
POSTMODERN RHIZOME AND MODELS OF RELIGIOUS IDENTITY

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Abstract

The article analyses the problem of the formation of religious identity in modern youth under the influence of such postmodern cultural phenomena as rhizome and transgression. The authors investigate the modern religious virtual space in the field of which new religious formations are being developed and study the attitude of students to similar projects. The purpose of this article is to identify the degree and nature of the influence of the postmodern worldview on the religious identity of young Russians. For this, the features of the post-modern religious worldview are analysed and the level of dependence of the religious worldview of youth on the Internet space is revealed. The main markers of the influence of the postmodern worldview on the religiosity of youth including, first of all, acts of religious transgression are proposed. Basic sociological research methods were used as the main research methodology. The study revealed a number of reasons that influence the transformation of value orientations of young people. It was also found that a religious dialogue with the older generation and representatives of the Church is replaced with alternative models of gaining religious experience.

Keywords: postmodernism, rhizome, transgression, Russian, youth

1. Introduction

The state of postmodernism marks a change in the cultural paradigms of the Modernist era. It has characteristic values and supporting constructs, a completely new system of social, legal and educational coordinates involving a huge number of possible assumptions. The emergence of postmodernist tendencies in culture is associated with the project of reconsideration of the classical worldview that needs serious correction while taking into account today's realities. The post-modern picture of the world is moving away from the notion of progress and linear perspective and is replete with possibilities and the absence of a definite pre-set. Binary logic that still dominates in Computer

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science, structuralism, Linguistics and in other fields has given way to multiplicity – the rhizome. There is no opposition between good and evil in the rhizome projection. The best and the worst merge together there [1].

Besides the rhizome, the postmodern worldview includes a series of special terms characterizing its main parameters, a ‘fold’ [2-4], hypertext [5], intertextuality [6], deconstruction [7] and transgression [5] aimed at destroying the classical hierarchical structures of the culture space.

The space of the sacred, or rather its desacralization, is also included to some extent in the postmodern worldview. Researchers credit the postmodern transition from traditional forms of religion [8, 9] to a new form of religiosity that goes beyond traditional norms. Theologians characterize them as pseudo-religion or ‘instead-of-religion’ phenomena [10]. It is not God who is in the centre of the religious post-modern worldview, but a human who doubts everything including the stationarity of the reality.

Postmodern ‘reality’ goes beyond the European frameworks and becomes ‘transnational’ in nature. The influence of postmodern ideas is also felt in one way or another in Russia not only among Generation X who is more or less aware of the works of M. Foucault, G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, etc., but also among young people. Since the present generation explores the world through a digital format, postmodern ideas come to them mainly through the Internet. This has a certain impact on the formation of the religious identity of youth.

The purpose of this article is to identify the degree and nature of the postmodern worldview influence on the religious identity of young Russians. To achieve this, the following tasks were performed in the article:

- revealing the features of the postmodern religious worldview,
- analysing the dependence of the youth’s religious worldview on the Internet,
- proposing the main markers of the influence of the postmodern worldview on the youth’s religiosity.

The study consists of a theoretical and a practical part.

The main hypothesis of this study comprises syncretism, multiplicity, as well as instability of the postmodern worldview including religious sphere. It makes the present generation of Russian youth more labile and receptive to new religious forms and transgressive trends in this field.

2. Theoretical foundations of the study - basic characteristics of the postmodern religious worldview

Postmodernism has long gone beyond the philosophical or artistic direction. It formed the basis of a new worldview and created its basic characteristics.

According to R. Inglehart, postmodernism as a worldview entails profound and massive changes in economic and political life, and they in turn transform social, as well as religious and family norms. The researcher calls the postmodern value a syndrome that excludes objective truth and religion in their

traditional meaning [8]. God has never been a central figure of postmodernism. Nevertheless, a new understanding of religiosity arises within its framework.

Destroying the linear worldview, the rhizome set an order of a higher level of complexity in the space of dynamic chaos [11, 12]. There is no deeper meaning in the space of rhizome. There is no integrity and support, no absolute authority. There is neither subject nor object there [5]. There is only multiplicity in this space. The rhizome “may be torn and broken in some place at any time. It can change its direction...” [1, p. 10].

The rhizome as a principle of plural choice entails the transgression as a possibility of ‘going beyond’. The transgression phenomenon is ‘the edge of the possible’, ‘burning experience’ which ‘does not attach importance to external boundaries’. It is a transition, overcoming borders, going beyond the conventions of socio-cultural norms and moral prohibitions [13]. It is a “gesture that faces the limit” [5, p. 46]. M. Blanchot calls this phenomenon an ‘experience-limit’. He describes the horizons that open during the process of transgression as opportunities “presented after the realization of all possibilities that overturn the previous ones and quietly eliminate them” [14, p. 579]. It involves a transition that violates or erases a border [5]. Thus, the transgression opens the boundaries that were previously considered to be inextricable and forbidden. This term also refers to the experience of this transition. These two postmodern categories on which the new worldview is based are fundamental for understanding the processes we are studying.

The postmodern rhizome and transgression weaken traditional norms changing gradually their meaning, experimenting, as well as introducing new gender roles and sexual morals. However, the new performs the same function as traditional religion and morality. It forms a sense of safety and security. The same aspects of religion still exist there: faith, worship, piety, preaching, and ministry. However, they are meant for some abstract subject.

Vector changing becomes a distinctive feature of this post-religion [10, p. 79]. It changes not towards something spiritual (transcendental), but it is focused on the fact that believers transcend themselves, transcend their feelings and preferences. “The pointer replaces the pointed one as a center of orientation and value.” [15]

In the post-modern worldview, the rhizome and transgression determine its multiplicity, fragility, figuration, as well as confirm the expansion of the boundaries of possibilities in the formation of one's own worldview bordering on permissiveness. The rhizome perception of the world makes the splitting of a person into sacral and profane spheres natural. It leads him/her out of the space of traditional integrality.

This entails the disappearance of the hierarchy primarily with respect to oneself. ‘Inspiring momentary’ becomes a defining moment subordinating all the activities of the individual.

This process can be characterized by a paraphrased statement attributed to Dostoevsky: “If there is no God, then everything is permitted”. J.P. Sartre turns this statement into the original principle of existentialism [16]. The postmodern

interpretation could be as follows: ‘Since everything is permitted, there is no God’, or he has the right to be anything he wants. Paying closer attention, religion from the peripheral and almost ‘spavined’ phenomenon for the post-modern worldview can be seen as a more visual aid for deconstruction and dehumanization of traditional images and guides.

The postmodern religious worldview shows the dominance of bricolage which is common to pseudo-religions. The East coexists with the West, mysticism is mixed with ritualism and the formation of new canons. Enlightenment from a mystical Christian deed and obedience becomes the achievable result of a series of exercises or techniques. The simplification of the approach to the worldview foundations of traditional religions leads to the gradual transformation of religion into one of the worldview systems the only task of which will be providing ‘spiritual services’ to the consumer [17].

The worldview is replaced by mental outlook. Postmodernism deifies the sphere of feelings. However, it is not the basis, it is just a “cloud of preferences” [18]. In this case, post-religion differs from other post-modern phenomena only in the sphere of religious feelings. The rest of the characteristics completely coincide: it is “the game enthusiasm for an activity as self-worth, the lack of external undeniable instances” [19].

Playing with external becomes a substitute for traditional spiritual life, and post-religion turns into a union of people according to their interests. Moreover, the postmodern multiplicity offers to choose form religions including the creation of one’s own direction. The postmodern culture is built on visualization, that is why there is a declining trust in a word and an increasing trust in images, gestures, actions. It explains the decline in interest in church as an official organization, and because of that all sorts of ‘spiritual’ movements (from Qigong and trans-surfing to various types of yoga) continue to thrive. It should be remembered that the postmodern stage of the information society is not only an era of cults, but also an era of equal accessibility of information, whether it is about Cistercian abbeys or space travels. That is why today people are looking for solace or exciting sensations in alternative post-religions even more actively than before. They adjoin New Age communities, participate in neo-pagan rituals, experiment with Wiccan ceremonies, or join the Family or the Heaven’s Gate cults. The younger generation is more open to changes and transformations. Joining transgressive processes and being under the influence of the rhizome structure of social networks, it begins to choose and then change religion or tries to create its own one with a new worldview.

3. Methodology

To confirm the hypothesis, the authors of the article conducted a comprehensive sociological study that includes two methods of collecting primary sociological information.

3.1. Survey no. 1 - obtaining the survey data via distributing a questionnaire (quantitative method)

The sampling size was 350 students of Astrakhan State University (ASU) who live in Astrakhan and Astrakhan region. 25% of them are the first-year bachelor students, 25% are the fourth-year bachelor students and 50% are master students. 39.1% are boys and 60.9% are girls. We used quota and purposive sampling by gender, year of study and faculties. Primary sociological information was obtained via distributing a questionnaire. Sampling error is 3%. The toolkit and the research matrix were developed by the authors of the study. Processing and analysis of the obtained data were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics 21 package. While analysing the obtained data, the level of religiosity and the involvement of students in the virtual space were determined.

3.2. Survey no. 2 - obtaining the survey data via electronic questionnaire (quantitative method)

The sampling size was 531 students of Russian universities (Astrakhan, Rostov and Volgograd regions, republics of Dagestan, Ingushetia, Chechnya, Kalmykia). 31.7% of them are boys, 68.3% are girls. We used quota sampling based on the method of selecting typical representatives. Primary sociological information was obtained via distributing electronic questionnaires on the Google Forms platform. The toolkit and the research matrix were developed by the authors of the study. Processing and analysis of the obtained data were carried out using the IBM SPSS Statistics 21 package. While analysing the obtained data, the following components were determined: the level of religiosity of students, the structure of the student population of the region, the level of students' awareness of the facts of religious transgression from one religion system to another.

3.3. Focus group interview (qualitative method)

There were two focus groups counting 8 people each during a comprehensive study. The group discussion lasted 90 minutes. The focus group interview guide was developed by the authors of the study. The first group included the representatives of those students who consider themselves to be of the same ethnicity. The second focus group consisted of the representatives of different ethnic groups. A gender balance was maintained in each focus group: the number of girls and boys was equal. The recruitment of interview participants took place according to the established objectives of the study based on spontaneous selection. After conducting an express questionnaire, the candidate was invited to participate in a focus group interview. The focus group interview included answers to the moderator's questions and open discussions, as well as answers to closed questions (question cards) issued by the moderator. The focus group interviews made it possible to determine the level of awareness

on the presence of virtual religious entities in the Russian-speaking segment of the Internet, as well as to determine the students' attitude to these new formations.

4. Results

The researchers set the following tasks:

1. To determine the level of religiosity among students in the South of Russia and in Astrakhan region,
2. To analyse the frequency of using the Internet resources by respondents as sources of information on religious topics,
3. To study the level of awareness of the facts of religious transgression among the students of Astrakhan region and Caspian region countries.

The main research segment in the first and second cases is full-time students in the age range from 17 to 23 years old. Comparative results of two surveys by age groups are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age of survey respondents.

Question	Survey no. 1 (350 people)		Survey no. 2 (531 people)	
	Age	Answer (%)	Age	Answer (%)
How old are you?	16-18	49.4	younger than 17	7.2
	19-21	46.0	17-22	80.8
	22-24	3.4	23-26	9.6
	older than 24	1.2	27 and older	2.4

As it can be seen from the above data, in the first case, 95.4% of all respondents are in the 16–21 age range. In the second study, the number of respondents aged 17 (including those under the age requirement) to 22 are 88% of the total number of students participated in the survey. The data show that the discrepancies between the indicators are within the limits of the permissible errors, which enables us to tell that the results are representative and reflect the real situation.

It was required to study the level of religiosity among students within the first task. Thus, it was possible to find out that 71.7% of respondents adhere to any religion, and only 29.7% are confident in their faith. At the same time, 41.8 respondents expressed uncertainty. Nevertheless, 24.9% of them are closer to a positive answer. It is interesting that 28.9% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I believe in God', another 7.7% are very close to this point. In this case, the answers to the question related to the respondents' religion or worldview are shown in Table 2.

According to the respondents' point of view, it should be noted that digital space is highly filled with religious online projects. This conclusion was based on the question 'Have you ever come across any resources on the Internet (social networks, blogs, videos, specialized websites, etc.) with a strongly pronounced

religious focus?’ 69.1% of respondents answered positively. On the one hand, based on the results in Table 3, we cannot say that resources like that cause a great stir among young people.

Table 2. Religion practiced.

Question	Choice	Number	Answer (%)
What religion (or worldview) do you adhere to?	Christianity	1	40.3
	Islam	2	23.4
	Buddhism	3	2.0
	Judaism	4	0.9
	Atheism	5	14.3
	Other religion	6	5.1
	Difficult to answer	7	14.0

Table 3. Amount of time spent on religious resources (in percentage).

Question	Choice (%)	Number	Answer (%)
How much time (percentage of total time) do you spend on religious resources on the Internet?	0 (do not use such resources)	1	53.7
	1-25	2	33.4
	25-50	3	6.9
	50-75	4	4.9
	75-100	5	1.1

On the other hand, 30.3% of respondents said that they had experience of watching videos with a pronounced religious focus on a popular video hosting service youtube.com (streaming video service). VKontakte (15.7% of users) and Instagram (7.7% of users) were chosen as the most popular social networks when answering the question: ‘Do you have any experience in communicating in groups of social networks with pronounced religious focus?’.

All of the above results were obtained from the analysis of the responses in the first study. To complete the picture, it is necessary to bring a number of data from the second study.

Notably, 14.3% of respondents said that they knew some information on religions that were formed and function on the Internet. In numerical terms, there were 76 people out of 531 respondents who took part in the study. Then an open-ended question was asked. The respondents were asked to name new virtual religions known to them. As a result, Pastafarianism (or Flying Spaghetti Monster), Abdulov’s Faith (Abduloverovanie), Jedaism, and the Missionary Church of Kopimism were named. The Russian Pirate Church, Hatsunism, Kuzya-the-God sect, the Church of Elon Musk, the Church of the SubGenius, the Church of the Hanzo were also mentioned.

Thus, due to the additional data obtained during the second sociological survey, we found out that among the respondents representing students of southern Russia, there is a certain segment of young people who are to some extent interested in or already familiar with modern online religions. Within the

tasks of the study, the results presented in Table 4 are very interesting. They demonstrate related data regarding the level of awareness of those students who answered the question on the knowledge of virtual religions and on cases of religious transgression.

Table 4. Awareness of the cases of religious transgression.

Question		Have you ever faced a situation where believers moved from one system to another?		Total
		Yes	No	
Yes	Frequency	60	16	76
	Do you know any 'Virtual religions' that were created and still function on the Internet?	78.9%	21.1%	100.0%
No	Frequency	301	153	454
	Do you know any 'Virtual religions' that were formed and still function on the Internet?	66.3%	33.7%	100.0%
Total	Frequency	361	169	530
	Do you know any 'Virtual religions' that were formed and still function on the Internet?	68.1%	31.9%	100.0%

Table 5. Attitude towards people who changed their worldview or religion system.

Transition		Choice					
		1 Positive	2 Rather positive	3 Neutral	4 Rather negative	5 Negative	6 Difficult to answer
1	Traditional religion to another traditional one	11.3	2.6	57.9	11.5	7.9	8.7
2	Traditional religion to non-traditional one	16.4	8.1	58.7	5.3	2.8	8.7
3	Non-traditional religion to traditional one	19.2	12.1	54.7	3.4	2.3	8.3
4	Became a non-believer/ an atheist	15.1	7.2	50.8	8.9	11.5	6.6
5	Became a believer	30.9	10.8	47.4	2.5	3.0	5.5

The data analysis shows that the number of respondents that are aware of virtual religions is more than 3.5 times higher than the number of those who know about new forms of religion that function on the Internet but have not heard anything about religious transitions. In addition, a rather large number of students who answered negatively to the question on virtual religions are aware

of the cases of religious transgression. In this case, the percentage ratio between positive and negative answers differs only twice.

Within the framework of the study, the respondents' attitude towards religious transitions was also studied. The results are shown in Table 5. Here it is necessary to pay attention to the number of respondents who are neutral to the situations of religious transitions. As can be seen from the table, the situation of uncertainty expressed in the absence of pronounced oppositions is common to all of the proposed transition models, which reveals the lack of formation of the religious worldview among students in the South of Russia.

5. Conclusions

The central hypothesis of our study was the assumption that the rhizome and transgression that are common to the current postmodern religious worldview affects the religiosity of Russian youth making its perception of religion more unstable and uncertain. It in part explains the increased interest in new religious forms and transgressive tendencies in this field.

Practical studies conducted by the authors showed that young people generally recognizing their religious affiliation (71.7%) are not very confident in it. We see that about half of respondents do not deny their religiosity, but at the same time they are not sure of it. After all, about a third of respondents answered positively about their belief in God.

It is possible that the reason for such discrepancies lies in the fact that religion is not in the top interests of modern Russian youth. According to our respondents, it is not cool to be religious. This opinion was expressed by 39.7 % of all respondents; another 29.4 % were close to agree with this thesis. This can be explained by the fact that in the postmodern coordinate system, the finding of objective truth and the existence of this truth are called into question since the experience of 'here and now' is much more important. The individual chooses what to believe in, how long and which way to go in searching the truth.

Despite this, about 60% of respondents are committed to traditional religions existing in Russia: Christianity and Islam. Thus, we see that Russian youth does not exclude the path of religious search and the formation of religious identity. According to the authors of the study, religious identity is a sense of belonging to a particular religious group [20, 21].

At this stage, it is still impossible to say that most of the representatives of Russian youth are ready to fully switch to the digital version of religion. Although almost more than a third of respondents show a certain interest in it and are familiar with Internet resources in this area. The religious segment of the Russian Internet is developing and gathering pace but it is significantly inferior in the content intensity and volume to the Western Internet space [22]. The Internet space which is much more than real is full of all sorts of religious resources and fake 'instead-of-religions', and more than 14% of respondents know about them. Some western scholars, in particular F. Jameson, believe that "innovations are no longer possible, and it remains only to imitate the dead

styles, speak beyond the masks and with the voices of these styles in an imaginary museum” [23]. As data from the social studies show, the ‘imaginary museum’ on the Internet is full of diverse projects ‘with a pronounced religious focus’. Most of the respondents (69.1%) came across religious resources. Apparently, it was for information purposes since only 33.4% were ready to spend about a quarter of their time on the Internet to study this kind of sites. 76 out of 531 respondents who took part in the research are aware of new Internet religions. Thus, we see that the religious nature of the religious Internet space with its multiplicity of choices leads to the fact that modern youth receives information from sources that are different from the trajectories traditional for historical religions, which affects the choice of religious identity. The youth attempts to find simple and clear answers to very complicated questions in the postmodern rhizome space with the help of adapted manuals ‘for dummies’, and for the most part, these online resources ‘with a pronounced religious theme’ are sort of these manuals. All this leads to the erosion of familiar oppositions and makes it difficult to form a religious identity among younger generation, which is a very complex process itself.

The multiplicity of choices makes transgressive processes among young people much easier. As can be seen from our study, they are not only aware of the processes of transition from one religion to another, but in general they are neutral towards such transitions. It includes the situation when traditional religion is replaced by another traditional one (57.9%), traditional religion is changed in favour of non-traditional one (58.7%), non-traditional religion is changed into traditional one (54.7%). In this case, the process is evaluated, not its content. While conducting the study with focus groups, this issue was given special attention. Group no. 1 with a multi-ethnic composition declared its positive attitude towards transgression processes. Group no. 2 with a mono-ethnic (Russian) composition used the wording ‘makes no difference’. On the whole, these focus groups identified the only unacceptable trajectory of transition into extremist religious groups that are harmful to any person. Moreover, this position was more clearly indicated in group no. 1. It means that when attracting more detailed attention to the processes taking place in society indicated by the post-modern worldview, the safety factor is triggered even in conditions of complete tolerance.

The rhizome which is inherent in postmodern society constantly appeals to tolerance. On the one hand, it is a trend of modern culture as the transition from cultural norms ensuring the survival of the human race to strategies for achieving individual well-being is associated with postmodernism. The need for consolation which was given by the church was lost, but there was a need to find the meaning and the purpose of life. It is possible to achieve this experience only individually because this experience does not claim to universality. On the other hand, some acts of religious transgression may lead to the emergence of new models of the religious identity formation. It happens when the transition points are not controlled by social and religious structures in a situation where virtual post-religious new formations quickly responding to contemporary cultural

challenges are offered as an alternative to the generally fixed global confessions. As a result, they will go against the generally accepted social values since a number of virtual religions are a fictional postmodern simulacrum. The newly born adept who moved into the simulative space formed by the postmodern rhizomes is forced to build his/her own strategy of adaptation to society because inside he/she begins to feel either like 'another' person or an 'alien' even in relation to his/her parents, relatives and friends. Time will show to what extent these practices can be destructive for society. However, the example of 'Columbiners' and a series of alike projects that formed their flock through virtual resources had a negative impact on their followers. This leads to the suggestion that erasing the usual opposition in the formation of a religious worldview, as well as tolerant attitude to the situations of religious transitions and changes in attitudes among modern youth is a situation that requires careful consideration. There is a need in additional research and detailed scientific analysis since the absence of regulation by public and civil structures can lead to irreversible consequences.

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