop.

Longing

Kiril is in his twenties and he is a recent university graduate. He has explored many churches in Samara, yet within these churches he seems to long for an idealized social group which he consistently fails to find. At the start of my study he was beginning a new job – designing and executing inter-bank loans for Priority Bank in Samara. His job at the bank paid the equivalent of 200 dollars a month for the first two months, a probationary period, then increased to 400 dollars a month. By the time I left the field, he had taken up a position with an advertising and marketing firm in Moscow. When Kiril was a student at university he spent one summer in America, working

⁴ Family Home Evening (FHE) was started in 1915 by the president of the Church and his counsellors. They asked parents to set aside one night each week to spend with their children and to use this time to pray, sing, teach each other the gospel, and conduct activities together. In 1970 the president and his counsellors designated Monday night as Family Night, and thus the Church continues to keep Monday nights free of Church activities. Several Church publications, newsletters, and magazines, offer ideas for family night activities and study.

An LDS website says:

"Family home evening is a special time set aside each week that brings family members together and strengthens their love for each other, helps them draw closer to Heavenly Father, and encourages them to live righteously...

Latter-day prophets continue to urge Church members to give highest priority to family home evening. They have promised that our dedication to this program will help protect our families against the evils of our time and will bring us abundant joy now and throughout the eternities...

Although family home evening should begin and end with prayer, it is not intended to be a formal class. In a statement regarding family home evening in 1915, the First Presidency said that "formality and stiffness should be studiously avoided, and all the family should participate in the exercises."

In Samara, Family Home Evening was organized by an elderly American couple. Their flat had enough space to host the 15-20 members, generally young people, that participated every Monday evening. FHE in this context was, according to the multitude of missionaries that also attended, "a bit different" than what normally happens in their Mormon households in the US: a dinner, maybe a visiting family, or local missionary, a group lesson or game related to the scripture, then dessert and some games. FHE in Samara followed more-or-less this pattern (without dinner), the difference was in attitudes and numbers. The missionaries frequently commented that the lessons they were trying to teach during FHE were often ruined by a lack of reverence on the part of some members.

⁵ Such activity falls under the church's "member missionary" programme.

⁶ They also generally meet with what they call "people in crisis."

at a restaurant in the city of Philadelphia as part of a work-travel scheme with other Russian university students.

Kiril feels that people in Russia are much better off now than ten years ago. He points to the fact that currently you can observe many people purchasing computers and digital cameras. He says that although many of these purchases are made on micro-credit, or small loan plans, it is still a healthy signal, for normally Russian people are scared of credit. To see them using credit indicates that they have work or other means. He also states that his parents had recently taken a loan so that they could buy him a laptop computer – though now he looks forward to repaying his parents and no longer having to ask them for money. When Kiril returns to his family's village he often has debates with his grandfather – who is a communist. Kiril expends much energy trying to convince his grandfather that the Soviet Union had deceived him and that everything his grandfather earned, in monetary terms, is now gone. Kiril says that, in the end, the Soviet Union failed to deliver on the future. Kiril's grandfather, who never makes a counter argument, seems amused by his grandson.

In other contexts, however, Kiril feels disappointed over the loss of the Soviet Union – he says that he was disappointed when the Pioneer programme was cancelled in 1990 because he never really got the chance to be involved. He was, however, involved in the Oktiabriata, the organization for children aged seven to nine, and still keeps his pin with a portrait of a young Lenin on it. Kiril laments the current lack of youth organizations. He says that the Pioneers and the Komsomol were helpful for young people. If for example, someone had started drinking then that person could be invited to a meeting where the others would talk to him about the problem and that person would feel shame. Kiril thinks that if youth are involved in such organizations then they will be more polite than they are now. Furthermore, Kiril wishes that he could have a group of friends who would always do things together – instead of his current situation in which he only meets individual friends. He looks back to his time as a student, when he was involved with the religious organization New Life (the local name of a branch of Campus Crusade for Christ), as an example of a friendly group. He says that he was very comfortable with the New Life group, but since graduating from university he has begun to feel out of place associating with students.

Kiril says he feels sad that the Soviet Union lost and that “our system” failed. He claims that before traveling to America he did not care much for American ideals but whilst in Philadelphia and later in parts of Colorado, he could see that American young people were able to influence politics – whereas in Russia people are scared of government. He thinks that youth and others should be more vocal about matters affecting their lives. If there were an organization like the Komsomol, says Kiril, then government could consult with it and receive the ideas of youth. However, he remains sceptical of the youth group “Nashi” (Ours) – which some people compare to the historic Komsomol. Kiril believes Nashi to be a vehicle created by Putin's Kremlin that functions similar to the Hitler Youth, and points out that one of its aims is to suppress the potential for a “colour revolution” happening in Russia – such as the orange revolution in Ukraine or the rose revolution in Georgia. At the same time, however, that Kiril criticizes Putin's tactics related to the formation of Nashi, he maintains that Putin was right to say that Russian people are not yet ready for democracy. Kiril also praises Putin for the arrest of oligarchs because it showed people that Putin could not be bought. Kiril claims that the presence of the Soviet Union provided a balance to global power. He does not like current US policy regarding construction of a missile shield. Without a missile shield, says Kiril, the balance of power could remain stable, but if the missile shield proves effective then America has more power, and currently Russia, unlike during the Soviet period, will not be able to finance the restoration of the balance.

Kiril's statements about youth – lack of suitable youth organizations, lack of a group of friends, often intermingle with his statements about religion. Kiril claims that he had been interested in spirituality for several years, but that for a long time there were no programmes for young people to learn about religion. This changed once he encountered Joseph, a missionary from New Life on the Samara university campus. Joseph was a “stinter,” that is to say a seasonal, usually summertime, volunteer, who helps the full-time volunteers with their work. At the time Kiril and Joseph met, Kiril was a student at Samara State University and Joseph was a cadet at the US Air Force Academy. Joseph's mother is Russian, and so according to Kiril, although Joseph had never before been to Russia he already spoke the language. Kiril says that over the course of the summer he had a great time with Joseph and with the group. They were polite, kind, and interested in spirituality. When Kiril was in the US the following summer he traveled to the Air Force academy in Colorado Springs and stayed with Joseph. Kiril reports that during the Colorado visit Joseph gave up his bed and slept on the floor, “because he has been to Russia” – implying Joseph understands the extent of Russian hospitality. Kiril holds that it was from Joseph and other American Christians that he learned how to live according to the Bible – yet he says that certain aspects of his Russian character are difficult to overcome and so he remains a sinner.⁷

On one occasion Kiril and I were drinking on the river embankment in a lively beer tent. A young woman approached – an acquaintance of Kiril's – she was with two other women who Kiril also knew, so they joined us for a while. Kiril, reminisced with these people about their experiences together at university. After they departed, Kiril said that he had had sex with the young woman whilst on a student retreat, and that it was all the more sinful because during intercourse he was also lusting for her friend (who I had also just been introduced to) who lay asleep next to them. He said that such encounters are part of the difficulty he faces in Russia, for, as he suggests, he is influenced by contemporary Russian behaviour. He claims that Russian men do not respect women in the way that they did during the Soviet Union and currently do in American churches. To emphasize his claim about Soviet respect for women, Kiril took me from the beer tent and we walked along the embankment to a Soviet statue of a woman seated on a rock. In one hand she is holding swim fins; the other hand is pulling her diving mask up onto her forehead. Kiril says that she was made to look strong, but not attractive because the Soviet Union did not promote eroticism whereas now Russia is obsessed with female beauty and sex because there is no longer anything else for which to strive. Kiril believes that Christianity could solve this problem, yet thinks that the Orthodox Church is not as attractive to young people as are more youth focused organizations like New Life (Campus Crusade for Christ).

Kiril says that after the summer during which he met Joseph and became acquainted with New Life he would occasionally attend the weekly bible study meetings held by New Life during the academic year, additionally he would correspond with the New Life stinters who had returned to America. They urged him to attend a church, which he says was difficult for him to do in Samara. He briefly attended a Baptist church because that is where the full time New Life missionaries always go for Sunday worship. However, Kiril claims that because he is a smoker and

⁷ Joel Robbins (2004) claims that evangelical developments can produce instances of conflicted selves as sinners as a result of transformation of local culture. However, as Wanner (2007:13) points out, many post-Soviets already consider themselves Christian, though they may not have expressed this identity in the same way as the arriving missionaries. To this end one will have difficulty attempting to support Robbins' position (not because Robbins' position is necessarily wrong), but because Russians, Soviets, and post-Soviets, may have already utilized conceptions of sin and morality which, analytically speaking, would not be possible to separate from the conceptual influence of western missionaries. Wanner suggests that such an already-present-motif may be why post-Soviets (in her case Ukrainians) are so willing to convert (whereas many other studies focus on resistance to Christianity among colonized people).

drinks occasionally the pastor did not like him and would not let him join the church social groups. On other occasions Kiril attended an Orthodox church, a Catholic church, a Lutheran church, and the Mennonite Church of Christ (Holdeman), yet always came away disappointed. Kiril says he feels *toska* when he thinks about the summer he was introduced to New Life -- for in his memory it seems a utopia: the members were friendly toward one another and because they lived according to the Bible they were well behaved and polite. When he moved to Moscow I communicated with him by email and telephone. He says that there are a larger variety of Christian social organizations to investigate, but as of yet has not found the one to satisfy his longing to experience the feelings he did during his time with New Life.

Conclusion

All three subjects speak about aspects of contemporary Russia that they find dissatisfying. Kiril and Vera both look to idealized conditions in the past, for potential solutions to their *toska*. Kiril attempts to search out organizations that match his ideal experience, whereas Vera does not envisage, or at least vocalize, a specific solution, but instead takes some pleasure in recalling the positive aspects of her past. Alisa's melancholy was apparently resolved with her membership in the Mormon Church, and thus she did not make known whether or not she harbours or previously held any other imaginative solutions to her condition. These three experiences of *toska* are unified in the sense that they each involve speculation about not only the relation of the self to ideas of spirituality or divinity, but also to the place of the self within the nation.

Feelings, or in Laming's (2000:209) terms the motivation that is produced by the experience of emotion, transform the self. Kristeva (cited in Midttun, 2006) has suggested that melancholy and perhaps other negative emotional states produce, or inspire, imagination (could we then argue that the possible corollary, to be happy, means to desire to continue in your current state?).⁸ But, because *toska* encompasses within it such a range of feelings when considered across a range of individuals, it is likely that for Russians who use the term there will always be an aspect of ambiguity when discussing its possible purpose. Nevertheless, as demonstrated in this paper, informants occasionally link the feeling of *toska* with particular sentiments for the past, or certain objects, and this implies an act of assessment which needs knowledge of whether something is significant and/or meaningful. This act of assessment is arguably affected by the process of enculturation – as Mogi argues: “even the simple act of seeing something becomes significant only when it is integrated into the context and syntax of the higher order cognitive process, which (along with other things) support our sense of morality” (Mogi, 2000:210). In this sense culture for the individual, which is a lifelong process of enculturation, i.e., of continuous change, impinges on decision-making and thus indicates that one's culture-as-assessment both contributes to the production of feeling and receives the influence of feeling.

Catherine Wanner (2007:131) writes: “many individuals in the former Soviet Union have argued that the ideological vacuum left in the wake of the collapse of communist ideology as a viable worldview and a source of individual and collective meaning was simply replaced with a religious-based orientation to self and society.” She points out that after the Soviet Union fell apart, some people “certainly did...embrace religion as an anti-Soviet alternative, a new moral compass

⁸ Her position is not without interdisciplinary support, for as the cognitive scientists Moore and Oaksford (1999) suggest, people may learn certain things about their world more rapidly when in a negative mood -- or at the very least “emotion may modulate the rate at which a cognitive skill is learnt” (1999:411). However, in the Moore and Oaksford study we must consider that mood was reportedly “induced” by “affectively valenced music and by requesting participants to enter the required mood state.” We might wonder if participants' interpretations of particular mood states vary according to other uncontrolled factors (i.e., an individual's lifetime of enculturation).

to guide their ideas and behaviour amid social confusion and economic collapse" (2007:131). Yet, as she puts it, this is only part of the story. Likewise, in my case, informant use of the concept of *toska*, as well as their other feelings toward the past and future, does not suggest religion has been embraced as an anti-Soviet alternative, but rather that religious experiences are interpreted by individuals in a variety of ways; specifically related to the examples present in this paper, one of those ways is by establishing some continuity with the past and in fact, what might be interpreted as a longing for some aspects of the Soviet past to reappear in the present.

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