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Literacy Practices and Identity in a Slavic Immigrant Congregation: An Ethnographic Study

Heather Walker Peterson
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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LITERACY PRACTICES AND IDENTITY
IN A SLAVIC IMMIGRANT CONGREGATION: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Heather Walker Peterson

Indiana University of Pennsylvania

August 2009

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Indiana University of Pennsylvania
The School of Graduate Studies and Research
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Heather Walker Peterson

Candidate for the degree of Doctor in Philosophy

David I. Hanauer, Ph.D.
Professor of English, Advisor

Gian S. Pagnucci, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Stephen May, Ph.D.
Foundation Professor of Language and Literacy
Education and Research Professor at the University
of Waikato

ACCEPTED

Michele S. Schwietz, Ph.D.
Assistant Dean for Research
The School of Graduate Studies and Research

Title: Literacy Practices and Identity in a Slavic Immigrant Congregation: An
Ethnographic Study

Author: Heather Walker Peterson

Dissertation Chair: Dr. David I. Hanauer

Dissertation Committee Members: Dr. Gian S. Pagnucci
Dr. Stephen May

In a 12-month study, I sought to answer the ways in which religious literacy shaped the individual and collective identities of a Slavic immigrant congregation in the Midwest. More specifically, I examined the relationship of religious and ethnic identities mediated by religious literacy. Following the New Literacy Studies and modifying its theory to fit a religious context, I noted the literacy events of this congregation through attending services, collecting documents, and interviewing members. Not a speaker of Russian and Ukrainian, I interviewed my interpreters as central informants. For my analysis, I applied an interdisciplinary approach to discursive identity and literacy practices.

The two pastors of this church were intentionally creating a collective identity in resistance to the historically negative ascription of “Russian Baptist,” providing literacy events in which newcomers experienced a caring community. The congregation’s assumed fixedness of a sacred text supplied stability and authority while allowing interpretation to engage with the constraints and strangeness of massive change as immigrants. National narratives still had influence, but the members in this study claimed a location in an ongoing narrative of the sacred text as more important. Partly due to a

background of marginalization, the participants exhibited a non-place identity, one in which situated place, the ethnicity of their home country, was not considered primary.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

A Visit to a Slavic Immigrant Congregation

In my first visits to a Slavic immigrant congregation, I was drawn by the tensions that make a good story. On a Sunday morning, I parked next to a vamped-up Lexus and joined my friends, a couple who translated most of the activities. During the service, we were told that the second coming of Christ was indicated by the number of people attending native to the U. S. An event that stood out was a dramatic poetry reading to background music and the sounds of a wharf. The poem was the story of the *Titanic*, detailing the plight of immigrants who were forced to leave their possessions on the ship. A senior pastor afterwards summarized it in English, assuring us that Jesus Christ was our “beacon” in life.

The following Sunday, I was invited to sit next to a young seminary representative from Ukraine. In mismatched clothing, he was not dressed as well as his U. S.-dwelling counterparts. He interpreted a seminary colleague’s message that Christ is preparing a place for the congregation in heaven. The colleague exhorted us: “Do not forget your churches. Do not forget us.” This plea was followed by a reading of a narrative of a man’s after-death experience in which he entered New Jerusalem but was sent back. A pastor closed with a short message that if we were strong, courageous, and faithful as Joshua in the biblical text, about to enter the promised land, we too would prosper and be successful. In Russian and English, the pastor read Sir Ernest Shackleton’s advertisement in a London newspaper, requesting men to go on a hazardous

adventure with a willingness to risk everything. Jesus Christ asks the same of us the pastor said.

Why the desire of heaven contrasted with a desire to live well on this earth, to find the “good life” in the U. S. while being willing to forsake all and yet not forget those in a home country? According to congregational studies (Warner, 1998), the immigrant experience is one that a historian in 1978, Timothy L. Smith, labeled a “theologizing experience.” He explained a post-1965 immigrant narrative as one of isolation, remorse and yearning for the past, and bold expectations for the future. In such an upheaval of desire and emotion, “the mysteries of individual existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie cried out for religious explanation” (p. 1174). I am intrigued by the intersections of identity and religious reading, writing, and text-based events in this theologizing experience. My primary question was, in what ways does religious literacy form the identities, individual and collective in this specific congregation? Given that immigrant congregations are noted for their project of “reproducing ethnicity” (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000), a secondary question was, in what ways were ethnic and religious identities mediated by religious literacy?

To answer these complex questions, I drew from multiple disciplines, particularly applied linguistics and sociology. The events around a religious text and assumptions about such text are an example that literacy is ideological, situated in power relations, and thus examinable with “linguistic ethnography” (Tusting & Maybin, 2007), as New Literacy Studies (NLS) scholars, such as Street (1984) and Barton and Hamilton (1998) have proposed. The NLS scholar Gee (1996) has argued that identity is discursive—identity is constructed through the medium of discourse. My understanding of identity as

discursive has been informed by sociologist R. Jenkins (2004): that individuals and collectivities have internalized ascriptions of themselves and others and are affected by external ones. Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) supplied my analysis with five interrelated characteristics of this discursive process: “(1) location within particular discourses and ideologies of language; (2) embeddedness within the relations of power; (3) multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity; (4) the imagined nature of ‘new’ identities; and (5) location within particular narratives” (p. 14). As I have analyzed, I have looked for junctions of literacy practices with discursive identity. Augé (1995) and Hanauer (2008) have helped me to designate the congregation’s collective identity, mediated through religious literacy, as non-place.

Both pastors, whom I will call Nicolai and Ivan, welcomed me as a researcher. The context was a Baptist-like congregation from 80 to 150 people in a major city in the Midwest. Most were immigrants within the last 18 years from the Commonwealth of Independent States, the former Soviet Union. I am not fluent in Russian and would agree that my dependency on interpreters increased the likelihood of distortion. However, as Temple and Edwards (2002) have argued, subjectivity exists regardless, and the inclusion of interpreters in the research process can benefit as much as it hinders. Not only have I attempted to keep translation visible in my writing, I included my interpreters in my interviews and regarded them as key cultural informants.

As my research progressed, I realized that to critique a Christian congregation was to critique myself. I participated in this church as an insider and an outsider. Although not Russian-speaking or Slavic, I identified myself at the church as a Christian with a conservative background. My background was a benefit in that the Baptist

doctrine was familiar and that I gained trust more easily. To portray my biases, I have examined my own religious literacy practices and identified myself as a critical realist researcher, which I explain later. Applying theory to self was more excruciating than I had thought. I found my own identity reconstructing parallel with my theoretical process throughout my research and writing.

Why Study the Relationship of Literacy Practices and Identity in Religion?

Before I proceed, I must handle some concerns with a dissertation that explores the relationship of literacy and religion. First, if religion is diminishing with secularization, is a study of its relationship with literacy needed? I would argue that religion is changing, but not disappearing. One of the contributor's to my theorizing, R. Jenkins (2000) has discredited religion's maintenance of influence in western culture. In line with Max Weber's thinking, R. Jenkins wrote that "the secularization of 'Western civilization' seems to be well-advanced and advancing: participation in formal, organized, religion has declined markedly" (p. 19). However, he does allow for new forms of "enchantment," including fundamentalism (p. 18).

Similarly, Marty (2005) has named fundamentalism as "new phenomenon" (p. 57). Marty has described fundamentalism as a group of people in a religion-influenced culture separating themselves when they think they have recognized traditions—either doctrines, laws, or stories--that must be must be maintained and typically codified to interact with the "stranger" as challenges occur in the culture. These Christians, Muslims, Jews, or members of other religions withdraw from those considered liberal or conservative, but they do not withdraw to be only separated, but to organize to change the polity of the church, denomination, or nation.

I suspect though that the etymology of the term “fundamentalist,” which, as Marty indicated, arose out of 1920’s U. S. Protestantism, is overly influential. For centuries, at least to my knowledge of Christianity, such a definition could also describe those who desired to restore Christianity to what they considered the original or authentic faith. In the case of immigrant congregations in the U. S., Warner (2004/2005) had a different way of naming the change in religion: in religion’s disestablishment with the state, there are “de-Europization” of Christianity and “vitality” in various kinds of immigrant congregations, although smaller in scale than organized, traditional religions.

Few significant studies have focused on both religion and literacy. Besides a handful of small ones (George & Salvatori, 2008; Todd, 2005; Farr, 2001; Hones, 2001; Saxena, 1994; Zinsser, 1986), two early anthropological studies of literacy that partly examined religious community were Heath’s 1983 research of Appalachian schools and communities and Street’s 1984 look at Koranic literacy. Two more recent dissertations have provided descriptions of migrant youths’ Arabic Muslim literacy (El-Laithy, 2002) and the written intertextuality of a Catholic parish (Tusting, 2000b). Published books have included A. Fishman’s 1988 participant observation of literacy in an Amish community, Kapitzke’s 1995 examination of literacy in an Adventist congregation, and Moss’s 2003 ethnographic literacy study of three African-American congregations.

Why so few studies on religion and literacy? Other than Weber’s prediction that religion would become irrelevant with the advances of secularization, perhaps the answer has to do with the politicization of religion, particularly fundamentalism. An indicator of this politicization may be the notion that fundamentalism is a new concept. In a world influenced by democracy, current fundamentalism has become highly publicized.

Christian fundamentalists in the U. S. are active politically for their moral views on issues such as abortion—their desire to influence U. S. policy, to bring about a hegemony that would be uncomfortable for many in academics, concerns such scholars as compositionist and rhetorician Crowley (2006). Furthermore, outside of the U. S. in our technologically globalized world, fundamentalist members of non-democratic states pursue actions that gather international attention to their viewpoints through the Internet and other forms of media. Unfortunately, as I argue later, this publicity about and politicization of fundamentalism had led to stereotyping of fundamentalists (cf. Shields, 2009). I was asked by a reader early in my dissertation process, does not the “Right” have enough voice in the U. S.? Why allow it another space in a dissertation? Such a question denies the complexity of fundamentalist identities, lost to the concerns about the advancement of fundamentalist versions of hegemony. Even without focusing on religion, the New Literacy Studies has been critiqued for not exposing power structures exhaustively (Collins & Blot, 2003). Literacy scholars examining religion thus appear required to proceed with caution buttressed by a critical approach, such as George and Salvatori (2008), who conducted a study narrowed to the religious literacy practices of those who resist the upper echelons of the Catholic church.

It is religious identities, even the compliant ones, and the ways in which they are shaped by the literacy of religion that are of interest to me and I would hope to others, if even for the practical reason that these are students that sit in the classrooms of secular institutions. As Daniell (2003) in her study of a women’s recovery group noted, “When whole areas of people’s lives are closed off as unworthy of academic attention, the academy misses important information” (p. 150). In her preface, Kapitzke (1995)

discussed the importance of studying religion and literacy if we are to agree that all literacy is ideological. Daniell asserted that her group's women's spiritual literacy (influenced for some by Catholicism)--their "literacy for power"--allowed them opportunities to revise their identities (p. 140). In my study of Slavic migrants, their religious literacy provided tools and practice to engage with the challenges of living in the U. S. and to affirm or form new identities. There is much to be gained in understanding how literacy shapes identities, as A. Fishman (1988) demonstrated when, through examining Amish literacy, she also recognized the similar authoritative literacy practices in common secular education practice and began to call for change.

A Summary of This Work

In chapter 2 of this dissertation, I present my model of discursive identity and why it is fitting for the New Literacy Studies. Chapter 3 is my explanation of conservative Christianity and my examination of my own religious literacy practices and identity throughout my fieldwork. In chapter 4, I substantiate the relationship between immigrant ethnicity and religion, particularly Christianity. In chapter 5, I provide the theoretical conceptualizations of the New Literacy Practices with qualifications. Chapter 6 is the history and context of Russian Baptists and their religious literacy and a description of Slavic Fellowship. Chapter 7 is the methodology of my study. In chapter 8, I examine the individual identities and religious literacy practices of the congregation's two pastors; chapter 9, the same for the socialized believers; and chapter 10, for the new believers. Collective identity in public literacy events is the focus of chapter 11, and collective identity as partly constructed with texts and private literacy events, as determined through individual interviews and observation of public services, is the

subject of chapter 12. In my conclusion, chapter 13, I discuss the power relationships of the pastors in maintaining collective identity mediated by religious literacy, reflect on my own identity as an outsider, summarize my contributions to the field, and review the study.

As I write this I am aware that this text is much more than the product of my research, an artifact of my narrative. I was dependent on participants who welcomed me. The greatest privilege of this study has been telling one of the “partial stories” of a immigrant congregation as a researcher in relationship with its members (Wittner, 1998, p. 382).

CHAPTER 2

DISCURSIVE IDENTITY, INCLUDING NON-PLACE IDENTITY

Discourse as a Medium for Identity

In her provocative book, *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*, compositionist and rhetorician Crowley (2006), stated “the assumption that human beings operate in relations to some medium is characteristic of postmodern thought, whether this medium is called ‘discourse’ (Foucault), ‘writing’ (Derrida), ‘the symbolic’ (Lacan), ‘hegemony’ (Gramsci), or ‘the *habitus*’ (Bourdieu)” (p. 62). Crowley continued, “Of course these constructs differ from one another, and the selection of one of them as a theoretical frame creates inevitable consequences, possibilities, and limitations for whatever follows” (p. 62). I would agree and add that any conceptual frame or medium is a metaphor, highlighting some features of life behavior and overlooking others. No conceptual frame is conclusive in being all-comprehensive, and to claim to have such a frame dismisses other possible explanations and creates hegemony.

Applying Manuel Castells (1996), Crowley defined identity as “the process of cultural attributes, that is/are given priority over other sources of meaning” (p. 6, as cited in Crowley, 2006, p. 72). Identities are formed and re-formed within the medium, as one chooses to understand it. Crowley chose Bourdieu’s *habitus* because it is more accessible for a reader who sees other terms, such as *discourse*, as limited to linguistic orientation. I, on the other hand, chose the language of discourse because I am studying applied linguistics, literacy. Another concept of identity applicable for my study is non-place identity, which has recently been advanced by Hanauer (2008) in regards to immigrants.

The anthropologist Augé (1995) recognized that in the age of supermodernity, place as a source of identity is retreating: humans are bombarded with news of current global events, travel great distances frequently, and have multiple methods of self-reference—facilitated by technology such as the Internet. People experience territory as non-places, most tellingly by their experiences of transit—his famous example is the airport that is reliably predictable regardless of where one travels. Literacy is central to non-places in that text often informs people of their identity: which line they stand in is dependent on their form of identification or whether they can buy something with a credit card is dependent on how the credit card company judges their financial status. A further example of text by Augé is the prevalence of signs that insist a tourist stop and ruminate on the history of a town.

This literacy indicates to me that non-place identity can be described as discursively formed, although, as Hanauer (2008) explained, a discursive understanding of identity is a postmodern concept. He defined postmodern notions of identity as “the acceptance of a discursive position”: immigrants within the contextualized focus of postmodernism were expected to negotiate their identity from their ethnic perspective, becoming “bicultural” (p. 206). As I explicate below, I consider discourse a medium of identity, but I do not apply all the poststructuralist assumptions of discursive identity. Non-place identity I locate as a possibility of discursive identity in particular for the participants of my study who have attached themselves to a narrative interpreted from sacred scripture with the history of an imagined place, Israel. In Augé’s (1995) focus on travel and transit, non-place identity is especially fitting for the immigrant situation. It strikingly corresponds with the claim by many forms of Christianity that believers are

only “aliens and strangers” until heaven. After my discussion of discursive identity and immigrant congregations, I return to non-place identity at the end of this chapter to briefly illustrate it for this particular congregation.

I am in good company in relying on discourse as a medium of identity. An understanding of discourse has been a major contribution to NLS by the sociolinguist Gee (1996).

Discourses, then, are ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific *groups of people*, whether families of a certain sort, lawyers of a certain sort, bikers of a certain sort, business people of a certain sort, church members of a certain sort, African-Americans of a certain sort, women or men of a certain sort, and so on through a very long list. Discourses are ways of being ‘people like us’. They are ‘ways of being in the world’; they are ‘forms of life’. They are thus always and everywhere *social* and products of social history. (p. vii)

Discourse, Gee continued, is an “identity kit” (p. 127). According to Gee, we are each members of several discourse communities and thus have several identities, often at variance with one another: identity is “enacted” in the interstices of our group membership, the language we are using at the time, and the circumstance we are in (p. 69).

All individuals have a “primary Discourse,” that can be described as “our first social discourse,” a childhood home discourse including an understanding of life and the world; from within this, individuals have interacted with secondary Discourses, obtaining

or opposing them (p. 137). For Gee, “If one wanted to be rather pedantic and literalistic, then we could define literacy as *mastery of a secondary Discourse involving print*” (p. 143, italics Gee’s). (When not being “pedantic and literalistic,” Gee’s definition of literacy is expanded to a semiotic approach that includes texts such as visual art.) Like Street, Gee has asserted that literacy, mastered through socialization, cannot be separated from social practice: “You can no more cut the literacy out of the overall social practices, or cut away the non-literacy parts from the literacy parts of the overall practice, than you can subtract the white squares from a chess board and still have a chess board” (p. 41).

As a linguist, Gee has recommended discourse analysis as a method of studying literacy, as Rogers (2003) effectively demonstrated in her study of the literacy practices of an African American family in negotiation with the public school system. Discourse analysis indicates underlying assumptions, or “tacit theories” in a discourse community. It can also indicate when different identities, or subject positions, are being enacted, such as when a child resists using his or her parent’s first language outside of the home, perhaps resisting ethnic identity, although, as Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) warn, one must be careful not to reify the link between ethnicity and language.

Within the field of composition studies, teachers and writers such as Fox (1994) have documented the impact upon students of writing and reading in an entirely new discourse community—language and tacit theories are tied. One compositionist’s article in particular has demonstrated the shaping power of discourse, its ability to quash individual identity, to silence it, and yet the potential of an individual identity to have agency in its re-shaping. Fittingly, the article is titled “Writing as Struggle: From Silence to Words” by Min-zhan Lu (1987/1998). In it she described her grappling with two

discourses as a student growing up in China. She used Chinese affected by communist thought at school and English affected by western thought at home. One day she wrote a book report for school on *The Revolutionary Family*—she empathized with a character’s inner dilemma, and found herself re-writing this, knowing what was expected of her was to comment on the outward heroism of the character. Not only did she avoid submitting the first report to her teacher, but she dared not show it to her family, who would have been surprised that she could be “moved” by such a communistic book. Eventually, her own inner struggle between the “voices” inside her would lead to her personal “silence.” Applying Burkean theory, she stated that “to use the interaction between the discourse of home and school constructively, I would have to have seen reading or writing as a process in which I worked my way towards a stance through a dialectical process of identification and division” (p. 81).

Jenkins’ Concept of Identity as Internal-External Dialectic

Lu’s process as “dialectical,” like other identity explanations, resonates with R. Jenkins’ (2004) concepts of identity. Although I’m recognizing identity through the medium discourse, I found explanations of identity lacking in NLS theory (cf. Wetherall, 2007), particularly once I attempted to study the multitude of explanations for ethnic identity. Except for Kapitzke’s (1995) examination of an Adventist church and Tusting’s (2000a, 2000b) work in a Catholic church, no new literacy publications associated with religion appear to have a significant focus on identity.

I wanted a nuanced explanation of identity that would lend itself to rigorous empirical research, particularly a detailed analysis. I found that the social anthropologist R. Jenkins (2004) met this criterion, tying well with the medium of discourse in literacy

studies. R. Jenkins is a critical realist, with an epistemology that defines “intersubjectivity” as meanings being somewhat shared among people. As poststructuralists would argue with R. Jenkins, all identities are social. Both the inside and outside (either individual or collective) voices are involved in R. Jenkins’ identity concept.

For R. Jenkins (2004), identity is a “dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions.” Definition making involves creating and noting similarity and difference. Human beings are engaged in the discursive process of making ascriptions: being” or “becoming” like others, “associating with” others, and a “practice” of categorizing those who are different. As creatures working with abstractions, according to sociological (Schutz, 1967, p. 193, as cited in R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 121) and psychological theories, we notice those who are not of the dominant language, race, ethnicity, or gender in our communities, and unknowingly use them to inform our “ideal type” particularly if we do not have close relationships with others from those social groups.

However, the identity process has not only *nominalized* aspects but also *virtual* ones. *Virtual* for R. Jenkins is the experiences or the meanings and the consequences of social reality. People respond to external ascriptions without recognition of the ascription, accounting for the consequences of social realities, reality that is not material. The most vivid example of this has to do with race. For example, a black individual in the U. S. may be treated differently in a job interview because of an outside ascription but not be aware of the different treatment. I would include that people may even have ideal images or ascriptions of which they are not cognizant, the default position, echoing Gee’s

concept of “tacit theories.” An oft-repeated example illustrating categorization is the following two sentences demonstrating white privilege in the U.S:

1. Americans are still prejudiced against blacks.

2. Americans still earn less money than do whites.

(Lieberson 1985a, p. 128, as cited in B. Williams 1989, p. 430, as cited in Banks, 1996, p. 159)

In linguistics, we would say that the second sentence is the “marked” sentence.

Many white native citizens to the U. S. would have to ponder it to understand it. That is because their abstraction of an “American” is an image of a white person as in the first sentence—their ideal type (a concept drawn from Max Weber). (Thus, we have white narrators in novels who attach the adjective of “black” or “African American” to their description of other characters and yet do not use corresponding adjectives of “white” or “European-American,” often unbeknownst to the author.) As R. Jenkins (2004) is fond of saying, although identity (including individual memory and collective history) is “imagined,” it is “not imaginary.” In this case, the identities of the constructions of white as the default image of “American” and blacks as exceptions to being “American” are imagined, but the social consequences of this classification is not imaginary. The significance of these social consequences is why I chose to follow critical theory in the exposure of my and others’ underlying assumptions.

In addition to a discursive understanding of identity, R. Jenkins has a more complex understanding of power and identity. Originally, I had attempted my analysis of identity relying primarily on Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2004) social constructivist and poststructuralist approach to identity: a discursive construction embedded in power

relations, which matched well with Street's ideological model. Street's (1993) definition of ideology as "the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other" (p. 8) assumed the reader's understanding of the distinctions between power and authority perhaps because his argument was situated in persuading his readers of the dangerous implications of the autonomous model of literacy. He did not tease out the meaning of "authority," and went on to use the word *power* applied as domination.

In my early analysis, when studying power relations I uncritically had two categories of analysis: domination and resistance. As I studied the literacy practices corresponding with the identities of the two pastors, one emerged as dominant, Nicolai, and the other as resistant, Ivan. This conclusion was simplistic when I considered what instances I had neglected: I had seen Nicolai read a letter to a recently deceased friend with what I saw as true, humble grief, and I had heard rumors that Ivan carried the actual authority in the church.

Other social scientists have lamented the reductionism of analyzing with this dichotomy. The anthropologist Brown (1996) explained that in "hindsight" he recognized that he and a colleague had analyzed the Asháninka Indians in Peru too one-dimensionally, seeing their joining with a revolutionary movement as primarily resistance against the government. He pondered:

The Asháninkas who inserted themselves into this conflict were not only responding to external challenge but also advancing their own vision of existential redefinition or transcendence. It is easy to pigeonhole these aspirations by cataloging them as the "hopes of the oppressed" or as a "bold struggle for

fundamental human rights.” Although accurate, such labels cannot fully address or comprehend the specificity of Asháninka dreams of world transformation or the internal struggles that these touched off within Asháninka society itself. (p. 731)

His solution was to include in the analysis the subject’s self-definition. He argues that a danger to such reductive analysis is the tendency of “moral leveling”—to see even trivial actions as resistance and identify them with great actions of resistance.

Ortner (1995) argued that in our examination of resistance and domination, we have often overlooked “ambiguity” of resistance and the “ambivalence” of resisters’ acts. She stated that “individual acts of resistance, as well as large-scale resistance movements, are often themselves conflicted, internally contradictory, and affectively ambivalent, in large part due to these internal political complexities” (p. 179). Her recommendation is to focus on their projects rather than their identities since the focus on construction of identities ironically leads to essentializing.

Campbell and Heyman (2007), who have studied border communities, came up with the language of “slantwise” rather than “resistance” if the actors do not themselves label their actions as resistance: “We are thus pointing to cases in which people frustrate the normal play of a given power relation by acting in ways that make sense in their own frameworks but are disconnected or oblivious to that power relationship’s construction or assumptions” (p. 4). For them, resistance must require intentionality; instead, “slantwise action affects power orders, sometimes changing them and sometimes being absorbed by them, even reinforcing them” (p. 4). It is “an analytic concept for understanding subjectivity and agency that is not reducible to intentional resistance or naturalized

hegemony” (p. 20). Both subalterns and elites can act slantwise. The vocabulary of slantwise action includes “*emerge and emergent, invent, stumble on, inadvertent, trial and error, willy-nilly, skip around, pick-and-choose, disappear, reappear, bypass, frustrate, inconsistent* (when seen from above), *irrational* (ditto), *unpredictable* (ditto), *intersect, impinge, improvise, and autonomous*” (p. 8).

In applying R. Jenkins’ concept of identity, the most fitting solution is Brown’s—to include the subjects’ voice within the discussion of identity. I did so through my interviews with individuals and receiving feedback by the pastors on the first complete draft of the dissertation. In those interviews, a third category besides “resistance” and “domination” emerged through interviews—*participation*. Ortner’s argument assumed a different understanding of identity—one that is not a process—which would include projects in an analysis. Interestingly, Gee (2000) has asserted that the work of projects is not only constructing but being constructed. Campbell and Heyman’s language of “slantwise” could be at odds with identity as being virtual as well as nominalized—an individual could unintentionally resist an external identity being applied. My chosen third sub-category of participation accords well with New Literacy Studies in that, as Ivanič (2004) has described, NLS’s understanding of people’s learning to write is “purposeful participation” in literacy events, identifying with a community (p. 235).

Indeed, traditionally, those who have studied religious ritual have used the language of participation. When I study my notes and see the indications of people openly responding with agreement in a church service or resisting with their body language (such as a frown or once the turn of a small child to scribble noisily on paper, revealing how much he hated being in a Russian-speaking church), I tended to overlook

all those who simply sat quietly when someone was speaking. Guardini (1964/2007) stated that seeing or gazing (even without written or spoken word) is “living participation” and ritual is “co-performed” by those who are gazing (p. 6). Rappaport (1980) explained that “to participate is, by definition, *to become part of* something larger than the self. When one performs a ritual, one not only constructs oneself but also participates in the construction of a larger public order” (p. 187). Participation constructs individual and collective identities. To do so, the participants, who choose to join a congregation, are assuming the church leadership’s authority as legitimate. Rappaport added that for the actor, “the reflexive act of subordination also establishes that to which there is subordination” (p. 187).

Can power be legitimate? In New Literacy Studies, there is little about the moral ordering of power, except for scholars’ request that non-dominant forms of literacy be considered literacy. In fact, Collins and Blot (2003) have critiqued the New Literacy Studies for not intensively applying French post-structural theorists, such as de Certeau, Derrida, and Foucault, in a more detailed examination of historical power relations. In their minds, Street explained “macro-power” but did not analyze “micro-power” (p. 61). They critiqued Gee for not having the “same emphasis as we have to constraint, to identities imposed, as well as chosen” (p. 174). The linguistic ethnographer Sealy (2007) responded to this by saying that a local study is indeed local, although situated, and like any study must be limited—it would be tempting to assume that larger structures are apparent at the local level but obviously not in their entirety.

A benefit of applying R. Jenkins (2004), particularly for ethnic identities, is that he does bring in the importance of outside ascriptions (“imposed”); however, he is

explicit about Max Weber's definitions of *power* as "the capacity to dominate other through coercion of one kind or another" and *authority* as "legitimate domination, the conformism of those who accept its demand or expectation as justified" (pp. 125-126).

R. Jenkins has proposed that humans engage in a world with so many multiple options for ways of being that groups provide a "comforting *sense* of predictability" in interaction (p. 126, *italics his*). This clearly echoes researchers of immigrant congregations.

R. Jenkins's understandings of identity accords with literacy researcher Maybin (2000). For Maybin (2000), an examination of discourse in literacy events and of shared discourse in an institution's texts (intertextuality) reflects "a dialectical relationship between structure and agency, and between micro- and macro-level contexts" (p. 198). In her chapter reviewing the studies within the anthology *Situated Literacies: Reading and Writing in Context* (2000), she listed three levels of analysis: "(a) individual activities, understandings and identities," "(b) social events and the interactions they involve," and "(c) broader social and institutional structures" (p. 198). It is simple to align these events and structures with R. Jenkins' breakdown of identity process into three different orders: individual, interaction, and institutional.

Individual Order: "the human order as made up of embodied individuals, and what-goes-on-in-their-heads" (R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 17)

R. Jenkins' concepts have corresponded with Gee's concept of children growing up with primary identities, but R. Jenkins has delineated an understanding of the individual is his or her early socialization, whereas Gee overemphasized the collective primary identity although Gee (2000) himself has acknowledged that in the "social turn" of the academy, we sometimes have lost the person as "agent" or "actor" (p. 190). Other

than Gee, NLS's Lancaster School's focus on "local literacies" has centered on the methodology of individual interviews. In my study I follow this since I wish to understand identity shaped by religious literacy through the individual voices of church members as well as collective voices.

The language of individual identities is a viable term because each of us is "embodied," although we have a construct of self. R. Jenkins (2004) has explained the self as embodied, and thus "unitary": it is always becoming and thus has continuity in the perspective of the individual. Literacy researchers have pointed out the importance of recognizing the embodiment of the mind. Barton in his early argument (1994) for an ecological approach to literacy, phrased it this way: "The mind is socially constructed upon innate potentialities" (p. 51). Hanauer in more detail stated (2003), "We are influenced by our cultural surroundings but can never be reduced to the level of a unitary identity between self and cultural surroundings. The cognitive system is, after all, autonomous and indirectly influenced by exposure in specific cultural frames. In other words, we are all unique, at least the extent of our experience of self" (p. 79). In "Writing as Struggle" Lu's (1987/1998) selfhood is clearly constructed in her maddening stresses of two primary discourses and yet clearly unique and embodied.

Interactional Order: "the human world is constituted in relationships between individuals, in what goes on between people" (R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 17)

As a child I remember being told that identity is not who you think you are, but it is who you think others think you are. The interactional order is descriptive of "identify[ing] ourselves in the internal-external dialectic between self-image and public image" and "identify[ing] others and being identified by them in turn" (Jenkins, 2004, p.

20). It is important to recognize that our identities are also shaped by others' views of which we may be unconscious. As stated before, R. Jenkins emphasized an understanding of both *nominal*, named identities, known labels, and *virtual* identities, experienced identities. For example, Lu went for some time in the communist public school without recognizing her allocation by the new institutional discourse of communism. Unknowingly, she may have experienced the *consequences* of the social reality for being the child of a so-called "Imperial Lackey" before she was chastised for calling her father an "intellectual."

Institutional Order: "the human world of pattern and organization, of established-ways-of-doing-things" (R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 17)

For all identity, but particularly when discussing collective identity, R. Jenkins is careful to use the term *identification* frequently to indicate identity as a constant process in order not to essentialize collective identities. A major contribution of R. Jenkins is his distinction between self-identification or *social grouping* and ascriptions applied to others *categorization*. Social grouping tends toward comparing *similarities*, whereas social categorization tends toward noting *differences*. Lu was categorized as the child of an "Imperial Lackey."

Categorizations of Identity Analysis—

Modifying Pavlenko and Blackledge's Identity Framework

But if social reality is imagined but not imaginary, how do I as an ethnographer observe discursive instances of identity in literacy events and texts? For my analysis, I borrowed categorizations of discursive identity from Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) edited collection *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts*. Their work may not

have been written to apply directly to literacy, yet their framework for identity is rooted in both social constructionist and poststructuralist theories, corresponding with the New Literacy Studies (Maybin, 2000). Although their approach is not from a perspective of critical realism as that of linguistic ethnographers Tusting & Maybin (2007), Rampton, (2007), and Sealy (2007), I did find their categories useful and modified them for my own use with R. Jenkins' identity concepts. R. Jenkins' had not focused on multilingual communities as they have—rather his work on ethnicity focused on the tensions between Protestant and Catholic Irish. Pavlenko and Blackledge have produced a discursive identity framework that is comprised of five interrelated characteristics: “(1) location within particular discourses and ideologies of language; (2) embeddedness within the relations of power; (3) multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity; (4) the imagined nature of ‘new’ identities; and (5) location within particular narratives” (p. 14). In the rest of this section, I illustrate each of these characteristics with religious literacy in an immigrant congregation. I do this briefly since I do not want to dwell long on later content in my explanation of the relevance of Lancaster School's approach to my study. With the goal of reflexivity, I then include my own analysis of my identity process during the dissertation's background and primary research, applying these categories to my own texts: my spiritual diary and a blog I temporally kept.

Location within Particular Discourses

Following Barton and Hamilton (1998), a method of understanding identity is how people describe themselves as individuals or as a group and others as outsiders. Also, following Barton and Hamilton, I researched the background of religious literacy for the congregations as well as research in current media to have an understanding of

outside ascriptions of Slavic-speaking congregations. R. Jenkins does the same in his research of ethnicity in Northern Ireland. So, although my study emphasizes the voice of the members of the congregation, the external contribution to identity is not neglected. For analysis, I did not conduct an intensive discourse analysis, but I did use the referential strategy of *naming* (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001). In T. L. Smith's article earlier immigrants to the U. S. named themselves as "chosen people" as exhibited in their hymns, an intertextuality worthy of examination and one tied with the ideology of a congregation. R. Jenkins' (2004) identity concept contributes to this in that my analysis involves both grouping and categorization—how do the participants name themselves, how do they name others, and likewise how do outsiders, either visitors to the church or voices in the newspaper name them?

Occurrences of the activation of insider or outsider language are valuable for study as well—language may indicate a perceived ideology. An example used previously is Lu's (1987/1998) portrayal of her childhood conflict between two languages that stood for her as two ideological discourses, English representing western thinking and Chinese representing communism. In Saxena's (1994) study of multiple literacies among Panjabis in England, she discussed how each language--English, Urdu, Panjabi, and Hindi--had their own literacies, including related scripts and ideologies. Urdu is associated with Islam, Panjabi with Sikhism, and Hindi with Hinduism. In El-Laithy's (2002) participation in an Egyptian American Muslim youth group, she noted that interest in religious literacy sparked interest in learning Arabic.

Embeddedness within Relations of Power

Institutions, social structures composed of power relations, provide a sense of belonging, offering identity. As stated above, I analyzed for dominance and resistance as well as authority and participation. My observation of behavior here, of the *virtual*—was particularly important for subordinates' response to their leadership. The leadership of an institution is particularly shaping of literacy practices, whether by the upper echelons of the leadership, the ministers in A. Fishman's (1988) literacy work among the Amish, or the lower levels, the Sunday school and vacation Bible school teacher in Zinssers' (1986) study. The Mexican immigrant and Mexican-American men in León's (1998) ethnography found their status, an aspect of their identity, in becoming leaders in a congregation.

In a minority community, the leaders are often the ones who have ventured into the dominant society and then returned to guide the community to maintain its ethnicity (J. A. Fishman, 1989b). Yang (1999) has commented that many of the leaders of the Chinese immigrant church could be characterized by "adhesive integration," the identities of persons who have capably negotiated their intersecting cultural worlds. It follows then that immigrant churches are significant, he noted, in identity construction in their "mechanism of the assimilation function" and their "mechanism of the ethnicity function" in the host country. The virtuality of an individual's response to construction through religious literacy is valuable as well for examination: it may be resistance. Chai (1998) described herself as a 17-year-old being "[d]ragged kicking and screaming to Friday night Bible study," by her parents, where she was appalled that the music was performed in Korean (pp. 295-296).

Multiplicity, Fragmentation, and Hybridity—Nominal and Virtual Aspects of Institutional Identity

What to make of studies such as Yang's that expose multiple options in a Chinese church to identify as Christian, American, and/or Chinese? As argued above, I view individual identity with R. Jenkins as unitary, "rather than a model of the self as a collation of bits" (R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 49). Also, collective identities such as ethnicity, although constructed, have their own metaphorical embodiment in that they are limited by circumstances (May, 2007).

Jenkins' has found it helpful to talk about "*institutionalized identities in their nominal and virtual aspects*" (p. 142). The nominalization may have a variety of virtualities—people experience what it means to be a Slavic-language Christian in the U. S. in many different ways. At the same time, the nominalization still has influence on the experience, or the experience may transform the nominalization. A potential example of the transformation of a nominalization may be when immigrants in the U. S. see little difference between an ethnic nominalization and a religious nominalization that would have been viewed differently in their home country. Chong (1998) remarked on the "fused" boundaries between ethnicity and religion for the second-generation of a Korean church, and Pak (2003) demonstrated that "fusing" within the religious literacy practices of another Korean church and church school. Nominalizations can also be "hierarchical": "One can be Danish and a 'home German,' Welsh and a *gog*; British and Welsh. In fact, to be a 'home German' one must be Danish, to be a *gog* one must be Welsh, and so on" (R. Jenkins, 2008, p. 171).

The relationship between the virtual and nominalization is the stuff of study. When people are in transition “the relationship between the nominal and the virtual may contribute a useful image of continuity; it is just as likely, however, to sow the seeds of confusion and conflict” (p. 171). It is here that the dialectic of identity may be the most obvious.

Within this category of identity, it is important to remember that although the immigrant experience intensifies the sense of fluidity, the multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity are not just characteristic of immigrant congregations but of postmodernity in general. Lifton (1993) has theorized a “protean self,” a person whose identity is in flux for survival in a world of flux. In his mind, those of various religions (and political persuasions) who choose a “fundamentalist self” are seeking a sense of permanent stability. While I consider his description of fundamentalism too broad-brushed, this quest for certainty appears to be a key trait of many conservative congregations (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). And yet certainty is one element of the quest for the transcendence that provides hope for the future of the community. As people in transition, immigrant congregations are attempting to determine not many certainties but a few as exhibited by their ability to accept others of different cultures but a same religion. As I explain in a later chapter, the text is perceived as certain, and the interpretation does have some room to change in encounter with the situations of another society.

The Imagined Nature of ‘New’ Identities

R. Jenkins (2004) has combined the work of Fredrik Barth’s concept of ethnic boundaries and the early work of Anthony Cohen in “symbolic communities” to further explain the dialectic of external and internal definitions. *Boundaries* tend to exhibit

collective differentiation while the *symbolization of community*, collective identity self-defined, reveal similarities. Boundaries have to do with relationship of insiders and outsiders; thus, boundaries are about process. By combining both concepts, R. Jenkins has maintained the dialectic, avoiding the reductionism that what happens inside the boundary—the similarities—are due primarily to differentiation from the outside. Symbolization includes abstraction of ideal types—it seems easier to get along with people if we can predict what they are like, “the constitutional basis of the notion of society” (p. 119). Symbols provide an “umbrella of solidarity under which we can all shelter” (p. 110). However, the symbolization allows the group to believe or imagine that they are all the same when they may actually have different values or behavior. This is not to say that they do not share values and behavior. In fact, what R. Jenkins’ has insisted is that Cohen added to the understanding of boundaries by considering the content or “cultural stuff” inside the boundaries—“common sense, common knowledge, and patterns of behaviour” and yet underscoring the symbolization, the nominal identification that can differ from the virtual (p. 115).

The imagined, symbolic community as ideal is what we want, who we want to be—it includes the language of desire. An example of this in religious literacy is the desire of the youth group member who started an Islamic discussion group on Sundays in El-Laithy’s (2002) study. He was imagining himself as differentiated from an individualistic U. S. culture. The imagined is fed by symbol, art, and story (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The most salient political image may be that of the American Dream, in which possessions are symbols of its attainment. In a congregation, older members

may define themselves by a desire to “return to its foundations,” but the main desire of new attendees may be that of having emotional needs met by a caring community.

Gee (2000) has theorized that all human effort is “enactive work” and “recognition work” in which “power and desire are always and everywhere at stake” (p. 192). Enactive work is getting others to see “people and things as having certain meanings and values with certain configurations or relationships” (p. 191). Work “to accept or reject” others’ enactive work is “recognition work” (p. 191). As we do both kinds of work, we are constructing and being constructed; this work is a “project,” and we are always “pro-ject”ing. Congregations pro-ject as individuals and communities in ways that are social and political—“one way we can analyse people, words and deeds is to ask what they seek to pro-ject in the world, what political projects they implicate” (p. 192). Congregations express their desires in their projects to proselytize others or to advocate for their members, defining who they are as they do so. They also construct and produce materials or set up websites corporately or individually to “pro-ject” themselves. Tusting (2000a), for example, demonstrated the relevance of studying text with her analysis of a Catholic church’s newsletter, “a marker of identity,” driven by a desire to shape the identity of its readers as people who pray individually and yet simultaneously (p. 46).

Location within Particular Narratives

Symbol is embedded in narrative—symbol and narrative overlap. R. Jenkins (2004) has borrowed from Berger and Luckman, the authors of *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), who perceive the “symbolic universe” of an institution as that which tells its members what knowledge and values count, primarily with language. It is “if you like, the story which a collectivity tells about itself, the world, and its place in the world” (R. Jenkins, 2004, p. 136). Unlike Berger and Luckman, a symbolic universe for R. Jenkins is not all-comprehensive but rather includes small, mundane institutions such as the block patrol—the world is composed of a multitude of symbolic universes, of overlapping collective narratives.

In this study, identity narratives may be shared stories told as a collectivity with shared experience or individual stories of experience. These stories are often intertwined with others: home or host countries’ cultural narratives, scriptural stories such as the exodus, and hero tales of others in the past who suffered, for instance, the “two Margarets” tied to stakes at high tide in Kapitzke’s (1995) study. Hall (1990) in his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” wrote of Africa as a symbol or metaphor for Jamaicans as a “Promised Land,” the imagined goal of the “narrative of displacement” (p. 236). Alluding to the imagery of scripture, he illustrated the narrative of a marginalized group.

León (1998) has demonstrated how narrative allows for identities in the process of negotiation. He told the “congregational narrative” of an immigrant church by combining individual narratives. He analyzed the binding together of the biblical narratives with cultural narratives and the American myth, creating a “border phenomenon, one that combines Mexican, American, and Christian evangelical

archetypes and mythologies into a fresh identity, one that can support such seeming contradictions as pentecostal mariachis” (p. 192).

In Hone’s (2001) study of religious literacy, Shou Cher’s conversion narrative and his narrative of relocation from Thailand to the U. S. was a narrative of religious literacy. As a researcher Hone approached interviews and observations in the framework of narrative study. He embedded Chou’s personal narrative in a larger historical narrative of rejection of the Hmong by China in the 1800s to the Vietnam War and the genocide and refugee situation that resulted because of the cooperation of the Hmong with the U. S. military. He included other brief narratives of the religious movements among the Hmong and the construction of Hmong alphabets and texts.

The Non-Place Identity of This Particular Congregation

With a scriptural narrative as perhaps the most visible to identity formation for Slavic Fellowship, non-place identity, nonetheless, emerges within all the categorizations of Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2004) discursive identity framework. As I will explore later with specific data, the socialized believers in the former Soviet Union were marginalized within the Soviet discourse, experiencing the virtual identities of the nominalization as Christians. Once they did not declare atheism, refusing to vow or sign anything that would disregard their faith, they were barred from post-secondary education. After the virgin lands program began in the 1950s, ethnically Russian people moved to states in Central Asia, including, likely, the ascendants of the Petrov family. Within this mixed cultural setting, congregations formed from both Slavic and German ethnicities, exhibiting, “multiplicity, fragmentation, and hybridity.” Disenfranchised from the Russian ethnicity that was equated as Soviet by the government, new identities

could be imagined. Thus, when offered the opportunity, religious believers left in the late 1980s for the U. S. (and Germany). The narrative they located themselves in, one they saw as continuing from Hebrew and Christian scriptures as the people of God, was attractive to secular Russian visitors to the church as they experienced the challenges of migration. Although the believers at this church referenced both Slavic and Russian ethnicity in their discourse, they perceived that their faith was central to their identity, and this collective identity was formed and maintained significantly through religious literacy. The idea of ethnicity, situated place, is not prominent. A non-place identity, or a non-placed identity, had been constructed externally and internally in their imagined narrative and place as members of a chosen people.

CHAPTER 3
MY IDENTITY, FUNDAMENTALIST RELIGION,
AND RELIGIOUS LITERACY

My Identity

“This sounds like it was too easy for you,” stated one of my reviewers. He was responding to chapter drafts that I had prepared to begin my primary research. “This has been the hardest year of my life!” I cried out. Earlier I had passed a preacher on campus, standing in a hollow worn into the hillside as he condemned passersby. *Am I identified with him?* I wondered. *Do I share identity with him?* We all have instances of migration, of leaving one community for another, whether to another country or to an alternative group of teenagers in high school with their own set of clothing signifiers. Although we do not all face the same remarkable pressures of uprooting from a vastly culturally different country to another, it is likely that all of us have had periods where “the mysteries of individual existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie cried out for religious explanation” as T. L. Smith (1978) explained for immigrants at the turn of the twentieth century (p. 1174).

In the NLS model, Street (1998) has instructed a “reflexive relativism” as “essential to understanding other people’s meaning and avoiding simply imposing our own views and concepts as though they were universal” (p. 17). The qualitative researcher, Maxwell (2005) has recommended “memos” to record ideas and personal responses to one’s ongoing research. I did have a field journal for memos, but as a life pattern, I also keep a spiritual diary, another text that records my own anomies. Sometimes the two journals would blur, neither could be neatly compartmentalized, a

realization that only confirms the impossibility of neutral bias as postmodern researchers have shown. In the following, I narrate some of my own journey toward a revised identity, revealing the reflexivity of my study and also discussing my understandings of the term *identity*. Before I can proceed further, I must discuss the risk to my identity in regard to my fundamentalist background.

Fundamentalist Religion

The word “fundamentalist” is frequently tossed about. Crowley (2006) surprised me in her initial chapters by placing two well-recognized conservative Christians in the same camp of fundamentalism, the historian Mark Noll, with a co-writer of the Left Behind series Tim LaHaye. Upon reading this, I was immediately aware of the personal aspect of the individual dialectic of my identity. I *grouped* myself with Noll, now a respected Yale scholar, but I wanted to reject the *categorization* of “fundamentalist” that included Tim LaHaye.

A definition must be first. I will begin with self-definitions by Christian historians of solid reputation inside secular academy and then return to Crowley. The history of the word *fundamentalist* was first claimed by conservative Christians in the 1920s who wanted to return to the “fundamentals” as they saw theologians and other Christians applying higher criticism to biblical interpretation and responding favorably to modernism, such as evolution. As the historian Marsden (1991) has pointed out, the word developed by the 1960s for mostly Baptist dispensationalists, both in denominations and in autonomous churches. Dispensationalism is the doctrine that God deals with people differently based on time periods, including that the nation-state of Israel will have a special future of earthly rule. Incorporated with Marsden’s definition of

contemporary fundamentalism is fundamentalists' goal of "separation"; reacting against more liberal churches, they believed they must separate, break off and avoid fraternizing, to remain holy.

In recent years, the term *fundamentalist* for religious usage is applied in the media to Muslim fundamentalists, those who adhere closely to *Sharia*, Islamic law, and who, similar to past U. S. Christians, are reacting to western modernism. However, this usage can be problematic when considering political implications. A common mistake of a media's audience may be to assume that a Muslim fundamentalist is equivalent with a *jihadist*.

P. Jenkins (2006), a historian of the Christianity of the global south, has problematized this definition further by drawing in the influence of non-western voices. He recognizes fundamentalism as a matter of believing in the inerrancy of scripture, and interpreting it literally. (I choose not to say "literally" because of what it may miscommunicate. Fundamentalists, like all interpreters, make choices in what they view as figurative language and not all figurative language is taken "literally," such as in the poetic portions of scripture—does God have wings? I will use the words "narrowly" or "closely.") P. Jenkins has insisted that the definition is confounded when political implications and connotations are attached because such implications are based upon the emphasis of the interpreters in response to their culture. Thus, in the U. S. while it may appear that most fundamentalists take political stances to do with individual rights, in the global south, those who interpret scripture closely may focus on the social justice issues affecting the congregations.

Crowley's thoughts are in agreement that although political implications cannot be overlooked, they are not core to the definition of fundamentalism. For her, fundamentalism is related to hegemony. Therefore, when removed from religion, fundamentalism can be hypothesized that on any two sides of an issue with collective force, there may be fundamentalists: for example, politically fundamentalist conservatives and politically fundamentalist liberals. Whatever the fundamentals are they are essential to their identity and thus their differentiation from others. Such people would be marked by their habit of demonizing any critique or critic of their fundamentals. Unfortunately, in the everyday life of academy, many of us have experienced the fallacy of being identified with one collective's adversary if we associate ourselves in any way with proponents of opposing viewpoints.

Crowley (2006), however, has taken this argument too far "when foundations are held to be primary, noncontingent, and nonnegotiable, then systems of belief stemming from them become fundamentalisms" (p. 14). In this argument from value, her first two words "primary" and "noncontingent" mean that there are ideals that are held above other ideals—her example is that of an environmentalist becoming a fundamentalist when only the environment would matter and not the human life in it. "Nonnegotiable" implies that the fundamentalist to protect his or her identity can receive no critique or critique one's self for fear of finding disparities.

This definition rings as if true, but it has weaknesses. It is hard to believe that the majority of people in the world, then, are not fundamentalist, do not have some foundational beliefs--folk assumptions--that they unknowingly regard as primary, noncontingent, and nonnegotiable. Of particular concern to me is the word

nonnegotiable since Crowley's book, titled *Toward a Civil Discourse*, is in no way about *discourse* with fundamentalists (for her, she focuses on the Baptistic dispensationalist variety) but discourse *directed at* fundamentalists. Although the back cover touts this book leading to "democratic discussion of civic issues," the book is about rhetoric to persuade, including an investigation of the audience, but never recommends spaces for both listening and persuading. I find it unappealing that when recommending that liberals persuade fundamentalists of liberal democratic values through telling stories to gain their attention, revealing other values, "demonstrating the contingency of given values and sets of values" (p. 201), and showing exceptions in ethics, Crowley never suggested a space for discussion. By never setting a space for discussion, she neglects the importance of a space for gathering to community. She is not inviting fundamentalists into community. In her mind, they have nothing to say, nothing to offer, nothing that could critique her view—she too has nonnegotiables.

If we all, if even un-self-aware, have ideologies that are primary, noncontingent, and nonnegotiable, then what is the issue? What makes fundamentalism, fundamentalism? Perhaps rather than nonnegotiables a better term would have to do with closure, with impermeable boundaries, with the separatist spirit with which Marsden characterized early Christian fundamentalists. Carlson (1986), the author of a dissertation detailing the interactions of Russian Baptists with U. S. conservative Christians after Stalin, applied a similar understanding: fundamentalists are those who, based on their close interpretation of the Bible, have "a policy of total separation, an unwillingness to associate with any whose theological beliefs and practices are not in total agreement with their own" (p. 17). Perhaps what Crowley intended with

nonnegotiables is the word *control*, control on the inside in isolating the group and control on the outside in trying to impose their beliefs and values systems on others. One appreciation I have had for the sociologist R. Jenkins is that he has reminded current leaders that there is legitimate power--authority—power considered justified by subordinates—as well as illegitimate power.

Perhaps what is at stake here is an ethical argument about how fundamentalists control inside and outside of their group. Clearly collective isolation or separation reveals a strong internal control. Fear of fundamentalists, as Crowley has and not unrightfully so, should depend on fundamentalists' methods of control. Spinner-Halev (2000) has discussed the approach that a liberal society should have toward restrictive religious groups: nonintervention unless extreme cases of the community harming its children, not educating its children, preventing its children from awareness of other options, and not allowing people to leave the group (p. 107). He has insisted that these groups be included in public discourse, stating that “dialogue itself may transform people and their arguments” (p. 152), and it must occur in “an atmosphere of mutual respect” (p. 158).

At this point, I can define *religious fundamentalism*, which I take as a religious community with the following three things: 1) a belief in the inerrancy of its scripture, 2) a narrow interpretation of its sacred texts, written or unwritten, 3) and a closure to critique and self-critique of its fundamentals. I do not want to essentialize fundamentalist groups. They like other social groupings/categories are on a continuum. For example, *conservative Christians* I take to mean as those who believe in 1) the authority and sacredness of scripture but not necessarily its inerrancy, 2) a narrow interpretation of the

Bible in regards to Christ's purpose, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ but not necessarily a narrow interpretation of the entirety of the Christian Bible, and 3) dissemination of their faith. Depending on the specific system of beliefs of a conservative Christian, the promotion of this last doctrine ranges from invitation to psychological coercion. Fundamentalism and evangelicalism are at the two ends of a continuum of conservative Christianity, marked by complete closure to alternative interpretations of scripture, fundamentalism, to a guarded openness, a thoughtful evangelicalism, at the other.

Ethnography of Self

Crowley (2006) would likely call me a fundamentalist without regard I believe for the complexity of my identity. To illustrate the nuances of a conservative identity in the following, I narrate some of my own journey toward a revised identity during my research period, providing reflexivity of this study and also applying my understandings of the term *identity*. Autoethnography as Holman Jones (2005) has written reveals not only individual construction through narrative but how emotions are tied to power relationships. By writing this section, I recognize that my research is not autonomous from me and even motivated by my personal experience or contributed to by my personal experience (Reinharz, 1992)—growing up in an ethnically U. S. Baptist and even attending an ethnically U. S. Baptist church as I began developing my contacts with the research community.

As I do in the chapters on individual identities and religious literacy, I follow Barton and Hamilton's *Local Literacies* (1998) in describing literacy practices and driving passions or themes, with my addition of scrutinizing identity. Unlike in my

interviews, I had the opportunity through my journals to examine change with chronology and divided up the journals in four periods beginning with my background reading for my study and continuing through the end of my fieldwork.

Key literacy practices were revealed in my habit of using a journal. Since late high school, I have written in a diary. I have written down thoughts that occur to me, scripture passages, and quotations from texts I reading and then asked questions and directed desires to God. This habit of journaling reveals other literacy practices—that I consider reading and writing as identity shaping, that other texts give me language for articulating ideas, that a variety of texts, genre, and authors--a heteroglossia—is important for this dialogical identity formation. That by my use of an author's name, I collapse an author and text into one as if I have a relationship with the author. When I combine quotations from books I have read, verses from scripture, and descriptions of events in my day I am exhibiting an interpretive framework of reality—a hermeneutic.

My agency in my identity formation was not only exhibited in the dialogical construction of my journals but also in that, throughout the two years of journals and the blog, I would treat my writing as if it was fixed. I made what I call “declarations”—proclaiming to myself and God that I was going to live differently or be different or state trust in that new kind of living. In some ways, this is similar to the language practices of new believers in my study whose fervent prayers were performative speech acts—they were convinced they were doing something by praying.

My journaling to God also indicated many of the literacy practices I share with the members of Slavic Fellowship. These may be as obvious as text as communication, text as an important resource, reading as ideological, and, thus, shaping collectivities, the

belief the Bible is sacred text, the value of belonging to a religious interpretive community, and perhaps what makes me cringe—the application and appropriation of scripture to oneself and to the world. This appropriation is where I fear most identifying myself with fundamentalists. My only relief is that I do not appropriate scriptural prophecy to predict the future.

As my identity changed, some of my literacy practices would begin to change, such as my growing value of multiple interpretations. In addition, I would be separated from my fundamentalist background by a driving passion—an openness to critique and by my reading of diverse authors, not narrowed to conservative Christians. To describe the intersection of my religious literacy practices and identity during the two- year time period, the following is broken into three sections. I first describe *journaling as a location for the dialectic of multiple collective identities*. Afterwards, I move to the tensions of various literacy practices. The first is my belief that *scripture is sacred text* held in tension with a *reduced value for a single, narrow, analytical interpretation*. The second is my *value of an interpretive religious community with my critique of power relations in an interpretive religious community*.

Journaling as a Location for the Dialectic of Multiple Collective Identities

In a chronological fashion below, I highlight characteristics of journaling as a location for the dialectic of multiple collective identities: juxtaposing a variety of texts, asking who am I, and naming and interweaving academic discourses, followed by a discussion.

Juxtaposing a Variety of Texts

The first summer of my research, 2004, my spiritual journal was combined with my research journal. I interspersed it with quotations from both scholars on ethnicity and Christians scholars writing to Christian audiences as well as scriptural texts. I had already had my topic approved by my advisor, but as I began to study background literature, I was filled with anxiety associated especially with one collectivity with which I identified—my family. How had I not considered in my topic choice that to examine a church was to examine myself? I wrote, “I’m realizing that recognizing what is going on here in an immigrant church might not make me happy, might make conservative churches look bad, and yet be truthful—might upset my family.” Within a few days, I quoted my advisor’s notes, “to question the [primary] narrative is to attack the people who assume it is commonsense truth and *that is my family*.”

Like Min-Zhan Lu (1987/1998), I was living in two different discourses. With her, I saw “reading or writing as a process in which I worked my way towards a stance through a dialectical process of identification and division.” Part of this early process was my awakening to other “namings” of ethnicity and Christianity. I began to reflect on my own assumptions about my membership in these collectivities. Reading in the works of Joshua Fishman that first summer, I wrote somewhat naively:

I search inside myself, and I don’t know this desire—this desire to be identified with a group, ‘where do we come from’ or do I, maybe with very conservative church I was in. This is bad because I so assume my own ethnicity—what I suppose is white American—that I can’t recognize it. It’s like when one says, “I have no dialect.”

I could not read the texts of research methods without identifying the power structures of my own Christian communities—my church and the Christian college where I taught. In early August I wrote to God: “This is HARD for me—by examining the forces I’m admitting social construction—conceptual metaphor, metanarrative, or cultural model—and I know that there is truth in it—I see it at [the church and Christian college].”

The next day, after talking with friends, I journaled, ending with an allusion to scripture, “I must examine forces, forces that I may not like listening too...am I afraid of the truth? No, as a Christian, keep me; I value *truth-telling* and I believe that *Perfect Love Casts Out Fear*.” Within a few days, I recorded that I met with my advisor. I told him that I worried about self-destruction but that I had begun to long for it. In my earlier doctoral work I had been pleased to affirm what I saw as true in my studies but took an elite stance in not allowing myself or my faith to be critiqued by what I studied. David wisely suggested I replace the metaphor of destruction with *reconstruction*.

My reconstruction included a reconsideration of the structuring of my gender. Throughout my journal, I commented again and again on my own gender and the relationship of my gender to my voice. In October, I read a leadership memoir of the postsecondary administrator, Jill Ker Conway. Once again, I held texts next to each other. An image I used for my new identity was removing the veil:

The veil must come entirely off—not just for expressions of the intellect but for expressions of the heart—and yet what is the expression of my heart but my passion and concern about my thinking....

The source of the veil was the main character, Orual, of C. S. Lewis's novel, *Till We Have Faces* (1956), a re-narration of Psyche and Cupid, that I had re-read in September. After writing of Conway, I jotted "I don't want to be Orual—a woman who veils herself, still woman and yet not woman to the men around herself."

Asking Who Am I?

In the second chapter of this time period, my questions and my confidence about questioning became more prevalent in my personal writing. By this time, I had separated my spiritual journal from my research journal. A key illustrative narrative from this time of questioning was when I remarked in my journal on a stunt I had pulled in my introduction to linguistics class that day.

In conservative Christian circles in the U. S., there are many who question the Bible version called Today's New International Version, a version that pluralizes some pronouns formerly translated in the masculine singular although the pronoun is representative of both male and female genders in the context. From my memory, I did the following: after hearing this version decried earlier on a February day in a student assembly, I rushed down the hall to cobble together a new opening lesson for my class. Later, I would record in my journal: "I don't know *me* anymore. Am I chameleon?" I then listed the conversations I had beforehand mostly in reference to the assembly speaker—two with men, two with women and wrote: "The two men probably think I'm conservative. The two women probably think I'm liberal." Afterwards, I remarked, "And then there was the TNIV activity I pulled in class today—getting them to see the premise for a different situation first [having the students realize the disparity in accepting a less narrow translation for people with emerging literacy, although, according to the assembly

speaker, apparently not for educated people of the U. S.]. Was that ethical? Who was that person?”

Naming and Interweaving Two Discourses of Academy

By December 2005, the differences between the academic discourse of the secular academy and the academic discourse of the Christian academy were magnified for me by a project in which I had to create an online identity, a webpage about myself for my conservative workplace. It was a project I did not want to complete:

It’s the interweaving of two discourses—no one wants you to have two primary discourses in your life—at least a few do. It’s why I can’t do a webpage at work, keep putting it off—I’d have to present myself to too many audiences—the secular academy, the Christian academy, even my family. I’m still learning to do that—to be me with two discourses interwoven—it’s meant the loss of close colleagues, my former theological advisors and the gaining of new ones—an art professor and a philosopher asking to do coffee with me—to talk philosophy, to have comrades.

Perhaps as a sign of my identity changing, I began to interweave discourses more tightly, making no explicit reference to incorporating the academic one in this journal directed to God. An example is from January 14, 2006. In my discouragement over the church, I had been pondering the metaphor from the gospels “the Kingdom of God” and was concerned that too many Christians were making their own kingdoms on earth. I wrote, applying the discourse theorist Gee: “Seeking the Kingdom is *not* making it—make disciples but not the kingdom—perhaps all creativity is simply *re-naming*—

perhaps the goal of a church should be to *name* instead of to make a kingdom...*recognize and pro-ject...*" (ellipses original).

Likewise, in early March, I recorded my appreciation for two Christian leaders and yet my concerns for their abuse of power. For one in particular, I had been considering her psychological/spiritual counseling approach for a relational issue, when another friend shared with me his own experience of this Christian leader's almost megalomania. I scribbled to God: "*YOU PROBLEMATIZE FOR ME—YOU SOMETIMES FEEL MORE POSTMODERN THAN ANYONE, EXCEPT YOU'RE HOLDING US.*" How different from August two years before when I worried, "And today, instead of praying for 'establishment' in you, I catch myself praying to be 'situated in you'—can that still be permanent?"

Discussion

I was concerned that to my workplace community interweaving multiple discourses would appear to be a lack of integrity as a Christian. Even among those Christians thinkers whom would be called "liberal" by that community, I have been surprised to find a similar response. After the two-year period of my primary research and in preparation for this writing, I read Christian theologian and ethicist Gustafson's book, *An Examined Faith: The Grace of Self-Doubt* (2004). In it I sought relief in his urge for U. S. Christians to critique their religious discourse and tacit theories, to examine Christianity by other disciplines, and to examine the human by other "interpretations." I resonated with his plead at the end, following a Harvard professor, "Don't exaggerate!"

Gustafson noted the "cognitive dissonance" of contemporary culture (p. 9) and in a fictive scenario described the multiple explanations for the world that a Christian

college student would encounter in a “liberating curriculum” (p. 20). He reminded his Christian readers that they assume scientific and sociological explanations in their discourse. They must because, whether intellectuals or not, all people are sufferers: “Every person who, in the face of severe pain, life-threatening illness, or other catastrophes, asks, ‘Why is God inflicting this on me?’ ” (p. 9). Generally, they choose which interpretation is true—scientific or religious. According to Gustafson, U. S. Christians, regarding religious and theological explanations, either 1) “reject” other explanations, 2) “accept” them, allowing them to “*determine* their theology or ethics” or 3) “accommodate” them, allowing them to “limit” or “license” theological explanations (p. 33, italics his). “The human,” he stated, “is an intersection in which various sciences intersect with a basis for ethics, ‘philosophical or theological’ ” (p. 19).

As much as I resonate with this, I resist it. Yes, major assumptions of multiple discourses often disagree. Perhaps a change for me is that there are situations in which I neither reject, accept, or accommodate the views of reality different from theological views. Recently, I felt best represented in this when I read the historical novels of Susan Howatch, who in her book jackets is touted for subsidizing academic lectures in the natural sciences and theology. Her novels about a healing ministry in a fringe of the high church of Anglicanism invite the readers into the ambiguity of either psychological or spiritual explanations for emotional and physical healing. Why cannot I stay in the ambiguity?

In novels, Bakhtin (1981) called this *heteroglossia*, the concept that the “dialogue” of different speaking styles, dialects, languages, and genre is a dialogue (sometimes implicit) of different social ideologies or worldviews. To become

ideologically conscious in Bakhtin's eyes, I cannot just receive the authoritative word, I have to have *internally persuasive discourse* within myself that is making selections, making words my own and yet always partly another's. This is self-critique. This is reconstruction.

Text as Sacred with Reduced Value for a Single, Narrow, Analytical Interpretation of Scripture

Again, the following loosely aligns with the chronology of the two years of my background and primary research. In this section, I tell the story of my loss of value for a single, analytical interpretation of scripture, and my increasing value, while maintaining that scripture was still sacred, for a variety of interpretations and of experiential readings with less analysis. I would begin to retreat from church services with long sermons interpreting scripture.

My Belief in Sacredness of Text with an Increased Value for a Variety of Interpretations

Like the immigrants in many of the congregational studies (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001; León, 1998), I had a narrow interpretation of scripture. In early August 2004, I interacted in my journal with Mark Noll's *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (1994) in which he presented the social construction of creationists' method of scriptural interpretation. I wrote for the first time that I was questioning a "literal" interpretation and added, "Help me, please." I read a literacy research article on genre and culture and on August 19 wrote:

I remember how sad I was to read [Madeline] L'Engle in *Newsweek* last spring or early summer say that conservative Christians took the Bible too literally and that of course the book of Job wasn't literal but a told story. Well, maybe, maybe if

based on genre...maybe I should be looking at interpretation of biblical texts from that time period as well...by considering such things will I soon be like Barbara Brown Taylor in saying that a Christian does not have to believe in the immaculate conception or the resurrection?

My fear was evident—to lose my narrow interpretation was equivalent to a loss of faith, and, thus, a loss of self. In the same entry, I recorded a comment I said to a friend, “My own method of interpretation is more tangible than Jesus to me.” I concluded: “It all goes back to literacy, it all goes back to *interpretation*. I don’t want to believe in anything. I don’t want to step off the deep end. I don’t want to lose You. Please let this be actual faith.” A week and a half later, I wrote that I saw how the apostle Paul seemed to have his own narrow interpretation of scripture but even he was situated in his time period—his thoughts were influenced by his society. Teary-eyed, I questioned, “Was Adam figuratively or non-figuratively the first man for him? Is it important?” I was crying a lot.

On September 12, I added to an earlier list of declarations, along with “Don’t commit suicide,” that “God’s Word is true.” This would be a tacit assumption throughout the rest of my journal, and in my blog a year later I described this as “when I told God that I’d keep believing in him and Jesus and the Bible as true, but I no longer knew what any of that meant.” I explain the significance of this assumption that I share with many Christians, that the text is fixed and sacred although it can be interpreted a variety of ways, in the chapters on literacy theory and on religion and ethnicity.

In addition to publicly advocating for a non-sexist translation in my introduction to linguistics course spring semester 2005, my spiritual journal indicates other openness

to interpretive issues. In agreement with a family member in a January 2005 entry, I stated, “we must not look through the Bible through one perspective—one hermeneutic—we must read and dialogue with those of other perspectives.” My journal also contained quotations from a paraphrased Bible version criticized by some evangelicals.

My unfolding openness to other interpretations is revealed by my long ponderings over a May exhibit of the Saint John’s Bible I had attended at a local art institute. I wrote to God in my journal that this contemporary illuminated Bible, which was much more than letters on a page, “made me aware of Your presence—that the gold webbing, flecks (symbols of you) across the sky in an illumination is true now even if unseen—My surroundings, myself, are ‘shot with’ your ‘grandeur.’” I stated, “Really an illumination is a kind of visual translation, with similar concerns of emphasis”—a shocking comment from someone from a fundamentalist Baptist background.

New Value of Experiential Reading of Scripture

At the end of August 2005, I wrote, “This summer I had to stop my one-year Bible reading--too emotionally exhausting, so I read the book of John imaginatively.” My new more imaginative reading of scripture had to do with the loss of connection I felt with God. I journaled on June 9, 2005, that I told a friend, “I still want the tangible Jesus. I want words and touch so strongly. She points out words in Scripture, but how I want you to touch me.” Later, in the same entry, I jotted, “I just read Knut Grónvik’s *Letting Scripture Read You*—entering Your Word with my senses, and thus You entering me, You who are so much bigger than me, You who enlarge me.” I then wrote the following. I had been:

reading that article and letting my mind sort of flit on what I had read in my Bible—trying to enter it as he said, “Imagine a God who sees Moses as beautiful.” And then I thought but I don’t just read the gospels, so I imagined entering Solomon’s temple....And suddenly, I realize I want to *contain* You....

Decreased Value for a Sermon—a Long, Explicit Interpretation of Scripture

Perhaps it was my reaction to the idea of trying to contain God that led me to discomfort with the orientation toward a long sermon typical in a U. S. evangelical church. In late August I recorded my appreciation for a quiet service in church. In December, I wondered in my journal that a church service should be primarily a sermon. A friend had asked me about my interest a new monastic community, which would not commit significant time to a sermon: “‘What about *ministry* of the *WORD*?’ And I say, “Perhaps, *lecto divina* [a slow, restful reading of scripture with little analysis].”

The disregard for this lengthy time period of explicit scriptural interpretation by one voice would return in my journal a couple months later. I had thought that attending an English-speaking church on Saturday evenings with friends would distance me from emotional enmeshment in Slavic Fellowship, but on February 5, 2006, I wrote:

I skipped church [the church I was visiting] (no car) Saturday night, and I need to be careful, found myself thinking that if I were to have any pastor preside at my wedding I would like “Ivan,” found myself curious about the membership process, wondering if a full English speaker could go through it—NOT GOOD.

Then, I wrote another one of my declarations, trying to fix a feeling in writing: “[*Church name I was visiting on Saturday nights*] is my church right now.” I included, “But it does

tell me something—the sermons are not that important to me—what I love about my Research Site is *Love*.”

Discussion

My recognition of wanting to “contain” God in my reading of the Bible had been forecasted in the comment I made to my friend the first summer of my dissertation: “My own method of interpretation is more tangible than Jesus to me.” In his book, *Is There Meaning in This Text* (1998), the theologian Vanhoozer has reflected on groups that he believes have a “idolatrous” relationship with the text, including deconstructivist readers, in celebrating their construction of the meaning without regard to the author, and fundamentalists, who in their unintentionally ironic form of New Criticism, are “Users,” who “confuse the text with their way of reading it” (p. 425). Appropriating New Critic William Wimsatt’s term “the verbal icon,” Vanhoozer suggested that scripture rather than a “verbal idol,” is a “verbal icon,” in which “something comes to us from beyond” (p. 460). The text is sacred. I cannot control its author or create it.

Furthermore, as Vanhoozer and others have commented, the traditional Protestant “*sola scriptura*” as the basis of authority is destabilized by a congregation’s insistence on their own narrow interpretation. For Vanhoozer (1998), “*fundamentalism teaches the authority of the text but practices the authority of the interpretive community*” (p. 425, italics his). In historical Protestantism, the authoritative “voice [of God] speaks through the Scriptures alone, to the accompaniment of preaching” (Ong, 1967, p. 294), which is the leaders’ primary method of expressing an interpretation that either guides or dictates the lives of the members of a congregation. As I explain in the next section, the tight

control of a congregation became very discomfiting to me, and the sermon orientation of an evangelical service was no longer attractive.

Value of an Interpretive Religious Community in Tension with Critique of Power

Relationships in an Interpretive Religious Community

In the section below, to show clearly the analytical categories that were dialectical during the time period of my background and primary research, I maintained the chronology roughly within each sub-section. The categories are critique of power relationship in an interpretive religious community (a congregation), value of an interpretive religious community, and imagined interpretive religious community, followed by a discussion.

Critique of Power Relationships in an Interpretive Religious Community

After reading the literacy historian Graff (1987b), on August 12, 2004, I had a new question: “What is legitimate power?” Followed by “How is power legitimately wielded in literacy practices?” A week later, I penned, “So I cry with frustration at [church newsletter] articles that seem about control, but isn’t this what a church is? Teaching what life with God should look like?” I read the Christian author, Phillip Yancey (1995), and wrote down quotations such as “Consistently, Jesus refused to use coercive power. He knowingly let one of his disciples betray him and then surrender himself without power to captor” (p. 246), and “is our first aim to change the external, political kingdom or to further God’s transcendent kingdom? In a nation like the U. S., the two easily get confused” (p. 249).

Christian views on gender were another issue that peppered my journal. I read Geraldine Brook's book (1995), *Nine Parts of Desire*, about conservative Muslims in the Middle East and noted:

They sound so much like conservative Christians....Their intellectual women have problems finding husbands who will take them as they are; they break into factions over specific interpretations of the text; their men and women are separated by fear of sexual tension/temptation as well; their young people avoid the dangers of western culture by drawing legalistic boundaries—radicalism that helps to define themselves as well.

What does this mean, LORD? It makes me want to regard such injunctions of women submitting to men as something [the apostle] Paul said because of his contextualization in the time.

In September, I read Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel, *The Handmaid's Tale* (1998), about a fundamentalist religion governing a section of U. S. territory, and compared it to another church newsletter from one of my Christian communities: "so I stay up to 4 a.m. reading *The Handmaid's Tale*. And I make all these connections later...[the pastor's] letter in the back of the [church newsletter] that equated doubt with unbelief, the front which advertised the women's fall kickoff—a new goal of 'homementoring'—making arts for the home to bless others." I added, "The emphasis on procreation for the 'marriage amendment,' doesn't that make a woman all about having babies?"

By January 2005 I was despondent about Christianity, and this depression is revealed in my spiritual journal when I considered the "kingdom" of God or heaven

references in the Gospels. I wrote on January 21, paraphrasing scripture, that the kingdom of God “starts modestly and grows significantly, how it’s worth selling everything you own to gain.” I add that the kingdom metaphor in scripture provides “identity, purpose, and power”; it is “guiding.” In March when I also recorded depression, I jotted down the scripture Mark 10:15, “Truly, I say to you , whoever does not receive the kingdom of God like a child shall not enter it,” attempting to assure myself that a depressed person is one with the humility of a child. However, the concern with the “kingdom” was that I noted church leaders created “safety and control in the name of ideals.” I found myself multiple times “crying over the condition of the church.”

Images would strike me in my dreams. I dreamed one night that I was trapped in a community with a building where leadership would not let anyone go. At another time, I scribbled to God, “And now I have nightmares—again living in a building with totalitarian reign.”

Value of an Interpretive Religious Community

My despondency over Christianity was held in tension with my commitment to remain connected to it. One of my early declarations for myself had been to stay for a time in my small group Bible study. On February 18, 2005, I wrote: “After a day when I felt reduced to almost to tears by exhaustion, I went to small group, and it bore reality to me, the reality of suffering for Your Name and the call to do it.” The theme of seeing reality would occur again and again. I wrote in August that instead of worry about what others would think, “tend[ing] the wrong dialogues,” I should be in “dialogue” God: “And this by the way is the power of SACRED TEXT—other voices shape the dialogue—I couldn’t see reality without them.”

After I had left my small group, the leader lent me the novel *Watership Down* (Adams, 1976), and based on this, in December I noted the common desire to start communities and that place was not necessarily important although a collective narrative was. I wrote in the same entry after interacting with some congregational researchers, mentioning a congregation as a “place of care” and Ammerman’s (1987) concept of “social capital of skills and connection” that “I wanted a Christian group to be with regular gatherings because *I want a place* (again, though, not physical) *to be needy*.”

By March of 2006, I had become encouraged by authors of books about Christianity who seemed aware of the complexity of reality. I read Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s (1954) *Life Together*, in which he shared principles from his secret seminary community in Germany during World War II:

Uncanny, I’m so grateful for this voice [Bonhoeffer] that spoke out of that environment—true Christian community occurs after we’ve despaired of it and ourselves, after we recognize we’ll never have the kind of closeness we want with others, and that the desire for closeness leads to control. Wow.

Later, in March, I jotted about a contemporary novel: “I’m reading the book *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson [2006], and it’s giving me hope, hope that religion can be beautiful and real and yet terrible.”

Imagined Interpretive Religious Community

Instead of despairing about congregations, I begin to imagine what a Christian interpretive community could look like. In February 2005, I noted the power relationships of not just Christian organizations but national governments. I addressed God on a book I read, *Toward A Theology of Beauty* (Navone, 1996), which quoted the

Catholic philosopher Lonergan, and asked, “*So would ethical power be authority that allows oneself to be critiqued?*” and included “[and] that allows opportunities for it.”

In my first blog entry in March of 2005, a key image for me was “wider place.” I applied the metaphor of wider place in two ways—to my individual identity, returning to the metaphor of “openness” and to my desire for community. A “wider place” in regards to a church was one with less emphasis on control, one that allowed multiple voices. I blogged in August 25, 2005:

So this is my question, if knowing God's love down to our toes is central to our faith as individuals, but also our corporate identity, why don't we experience belovedness more in church? (and I'm not saying any specific church since I'm in transition). I wonder if we're afraid we'll lose control emotionally or that people will compartmentalize Sunday morning as their only reality of Jesus.

I began to practice in my classroom, the “wider place.” In a June blog, I was considering the “project” of my writing theory class, that some of “the readings I [would] give my students will threaten some of their religious attachments that make them feel safe.” But I described the spaciousness of spirit to receive these readings as beautiful and stated my desire: “What I want as a teacher this year is to invite my students into God's spaciousness, to offer them the opportunity to be radically de-centered.” “Radically de-centered” was in reference to a book I read on beauty and ethics by Elaine Scarry (2001). After the course began, I blogged:

I released some control as I said I would, and the students on their own have led the discussions down deep golden veins. The souls in our circle of chairs are such good souls--a variety of masculine and feminine voices-

-sensitive, passionate, and sincere, and on the cusp of their vocations. And then there's my voice, surprisingly feminine to a couple of the guys I wonder, as we dialogue on topics that are usually addressed by an authoritative male.

I was recognizing that I do not have to come off with an oft-applied view in conservative Christian academy that authority is best maintained by a male teacher.

In my development of the ethics of the church, I wondered in my blog if churches should be better “namers.” In January 2006, after reading R. Jenkins (2008; 2004), I wrote a blog called “naming” in community. I mentioned how in western churches the leaders tended to produce additional texts about what the church is and what it should be, differentiating themselves from others, and stated that in one church in my experience “eventually for me the words closed in on themselves with no white space to draw a breath, becoming more impermeable to new words, other ideas.” I provided positive examples of “naming” and wrote: “There is a naming that induces creativity, that blesses, and there is a naming that controls, that produces what is called an ‘ascriptive culture’ in my studies, that defines ‘us’ and ‘them’ very narrowly.” I ended my blog with “as Christian communities, following a God who gives each of us a new name on a white stone [a reference to the book of Revelation], how do we name well?” Some days later, I journaled, intersecting Gee’s (2000) conceptualizations about literacy, “Seeking the Kingdom is *not* making it—make disciples but not the kingdom—perhaps all creativity is simply *re-naming*—perhaps the goal of a church should be to *name* instead of to make a kingdom...*recognize and pro-ject*.”

Discussion

Internally, by choosing my dissertation topic, I named myself as a critic of Christianity. I chose to appropriate critical theory, in order to understand my own tacit theories. Kincheloe and McLaren (2000) wrote that “critical qualitative researchers who understand the relationship between identity formation and interpretive lenses are better equipped to understand the etymology of their own assertions—especially the way power operates to shape them” (p. 288). They continued: “It was this dynamic that Antonio Gramsci had in mind when he argued that a critical philosophy should be viewed as a form of self-criticism” (p. 288). The critique of a church resulted in a critique of myself, impelling me to change the way I teach, the classroom community that I led, as well as to dream about what could be in a larger interpretive religious community.

For myself, “poststructuralism” has aided me in a new calling. As the Catholic sociologist Flanagan (2001) has argued, postmodernity has challenged both the church and sociology. It “in a curious way released sociology [or in my case qualitative literacy research] to see the ground of faith better, without the allures of the gods of reason who made science the belief of the discipline” (p. 152). Like the early critical theorists such as Freire or a critical hermeneut, I want to “name the world as a part of a larger effort to evaluate and make it better” (p. 290). I openly believe that a congregation can be a legitimate community with which to identify oneself, but while I have hope, by critiquing myself as a member of those who call themselves Christian, my study of one particular congregation is unlike the common dichotomizing of critical hermeneuts who “focus on domination and its negation, emancipation” (p. 290). Why cannot my naming be more like what the Christian ethicist O’Donovan (2002) described as the moral reflection,

rather than the moral deliberation, a community does together, naming to call something a common object of good? I can join my voice in naming values of a religious interpretive community including democratic ones such as a plurality of voice, which O'Donovan has insisted upon, understanding that an un-critiqued unity can lead to totalitarianism, an idolization of a collective identity. In a dissertation, this explanation of myself could cause concern for my description of the community of my study, but rather I can proceed in my description ethically because of my own self-awareness and my readers' awareness of my values.

CHAPTER 4

PEOPLE OF THE BOOK:

RELATIONSHIP OF IMMIGRANT RELIGION AND ETHNICITY

My Concept of Ethnicity in Dialogue with R. Jenkins'

One of the reasons I chose R. Jenkins' (2004) model of identity is that he not only conceptualized identity as discursive in form and incorporated multiple perspectives, but he also has done significant work with one type of identity: ethnicity. His contribution to the field in particular has been the book *Rethinking Ethnicity: Arguments and Explorations* (2008). He has called the following propositions "the basic social anthropological model of ethnicity":

- Ethnicity is a matter of 'cultural' differentiations (bearing in mind that identity is always a dialectic between similarity and difference);
- Ethnicity is a matter of shared meanings—'culture'--but it is also produced and reproduced during interaction;
- Ethnicity is no more fixed than the way of life of which it is a part, or the situations in which it is produced and reproduced; and
- Ethnicity is both collective and individual, externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification.

(p. 169)

These propositions are congruent with his concept of identity as an internal-external dialectic of self-definition, always social. He is social constructivist in thought but not purely so. He corresponds well with discourse and NLS studies because he understands that the identity process always includes categorization—that it is a way we make

meaning as humans. And that the outside categorization affects our understanding of ethnicity, not just the inner definitions. Due to categorization, the significance of power and authority matches that in the NLS. Categorization has consequences. I must not neglect in my brief presentation of R. Jenkins' model of ethnicity that he and other social sciences are sure to mark that researchers' categorizations contribute to the construction of ethnicity itself.

The depth of R. Jenkins' model corresponds as discursive, poststructuralist in that it aids the researcher in considering not only the differences, essentializing the ethnic collectivity, but also the "default" position that the researcher may be coming from. The researcher who shares similarities with a collectivity of study may overlook these similarities in the glare of the differences. Analogically, this concept is like people who claim that they do not have a dialect but determine that those outside of their region do. According to R. Jenkins (2008), "We need to remind ourselves all that time that each of *us* participates in an ethnicity—perhaps more than one—just like *them*, just like the Other, just like the 'the minorities'" (p. 15). He continued: "Recognizing that ethnocentrism is routine and understandable, as routine and understandable as the invisibility of one's own identity, does not absolve us from the need either to struggle against it, or to make ourselves more visible (to ourselves)" (p. 15).

A criticism of R. Jenkins' description of ethnicity is that it does not appear to be about the "cultural stuff": those things we often think of when we apply the folk idea of the word *ethnicity*--traditions, language, etc. While believing there is a "real" to be studied, he has been criticized for leaning so far toward social constructionism that he could "pave the way" for relativism other than methodological relativism (Voas, 2003).

Following Frederik Barth, R. Jenkins (2008) has insisted that the emphasis of research should be on the boundaries and not “the cultural stuff”—and yet neither should content be neglected. To study the content of the boundaries, he examines the virtualities. For example, in *Rethinking Ethnicity* (2008), he has determined that the Northern Ireland conflict should be categorized as a political and national conflict rather than a religious one, despite the various nominalizations of “Protestant” and “Catholic.” Religion plays a part, contributes to ethnic identity, but it is secondary.

I suspect that R. Jenkins is likely right—for many people, religion is secondary to their ethnicity, but as immigrant congregational studies have shown, religion sometimes appears to be primary. If religion and ethnicity were on a continuum, when is religion more primary and ethnicity not? It sounds like the kind of question that R. Jenkins would like, but R. Jenkins, I believe, has tended to neglect religion as I mentioned in chapter 1. Oddly enough, R. Jenkins has viewed kinship, ethnicity, and even class as possible primary identities, one in which children would be socialized, with no mention of religion, implying that it is embedded within those categories. But, as A. D. Smith (2003) has argued, to treat religion as *only* secondary to ethnicity leads to overlooking its significant impact regarding the construction of nations.

To continue this discussion, I need to return to definitions. For R. Jenkins’ (2008) the propositions of ethnicity above means that ethnicity is the general term: “the communal, the local, the national and the ‘racial’ are to be understood as historically and contextually specific social constructions on the basic ethnic theme, allotropes of ethnic identification” (p. 45). These all have their own ideologies, and there are not clear boundaries. In fact, differences he has stated are the consequences of those social

realities: “rights and responsibility, or access” (p. 43). When I read this, I was somewhat confused—those rights, those responsibilities, and access have not to do with solely interactions of boundaries, but what is inside the boundaries—what makes meaning for the individuals, meaning that, nonetheless, is given shape by the outside of the boundaries. His words have to do with content.

For example, R. Jenkins has defined nationalism as “an *ideology or ideologies of ethnic identification, historical contingency and variation, a state context, ethnic criteria of political membership* and a claim to a *collective historical destiny*” (2008, p. 167, italics his). He has devised a definition that is both constructional by focusing on what nationalism does, along with content, “a claim to collective historical destiny.” Thus, content of differences is important albeit changing and virtual. As the literacy and language rights advocate May (2007) has explained, ethnicity scholarship has tended toward several dichotomies, actually overlapping, such as modern versus postmodern, primordial versus situational, intrinsic versus instrumental, and content versus boundaries (p. 28). May has asserted that the best understanding of ethnicity combines both construction—for him, Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*--and content—for him, A. D. Smith’s notion of *ethnie*. A. D. Smith (2003) who also has had an ethnic framework for notions of nationality, nationalism, and so on uses both functional, including the interactions of the community, and substantive definitions for religion, including the belief—the content: “a quest for individual and collective salvation in a supraempirical cosmos that guides and controls our everyday world” (p. 24). In his work, he does the opposite of R. Jenkins in that he has tended toward the content with the risk of essentializing the perceptions of the category.

I suggest that I can utilize R. Jenkins' concept of ethnicity, which emphasizes the ascriptive, and draw together both construction and content in my analysis. By applying Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) categories, including one examining power relationships, I do this and maintain content analysis by plucking at the threads of narrative, symbol, and imagination. Like in A. D. Smith's book *Chosen Peoples: Sacred Sources of National Identity* (2003), religion can include some of content in its definition and still be constructive. I can follow A. D. Smith, in his definition of religion—community with a belief in the transcendent, but unlike Smith, not overemphasize belief. I define ethnicity with R. Jenkins' propositions plus an assumption about a belief in a collective descent in regards to “shared meaning.”

It may be one reason that R. Jenkins tended toward content-avoidance is that his studies in Northern Ireland and in Denmark have not dealt with immigrant populations who are desperate to keep their identity as differentiated from those who surround them and yet assimilate into culture. At this point, it would be good to review understandings of assimilation for immigrants.

Assimilation and Ethnic Identity

I have surveyed scholarship on various models of the course of immigrant adjustment to illustrate some of the complexity of experience affecting identity. The outcome of adjustment to a new environment in which persons identify themselves with another group and undergo a loss of the boundaries that distinguished them as members of their initial group is *assimilation* (Barkan, 1995). Barkan (1995) has portrayed the processes leading to assimilation as overlapping, multi-factored, and experienced differently for each individual, not meant to be a “straight-line” model of adjustment but

like Gans' (1994) oft-quoted phrase a “bumpy-line theory.” Due to the highly politicized nature of the word *assimilation*, Barkan has been careful to note that he has described assimilation, not prescribed it. He has listed these stages as *contact*—upon entrance to the country, immigrants are surviving based on their former culture’s understandings, *acculturation*—interaction with the dominant group leads to taking on some cultural understandings of that group, *adaptation*—a second generation is born and relationships are made with outsiders who have positions of power, *accommodation*—group members have grown in status outside of the group through education and jobs, *integration*—distinctive group practices are “residual,” and finally *assimilation*. Also throughout these stages, individual members speak their own language less and the dominant language more, and their attention shifts from thoughts toward their home country to thoughts to the new one.

In response to adjusting, many immigrants form a sense of ethnic identity that they may have not explicitly recognized before. The relationship of ethnic identity and assimilation is a debated one among sociologists. Keeping with the theme of irregularity in the process of adjustment, Portes and Zhou (1993) have pressed in a different direction for “segmented assimilation”: the process of adjusting results in numerous ethnic identities based on conditions such as race or class. Rumbaut (1996) employed this theory in studying the second generation. One ethnic identity, he noted, was that of a combination of discrimination, an inner city setting, and a lack of peer ethnic community which facilitates young people to align themselves with U. S. born minorities as “reactive adversarial subcultures of underclass youth”—gangs (p. 126).

Kim and Hurh (1993) after their interviews of 622 Korean adults in Chicago argued that assimilation (associated for them with *replacement*) and pluralism (associated with ethnic *attachment*) do not have to be mutually exclusive. Besides these two types of adaptation, the others are *additive* or the “adhesive pattern of adaptation,” *blending* or *synthesis*, and *marginalization* (a lack of attachment with the original and the dominant group). Of most interest, is the type they named *additive*. This “adhesive pattern of adaptation” as theorized in an earlier work of theirs (Hurh & Kim, 1984) is associated with attachments to both the dominant society and the Korean one in various sociocultural dimensions of the participants’ lives. Kim and Hurh have concluded that in some dimensions Koreans are “Americanized” such as food choices, are ethnically attached such as in kinship relationships, and have additive practices such as in activation of both English and Korean and friendships in both groups.

To preserve their ethnic community, immigrants may teach their first language to their children. Part of the symbolic value of language is that of boundary (J. A. Fishman, 1989b). But for a language of an ethnic group to be maintained, more ethnocultural boundaries than this have to be established: boundaries must be constructed to prevent the overwhelming outside influence (1989e). To reverse language shift, minority language communities such as an immigrant community must at the least have children’s education communicated in their language (J. A. Fishman, 1990; May, 2007). In such a school, students could exercise the literacy of their language and culture, ethnic literacy practices being “among the most powerful stuff” shaping students’ identities (J. A. Fishman et al., 1985, p. 432). However, the endeavor of their own school is by far beyond the resources of immigrants, who instead send their children to monolingual

public school, dominated by peers and teachers of other group memberships, increasing the rate of the assimilation for the immigrant community.

The “Theologizing Experience” and Ethnicity in Immigrant Congregations

Although a literacy study, the rest of this thesis cannot begin with a theory of literacy, it must begin with the premise that makes literacy methodology ideal, that is, the “theologizing experience” of immigrants. T. L. Smith (1978) described the immigrant experience before 1965 as one of isolation, remorse, and yearning. In such an upheaval of desire and emotion, “the mysteries of individual existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie cried out for religious explanation” (p. 1174). For the post-1965 immigrants, the situation may be even more complex since the perceptions of race diversity are greater and “transnationalism,” travel to the home country permanently or temporarily, has increased (Warner, 1998, p. 15).

The religious explanation immigrants “return” to, according to Yang and Ebaugh (2001), is theology, scripture and ritual. These provide a rationale for institutional change to a congregational style like U. S. churches, to resolve the tensions of a congregation that has brought multiple traditions, and to respond to pluralism in the U.S (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001). In their study, they observed mosques becoming not only a place to pray but a place to study as interviewees claimed they had been in the past and a Hindu temple becoming a place for believers from varying groups to decide on the “essentials” of their faith by examining classical Hindu texts. All congregations in encountering pluralism made “universal and absolute claims,” including the Eastern religions, Yang and Ebaugh asserted, who “frequently claim that their religion possesses some unique beliefs and practices” (p. 281). The return to foundations creates a notion of

certainty in an uncertain world for immigrants who are “hungrier than most Americans” for internal stability (p. 281). Yang and Ebaugh have been careful to announce that although an emphasis on theology has echoes of fundamentalism since a congregation sometimes metamorphoses to a more conservative traditional society (Abusharaf, 1998), it can result in the making of “liberal or liberating ideas and actions—liberating followers of religion from stifling cultural traditions and sectarian limitations” (p. 281). In addition, believers often become more inclusive to those of other ethnicities who have high regard for the same text, rituals, or founders.

In their chapter on the role of immigrant congregations in “reproducing ethnicity,” Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) have commented that these kinds of changes are transitions in identity, emphasizing religious identity more and expanding ethnic identity to include other groups. But if transition with these characteristics is the case, the phrase “reproducing ethnicity” may be a misnomer. It has been well noted that the relationship of religion and ethnicity, and religious and ethnic identities, cannot be unwoven easily or entirely (Hammond & Warner, 1993; Toulis, 1997). For example, some researchers have observed that in the congregations of their study, religion and ethnicity became indistinguishable, as in the example of Korean immigrant churches (Chong, 1998; Pak, 2003). One researcher, Chong, in her sociological research of second-generation Korean church members concluded that being Korean was fused with being Christian: members seemed to have forgotten that values between traditional Korean culture and Christianity were similar. In contrast, Toulis explained that “faith and ethnic identity were neither indivisible nor interchangeable concepts” for the members of a British Pentecostal Jamaican church, unlike Rastafarians, whose identity as Black and their religion were

tightly interwoven to the point of transposable since the basis of both was their experience of racism (p. 169).

A more apt term for self-identity transitions such as the ones Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) discussed is re-creation. The dual role of assimilation and maintenance carried out through religion indicates a newly crafted ideological system. If the group has formed in a way that ideologically veers from the heritage country's ethnicity, then religion has factored in constructing or re-constructing new self-definitions of their ethnic identity. J. A. Fishman's (1989a/1977) term of "re-ethnification" can be re-construction, not only full assimilation. Sociologists, such as Hammond and Warner (1993) who have insisted that the ties of religion and ethnicity are "weakening" (p. 66) when Hispanics become Pentecostal rather than Catholic or African Americans become Black Muslims rather than Protestants are mistaken: new ethnic self-definitions are birthing—with new symbols or re-interpreted symbols. They are restricting ethnicity to situated place rather than the potential of new interpretations of sacred text or newly appropriated sacred text, resulting in non-place identities.

For individuals, the virtuality of the collective definition may feel conflicting, not fused. Yang (1999) has illustrated the multiplicity of identity constructions for individuals in his published dissertation of his ethnographic work in a Chinese church. He applied the framework of an "adhesive pattern of adaptation" to explain the "adhesive identities" of the church members. Three general identities—Christian, Chinese, and American—were asserted in the church. Some members identified more with one or two but not the other. Some maintained all three at once. Within those that exhibited all three, various patterns existed of dominance. The first pattern, "fragmentary integration"

was one of dominance in one identity (p. 183). The second, “fusive integration,” was a synthesis of American and Chinese in which the individual felt disenfranchised by Americans and by the Chinese, never fitting in either group (pp. 183-184). The third “adhesive integration” is the combination of all three identities in such a way that an individual believes he or she has drawn positively from each identity in order to interact without difficulty in a variety of situations whether in church, with Chinese, or with Americans (p. 185). Toulis (1997) portrayed similar combinations among individual Jamaican church members, those who saw ethnicity and religion as “overlapping,” those who saw ethnicity and religion as “overlapping” but separate from Black identity, and those who saw religious identity as “transcendent” of ethnic identity.

Identity, Religion, and Ethnicity

At this point, I must turn from the construction, the boundaries, to focusing on the content. As stated before, *religion*, as I conceive it, is a community with beliefs in and response to the existence of something transcendent outside of normal human experience. Warner (1998) has argued that religions are not scripture but “living communities” (p. 9). His view “stands opposed to that historically Protestant attitude, deeply seated in much of American culture that holds that true religion is found outside the world” (p. 9). Although I agree that religion is not the texts themselves, it is a community’s interpretation of them as lived response. This is evident of the religious communities who are attempting to find the essentials of their faith, “pure” religion among groups of diverse background: they are hoping to transcend cultures (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001) as shown by the Pakistan man who asked about wearing a cap during prayer: “Is that really Islamic? Or culture?” (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001, p. 280). Most

of the world's major religions can be described as "text-based" since they insist that they have writings that explain the transcendent and a way of life in response. Others may have ritual or oral stories that serve as unwritten texts.

When viewed as separate categories, the similarity between religion and ethnicity is apparent—both provide meaningfulness to every life experience of their members. In one article, J. A. Fishman borrowed questions from LePage and Tabouret-Keller (1982) to discern how ethnicity influences ways of life (J. A. Fishman, 1989c/1977, p. 11). The questions were "Who are we? From where do we come? What is special about us?" (p. 11). Such questions could also be asked of a member of religious congregation, steeped in history, including historical texts. Both Jews *and* Christians may respond: we are children of God following generations before us back to the days of the Old Testament patriarchs. T. L. Smith (1978) noted that early Jewish *and* Christian immigrants associated themselves with being a "covenant" people of God in their immigrant journey (p. 1177).

The use of religious myth to shape identity, such as the biblical narratives of the "covenant people," is the basis of a collection of essays, *Religion and the Creation of Race and Ethnicity*. Prentiss (2003), the editor, has asserted that, although there are other contributing factors, religion is a major factor in the construction of ethnicity. Factors other than religion and migration affecting the re-construction of ethnicity may be "war, conflict, conquest, enslavement, or simply coexistence" (Sollors, 1986, p. 57). Martin (1997) in his discussion of religion and ethnonationalism cites the impact of "industrialization, urbanization, migration, or mass communication" (p. 5) on traditional societies. However, these additional factors if not a form of migration, have echoes of

migration, of identity encountering exile from what was known before, whether living with new neighbors or new technology: “self-identity is challenged by change” (p. 7).

In the following, I have explained in detail how one religion in particular, Christianity, could construct a sense of peoplehood. I chose Christianity because of its significance to the subject of this study, but I believe that applications for other religions could be made as well. For my explanation, I have borrowed three content-focused notions from J. A. Fishman (1989a). Paternity, has to do with “being.” It is the sense of a blood relationship, of what is “unalterable” about ethnicity, and the desire to have roots. Avoiding sexism, I call it *heredity*. Patrimony or “behaving,” what I call *heritage*, is cultural ways of doing life. Phenomenology is the meaning of both of these to individuals of an ethnic group, including their perceptions of their own and others’ ethnicities. Avoiding diverting to boundaries, I titled this last section *meaningfulness*.

To discuss Christianity along these three characteristics, I have incorporated the concepts of two Christian scholars in the fields of literature and literacy. One is the Roman Catholic Ong (1967, 1977, 1982). Ong’s argument that the alphabet created a consciousness and focus on objectivity in humans was neglectful of the importance of ideology, but he was insightful in his explanation of the relationship of scriptural text to its readers. The second scholar is the Protestant Jeffrey (1996), whose major work *People of the Book: Christian Identity and Literary Culture* defended historical Christianity against the poststructuralist accusation that Christians were logocentric.

Christianity as Ethnic Heredity

It is, I claim, the assumed fixedness, *entextuality* (Collin & Blot, 2003), of scripture that provides the sense of rootedness wanted by people undergoing change.

This fixedness provides stability and yet also the freedom to interpret the text to engage with the constraints and strangeness of massive change (Barton, 1994, p. 63). In reference to this concept in an unpublished work by Parry (1982) on Hindusim, literacy researcher Street (1984) noted that in his own study of Koranic “maktab” literacy, it is the fixedness of the texts that grant authority to the interpreter, allowing multiple interpretations for dialogue. Street explained that stories of the Hadith, commentaries and reports of the Prophet Muhammad and his sayings and doings, although considered “fixed” are never “frozen” since they are re-read and re-told to engage with current issues and technology (p. 139).

Religious text offers something unalterable when assumed as fixed. Individuals’ understandings of ethnicity and race are alterable, dynamic, and based on perceptions. This is obvious in the U. S. As Prentiss (2003) pointed out, the U. S. government changes its racial descriptors on a regular basis, also signifying their status as “social and political realities,” despite the language of “construction” (p. 2). A religion may provide something perceived as unalterable or reinforce the unalterability of the perceived heredity. African slaves sent to the U. S. were from varying ethnic groups, and their descendents are now united as the same ethnicity, strongly influenced by Protestant Christianity, although other narratives, such as the Black Islam have also been formative towards the end of the last century (Glaude, 2003).

To regain a sense of ethnicity, a broken or oppressed people may develop historical myths or appeal to religious ones. Centered on the subject of this study, the history of the Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union is particularly telling as provided by Olcott (1997). Other states in the former Soviet Union, such as Ukraine and

Belarus, had been divided up by ethnicity, but Stalin set his own boundaries on the Central Asia states, which were composed of vast numbers of clans and multiple languages. During the collapse of the Soviet Union, people considered themselves Kazakhs and so on, but Soviet leadership had “muddled the history of earlier states in such a way that there were no logical historical ‘heirs’”: however, Central Asians knew enough of history to form their own political entities (p. 79). In their reconstructing of history, the Kazakhs have recognized their state as an extension of the regime of sixteenth and seventeenth-century khans, and the Uzbeks have declared “that their ancestors have always been ‘Uzbeks,’ rather than simply part of the Turkic tribesman or Turco-Persian city dwellers who populated Transoxiana” (p. 81). Nationalism can be rationalized based on a construction of ethnicity as shown. Likewise, some Central Asians have appealed to the common religion of Islam to unite members of states (p. 79). One of my Russian-speaking friends, before my study began, told me that the people who claim to be racially related to her back in Central Asia would disown her for being a Christian. And yet here, because of her accent, she will likely never be considered an “American” by native U. S. citizens. Therefore, she says, her ethnicity is her Christian faith.

To understand a community’s culture, we must understand the meaning-making processes of individuals as provided by the community (Hanauer, 2001). I recognize, in the forming of ethnicity, three options to respond to an apparently fixed text that tells of the transcendent. As with literature, members of a community may choose to compare a scriptural narrative to their own stories to frame them in new ways, such as the Puritans and African Americans did with the exodus, each with their own interpretation. Second, members of a community may choose to join the narratives of scripture as many Puritans

and African Americans did or have who consider themselves devout believers in spiritual lineage with the characters of the text. Third, members of a community may append scripture, to not only join it but add their own fixed written text. In a situation of resistance, religious community members may create additional scripture as the basis for new revelation. Probst (1993) in his literacy research described a Christian splinter group in West Nigeria, in which the leader Josiah Oshitelu, claimed to have a series of visions which he wrote down as addition to the scriptural text. Oshitelu's texts created another community, another identity, challenging religious colonizing forces.

Although all overlapping, the second pertains the most closely to this study. The unalterability of the text offers the unalterability of the people gathered around the text. A religious myth could fulfill the desire for a historical collective memory, one that claims to transcend cultures and ethnicities. Why is it that Christians see themselves as the people of God in line with an ancient Middle Eastern historical people? Scriptural text invites believers into a spiritual history. First-century Christians' interpretation of the Hebrew Scriptures was that of "prophecy and fulfillment" centered on the incarnation, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Pelikan, 2005). The early Christians in the writing of the books of the New Testament saw themselves in line with the patriarchal fathers and, as the apostle Paul, who instated the Christian use of typology, wrote, "grafted" into the same root (Rom. 12:17). "This literary theory of Jesus," as Jeffrey (1996) has called the apostle Paul's hermeneutic, is a "radical proposal for re-reading the entire Hebrew Scriptures" (p. 60). The Hebrew texts became a "*prolepsis*, a text preliminary to another text, dependent for closure and full meaning up

that which is now to come” (p. 60), words only somewhat fulfilled by the first coming of Christ and expectation of the second.

Ong (1977) has called the Bible “radically historical” in that its narratives may be missing in “closure” as in other literature (p. 264). He pointed out two characteristics of the Bible: its “futurity” and its “special status of textuality” in its teachings on Jesus Christ as the Word (p. 261). The canon seems closed to addition, but its futurity is noticeable in that the historical and spiritual narrative of God’s people remains open. Near the end of the final book of the New Testament, the apostle John proclaims “The one who testifies to these things says, ‘Surely I am coming soon.’ Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!” (Rev. 21:20, New Revised Standard Version). According to Ong, the belief in a resurrected Christ, “the living and incarnate Word,” whose spirit dwells among his believers “gives the biblical text the life of faith at all times” (p. 270). The story is not done (p. 263).

In one of my initial visits to Slavic Fellowship, a preacher, Alex, delivered an entire sermon on scripture and Jesus Christ. He pointed out, as Pelikan (2005) did, scriptural passages from the gospels that declare Jesus as fulfillment of teachings in the Hebrew Scriptures. Through the interpreter, I heard the statement, “Christ and the scriptures are the same thing.” For Christians, this belief that Jesus is the Word of God as fulfillment or living text gives them a new identity as the people of God, who are united to Jesus in their faith. Their multiple individual stories are joined to the story of Jesus, which is, Wright (1992), a theologian oriented toward historical narrative, has asserted, the re-telling of Israel’s story according to New Testament writers.

A scriptural narrative also provides an imagined place. National narratives, whom A. D. Smith (2003) has argued have sources in scriptural narratives, include a place, a “homeland” as Hanauer (2008) has indicated in his discussion of non-place identity. It is fitting that one of LePage and Tabouret-Keller’s (1982) questions regarding ethnicity is focused on place: “From where do we come?” The three options I have proposed of ethnicity formed in response to a sacred text correspond. A pastor’s sermon at the opening of this dissertation illustrated a comparison of the promised land about to be entered by the biblical character Joshua to a spiritual promised land for his listeners. Slavic Fellowship took their inclusion in the scriptural narrative even more literally with their particular theological interpretation, recognizing the nation-state of Israel as predominant in their regard. Thirdly, a religious people may not only create a promised land in their imagination with a real-world reference of a scriptural account, such as Israel, they could also do as the Mormons did, producing a textual narrative that claimed a new promised land in the U. S.

The identification of what would appear to be culturally strange Middle Eastern texts to immigrants in a re-formation of their ethnicity in the U. S. is facilitated by their own language in religious contexts. Organizations such as Wycliffe Bible Translators have made biblical texts available in minority languages, and publishing is comparably cheap in western nations. Considered hereditary in a mystical manner of deep connection, language has been characterized by J. A. Fishman (1994) as a *symbol* of culture, an *index* of culture, and a *part* of culture (1994). J. A. Fishman has tied language to both ethnicity and religion: “What would religion be without language?”: this

connection may designate language as sacred even outside of a religious gathering (1989b, p. 7). Language's importance to ethnic identity cannot be overstated:

I am not really "me," the true me, the real me, the whole me, unless, I am free to speak whatever language whenever I want to, unless I am free to maintain my customs, to raise my children so that they will be able to continue and treasure those ethnolinguistic gifts that I continue and treasure, and in terms of which I define myself, know myself, express myself, and relate myself to my nearest and dearest. (1985a, p. 451)

And yet J. A. Fishman (1989b) has admitted that this link is not essentialized, that ethnicity can continue without the original language: "However, the empirical truth that the knot *can* be untied, does not change the phenomenological truth that the link is indissoluble, nor the objective truth that even the continuous component in the new compound is not really identical with what it was in the old compound" (1989b, p. 180). For later generations of immigrants, using English may even become a way of conveying one's identity as an ethnic American in the pluralistic U. S. (J. A. Fishman, Reidler-Berger, Koling, & Steele, 1985).

Christianity as Ethnic Heritage

As well as the people of God, Christians may call themselves the children of God, suggesting again heredity but also heritage. The multiple genres of scriptures can be applied to both heredity but also heritage of ethnicity. Possibly the more narrative passages, including genealogies, provide a history of who believers are, while the expository ones provide instruction on how they are to live. In the narration of the gospels, Jesus called God "Father," and in the didactic letters of the rest of the New

Testament, the apostles used the language of family as grounds for moral behavior within the Christian community and in society. This caring for one another is the lived response in addition to the belief produced by interpretation of scripture. In their observations of immigrant congregations, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) noted that they become “community centers” and a place for social services, locations that conduct the “emotion-work that many have associated with families” (Wittner, 1998, p. 370). A Hmong man claimed in a literacy study (Weinstein-Shr, 1993): “I don’t have family here—I have my church” (p. 293).

Recognizing other Christians as family evokes a new loyalty over one’s biological family. Goody (1968) has made comments about the enculturating implications of not just Christianity but any “literate religion” or “religion of the book” which in the “universalistic” appeal to conversion can join inside groups with outside groups while creating separation within a family, restructuring society (p. 2). For Christians the commitment to the care of another group of people is intensified by a strange tension of New Testament writers on which Pelikan (2005) remarked: believers are to live with the expectation that Jesus would descend in his second coming at any moment and be ready. With such an attitude, a group of immigrants gathered as a congregation in the U. S., like the people of Israel after the exodus, form some of their own governance with ethical requirements for its operation, and even disciplinary consequences for those who do not abide by these requirements. Their interpretation of scripture may allow for a lived response much like their previous cultural norms, although the meaning may be changed, as Toulis (1997) described for the Jamaican Christians who through “symbolic

transformation” recognized food, language, and other symbols as also spiritual, ones that “incorporate and transcend ethnic particularity” (p. 207).

Besides the family-like obligations, the texts of the apostle Paul’s letters appeal to another vision of morality, this one an individual one—the imitation of Christ. Sollors (1986) saw the almost countless examples of the Christ figure in ethnic American literature from the 1700s through the 1900s as “the strongest evidence for the pervasiveness of typology in the American imagination” (p. 50). The Word as the scriptures was rewritten, re-interpreted or told as the Word, an imitation of Christ.

In Jeffrey’s (1996) argument against the accusation that all Christians are logocentric, he has noted, as Street did about the Koran, the text is “fixed” but not frozen—Christians do understand the fleeting nature of language. There is a text other than the Bible as the subject of their focus. Jeffrey has pointed to the apostle Paul’s emphasis of the spirit and not the letter (2 Cor. 3:1-6). When Paul wrote about having this treasure in clay jars (2 Cor. 4:7-11), he is writing about, not the words on the page, but the Word of God in persons. Jeffrey wrote:

the better text is the life of Jesus, and the only time this text can be ‘read’ and handed on is when, through death to the obtrusive self, the imprint of Jesus becomes legible in the mortal flesh, ‘the earthen vessel’ (KJV), of an ordinary life. Ironically, the most necessary ‘text’ is thus the most vulnerable; yet *imitatio Christi* becomes hereafter the only mode of authentic ‘reading’ for Christian People of the Book. (p. 70)

Such a statement moves us to the discussion of phenomenology.

Christianity and Ethnic Meaningfulness

If many Christians do read the scriptures to become like Christ, this interpretation invests their events, actions, and understanding of the world with a different meaning than other forms of interpretation would. Jeffrey (1996) has insisted, following Augustine, that “meaning resides in the person” for Christians (pp. 4, 6). Believers’ language and selves, according to Augustine, were to be read by others (p. 9). In a likewise manner emphasizing personal meaningfulness, Ong (1977) viewed interpretation as Ricoeur did, “appropriation”—Christians are expected by the content of the text to interpret it, to appropriate it so that it is “interiorized” (p. 268). The “great introspective religious traditions” have texts (1982, p. 105). Ong (1967) has stated that Christians never find what the scriptures “mean,” but by studying them are joined in “continuity” with them, “a living continuity in which all other meanings have their home” (p. 320). For Ong, the Catholic Church was the “continuity of the revelation with its past” in typical Ong fashion as the current “spoken word” (p. 320).

Freire (1970/2003) saw literacy as an opportunity for those marginalized to “name” their reality. Because religious literacy involves the type of appropriating, meaningful interpretation of text that Ong and Jeffrey have discussed, ample space is given for a community, in the case of this dissertation, an immigrant community to re-name their reality in their host country. Christian theologians, such as Brueggeman (2001), have made the argument that the “deep memory” of the exodus and the Israelites’ designation as a “covenant people” provided liberating hope for them in exile later in their history in the Hebrew Scriptures. When ethnic communities appropriate this deep memory for their own, they are able to engage from a position of felt power rather than

felt marginalization: they have a “new spiritual code in which they are advantaged” affecting their reality and thus their hope (Toulis, 1997, p. 207).

León (1998), in a social science study, observed this interpretation in a large Los Angeles evangelical church, Alcance Victoria, composed of Mexican Americans and Mexican immigrants. He commented that members of the church became “masterfully adept at weaving social and political discourses into their own understanding of the Gospel and the Alcance Victoria message” (p. 185). The process of this was not an individual activity: “They arrive at a particular vision of the world that responds to their own crises and issues, yet this peculiar stance is based on their communion with a community of biblical interpretation” (p. 185).

Because the text is considered fixed but the interaction with the text is not, the interpretation is not the same for each community or even each individual. Sollors (1986) cited the multiple ethnic interpretations of Acts 17: 26 (all nations of “one blood” in older Bible translations) to support various visions of the U. S.’s future by blacks and whites throughout its history. León (1998) has suggested that Alcance Victoria reshaped itself in response to external pressures because of the ways in which members interpreted scripture, literally, and yet with a “malleable enough” approach to suit a wide variety of congregants (p. 190). According to Prentiss (2003), the constant change of circumstances for a community produces alternative interpretations of the text, while “maintaining the centrality of their mythologies” (p. 9). The predominant interpretation within the dialogue of these differing interpretations is the holder of power in a community.

Ng (2002) found that while the pastor of an immigrant Chinese church’s conversion story was one of being saved from sin and being “born again,” the stories of

newer members were ones of physical blessings in their life in the U. S. Their God myth was one of a “tutelary god” rather than a “savior,” and their identity fit well with being children of God rather than the saved. Yet these newcomers were welcome in this community by their recent tie to the text—however, they were not the ones in power although in the context of the U. S. where they may choose to find another congregation, they may have been able to challenge the power structure. The Christian teaching, as Probst (1993) has indicated outside of the U. S., that everyone has access to God’s truth in the Bible can lead to a “democratising element that inevitably challenges any clerical meritocracy that tries to establish itself as the custodian of the truth and supervise a correct interpretation of scripture” (p. 211).

I have attempted to depict the interpretation of scripture as complex, multiple, and powerful in the interpreters’ goal to become something other, for Christianity, the Word, Christ himself. In the process of interpretation, religious text’s fixedness and myth are major factors in ethnicity construction. Unfortunately, scriptural interpretation has been underemphasized or engaged with poorly by many contemporary researchers. Because of the identity-making construction of religious literacy in an immigrant congregation and the power differentials that influence community, the New Literacy Studies methodology as poststructuralist and social-constructivist appears apt with this study. However, as I began my initial work, and through dialogue with my advisor, I became aware of constraints of NLS for this particular context. In the next chapter, I introduce the foundational early work of ethnographic literacy before I delineate my critique and discuss the methodology of the Lancaster group, and survey related studies.

CHAPTER 5

SITUATING THE NEW LITERACY STUDIES AND IDENTITY FOR A RELIGIOUS CONTEXT

Introduction to the New Literacy Studies

The New Literacy Studies began in response to grand theories and campaigns about literacy that posed academically literate people as superior and more economically valuable than those defined as “illiterate.” A historian of literacy, Graff (1978/1987b and 1981/1987c) countered worldwide literacy campaigns by arguing that “we overvalue literacy, by itself, and in so doing, we remove it from its sociocultural context” (1981/1987c, p. 18). He questioned the view of literacy as liberating, democratizing, and individually enhancing, which he claimed ignored a government’s underlying purpose: the production of people deemed good citizens. This social control originated in literacy education advanced by religion:

The initial impetus was sectarianism, as religious groups competed for the souls of the poor and struggled to morally uplift them. Religion, and particularly Protestantism, was the driving force in those few societies which achieved universal literacy before the nineteenth century. (1978/1987b, p. 51)

Unfortunately, in its rise in the academy, the New Literacy Studies has itself gained a status that “it is the right way” to examine literacy, although it has been recently diversified by linguistic ethnography (Rampton, 2007).

Street and the Ideological Model

Stimulated by his own study of Iran’s religious and commercial literacy (or as he would propose “literacies”), anthropologist Street (1984, 1993, 1995) would directly

challenge what he called the “autonomous model,” established in Goody and Watt’s (1963/1968) classic article and later in Ong’s (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, all which insisted that a consequence of writing was “logico-empirical” thought for cultures, separating “literate” cultures from “non-literate” or “oral” ones.

Street (1984) resisted in a Foucauldian-like argument: changes in knowledge and reason are produced by social movement. Technology itself, including reading and writing, is a “social product that has arisen as a result of political and ideological processes and institutions and its particular form has to be explained in terms of such processes”—it is never “neutral” (p. 65). He referred to an influential early ethnographic study for NLS, Scribner and Cole’s (1981/2001) research with the Vai of Liberia in the 1970s to study the psychological or cognitive effects of literacy. One of the scripts that the Vai learned was taught by a friend or family member outside of school, and the other two, English and Arabic, were taught in school. What Scribner and Cole found was that to understand cognitive or, better, social consequences, they had to examine not literate and nonliterate but schooled and non-schooled: “The monolithic model of what writing is. . . . fail[s] to give full justice to the multiplicity of values, uses, and consequences which characterize writing as social practice” (Scribner & Cole, 1981/2001, p. 137).

Literacy as social practice was also displayed for Street by Heath’s (1983) ethnographic study in the Piedmont Carolinas of the U. S., culminating into *Ways with Words*, demonstrating that literacy had different meanings, different “ways” dependent upon the different communities: Roadville (white working class), Trackton (African-American working class), and a mainstream, middle-class town. What was considered

knowledge and truth affected the literacy events of these communities. Of particular interest for this study, the conservative Christian beliefs of the Roadville community facilitated reading stories that taught lessons or were “real” from personal experience, supporting Street’s (1984) “ideological model” of literacy in which “analysis of the uses and consequences must take into account quite profound levels of belief and the fundamental concepts through which a society creates order and design in its world” (p. 114).

Order and design is constructed through power structures; consequently, Street has argued, “the meaning of literacy depends upon the social institutions in which it is embedded” (p. 8). The term “ideological” indicates the location of literacy in power relations, an aspect of a thoroughly performed ethnographic study that cannot be overlooked (Street, 1993). Relying on poststructuralist culture and language theorists such as Bourdieu and Fairclough, Street further developed that “ideology is the site of tension between authority and power on the one hand and resistance and creativity on the other” and that “[t]his tension operates through the medium of various cultural practices, including particularly language and, of course, literacy” (p. 8)

Lancaster School’s Approach

“Lancaster School” may be known as such because Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič are all researchers at Lancaster University or because Barton and Hamilton’s 1998 work *Local Literacies*, an ethnography of a working-class neighborhood in Lancaster, provides not only concise theory of situated literacy but also recommendations for methodology and a thoughtful, replicable model. This combination of theory and practice would be further developed by another text edited by Barton, Hamilton, and Ivanič (2000), *Situated*

Literacies. Although I rely, with qualifications, on the propositions presented in *Local Literacies*, I have enriched my understanding of the Lancaster School's approach by including other less central texts by the Lancaster scholars, in particular, Barton's (1994) *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language*, which has provided background theory for the later works. Lancaster's school has been a stream into the emerging scholarly community of linguistic ethnographers (Rampton, 2007). The six propositions set forth in *Local Literacies* are the following:

- Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
- There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
- Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others.
- Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
- Literacy is historically situated.
- Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making. (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7)

In the first proposition, which is the central one, the influence of Street is obvious in the term "events," (which Street borrowed from Heath) meaning the observable units of literacy study, and the term "practice" (also advocated by Gee) indicating the cultural and ideological ways of literacy. The rest of the propositions, to some extent overlapping, flesh out the first. While I apply the tool of the New Literacy Studies, I cannot for my

ideology of self accept the underlying assumption that I am entirely socially constructed, only situated.

The intention of the following section is primarily to locate my study of religious literacy in an immigrant congregation in the Lancaster School's approach with some attention to the influence of the New Literacy Studies in general. I weave in as illustration ethnographies by sociologists of religion in immigrant congregations to augment the small amount of research specifically on immigrant religious literacy, NLS accounts of religious communities not necessarily immigrant, and NLS accounts of multilingual and immigrant communities not necessarily with religion as a unifying factor.

Situating Literacies of Immigrant Religion in the Lancaster School's Approach

Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.

As stated before, literacy understood as a set of social practices is the conceptualization of values, beliefs about knowledge and truth, and attitudes forming and formed in interaction around and with written text. Literacy practices happen within relationships and can no longer be considered "a set of properties residing in individuals" (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 7). Literacy practices are what "give *meaning*" to literacy events (Street, 2000, p. 21). The written texts which mediate these events in a religious congregation may include notes for announcements, songbooks, written sermons, or a newsletter--a "marker of identity" (Tusting, 2000b, p. 46). These are all produced by the religious community, yet the members of the community are constructed by religious

texts as well as construct them, although I am not stating that texts “do can things” on their own (Barton, 1994, p. 63). Likewise, many of these religious communities would protest that they are entirely constructed. Many of the texts produced in religious communities exhibit *intertextuality* with scripture, an important feature of religious literacy in these communities.

In a community of interpretation, how scripture is read is important since the outcome of the reading or meaning-making must align with the community’s beliefs for the group to remain cohesive. Religious literacy studies demonstrate that congregational leadership may maintain tight reins on the approach to interpretation. In Kapitzke’s (1995) study, the children were taught in the banking method (Freire, 1970/2003), which did not facilitate inquiry. In Zinsser’s (1986) ethnography of a fundamentalist “vacation Bible school” and Sunday school classes, children understood that they could not creatively conjecture about the religious text during story time “because the Bible was taught as ‘the word of God’” (p. 63). Heath (1983) noted the same in the Roadville community but a freedom of expression to “raise hymns” in Trackton by adding new phrases during the singing.

In A. Fishman’s (1988) religious literacy study of an Amish family and school, A. Fishman called the Amish an “interpretive community” despite that Stanley Fish’s term was in reference to critics. For A. Fishman, the ministers were critics in that they saw the Bible as power, influencing moral behavior. The Bible, traditional Amish books the *Martyrs Mirror* and the *Ausbund*, “and any narrative should be judged for its effect on people, its ability to evoke sympathy and to promote right living, not for its literary language, structure, or other mainstream critical concerns” (p. 137). In a community

where no separation existed between secular and religious, the school as well enculturated this literal or “text-bound” sense of reading. A. Fishman, however, has pointed out that individuals’ discussion to make sure they had the “correct” understanding of text indicated their sense that meaning was not only in the text but associated with individuals and community (p. 160). Being Amish included reading in this fashion.

Literal reading of scripture by immigrant populations may transfer to other settings such as school (Edwards & Nwenmely, 2000), or it may not as in the case of a literacy study of Bengali British children whose reading of story books was quite different from their reading of the Koran (Gregory & Williams, 2000, p. 46). It would be a mistake to consider this return to foundations or religious texts as identical with the fundamentalism of some ethnically U. S. Christian churches. The anthropologist Hepner (1998) described a Rastafarian congregation of mostly Jamaican immigrants as engaging in Bible study, unlike traditional Rastafarians, with “more literal and fundamentalistic interpretation,” yet the leaders still applied the traditional Rastafarian appropriation of biblical promises, telling of “Ethiopia’s scattered children” rather than Israel’s (p. 220).

The Lancaster School would deem students’ taking of their way of reading in church into the school system as having crossed domains, the religious domain crossed with the school one. In the case of Street’s (1984) Iranian study, the religious, maktab, domain crossed with the commercial one: he argued that the commercial literacy of the villages he visited was adapted from the maktab literacy. Domains are linked to the kind of literacy as well as to discourse communities. Barton and Hamilton (1998) have explained *domains* as “structured, patterned contexts within which literacy is used and

learned” (p. 10). But like most contexts, domains are messy. They cannot be crisply defined. And perhaps the religious domain may be one of the hardest to circumscribe especially with noticeably devout communities. The concept of situated literacies is difficult to fit to a religious group centered on a preexistent text.

If religion involves a body of people going about a way of life based on shared beliefs, that way of life is rarely put aside on the way out the door of their place of worship. For example, discourses found in churches, says Gee (1996) “involve an intricate network of ways of talking, acting, and valuing that can be quite pervasive in the lives of these people” (p. 142). The Amish people A. Fishman observed may seem an extreme case, but people not as excluded from other social groups maintain their discourse outside of their place of worship. They may start their own primary schools, one aspect of Kapitzke’s study (1995) or synchronize individual prayer in the day as Tusting (2000a/2000b) highlighted in her analysis of a Catholic newsletter, concluding that domains are also marked by time. Home literacy events of two families in Kapitzke’s study included reading religious bedtime stories to the children, gathering for family worship, reading Adventist books, and studying the Bible individually.

Similar religious literacy activities are exercised in religious immigrant homes. Focusing on separate domains in her literacy work with Chicago Mexicanos, Farr (1994/2001) also noted the importance of time. Religious holidays were honored at both church and home, literacy being inextricable from the celebrations. The private domain of the home may as well become a location for religious indoctrination or worship, evident through Hindu family studies of Hindu philosophy and the *Bhagavad Gita* in Los Angeles (Kurien, 1998), in the same city the reading of scripture at a Catholic Mayan

house church (Wellmeier, 1998), or in Toronto Gulf Palestinian mothers reviewing Arabic literacy with their children in order that their children will not drift from Islam (Rothenberg, 2000).

What may differ from non-immigrant religious communities is the multi-lingual or minority-language situation. Farr (1994/2001) pointed out that there were two major differences in the literacy for the religious domain of the Chicago Mexicanos from other domains: the literacy was in Spanish, and the texts were lengthy, rather than the brief one in English for texts such as application forms. Some congregations may even find themselves in the almost impossible predicament of maintaining a holy language, such as Arabic, and its vernacular language (J. A. Fishman, 1989d). The enactment of mother tongue language and the resistance to assimilation bespeaks of the enormous pressures on a congregation, leading to the next of Barton and Hamilton's (1998) propositions, those regarding power, goals, and cultural practices of an institution, a domain-maker.

Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies become more dominant, visible and influential than others. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.

Unlike more traditional approaches to literacy, Barton and Hamilton (1998) have regarded literacy as multi-functional—it can do many things for people (such as take the place of spoken communication), but more importantly to this study it has social meanings for people, for example, operating as “*evidence*, or *display*, or *threat*, and as *ritual*” (p. 11). These are words about identification to others--“*evidence*” or “*display*,” the construction of identity by force--“*threat*,” or identity formed through communal patterns--“*ritual*.” In accordance with this conceptualization of literacy, text does not

always have to be read or written for identity construction to take place for all the participants in a literacy activity. In Zinsser's (1986) ethnographic research, she observed four-to-five-year-old children, unable to read, who received rewards for bringing their King James Bibles to church with them. During the Bible story, the teacher opened each child's Bible to the passage that covered the content of the storytelling. Such identification in which the text does not have to be read or written demonstrates the powerfulness of literacy associated with a social institution.

Is religious literacy a dominant literacy in the west? In the U. S., constant renegotiation of the policy of separation of church and state raises this question from within the media. The renewal of religious rhetoric in politics could make one consider religious literacy as dominant. Certainly, Christianity is the dominant religion in the U. S. Yet, in the following of their way of life, many congregations instead sees themselves as being counterculture, living in a postmodern world with entirely different assumptions about not only morality but reality itself. For example, fundamentalist Southern Baptists in Tennessee, with a separatist social goal, called for the withdrawal of all Southern Baptist children from the public school system, likely to homeschool or enroll their children in private schools, similar to the Adventist primary school in Kapitzke's study.

In this response to outside discourse, many congregations—Christian, Hindu, and Muslim--begin doctrinal classes for all ages inside the community, often located at the place of worship. These classes may occur on a Sunday or be a mid-week "club" or a short summer school as Zinsser (1986) described. Kapitzke's (1995) Adventist church held Sabbath School, which "commenced at 9:30 a.m. worldwide" in conformity to the *Sabbath School Manual* (p. 129). Along with Sabbath activities, the Adventists

coordinated other programs and scheduled events such as youth and children's clubs during the week and conferences. Referring to the ideas of Fairclough (1989), Kapitzke (1995) remarked that members were so busy with inside activities that they were "constrained" from outside activities, "defin[ing] and delimit[ing] the possibilities of discursive identity and social relations" (p. 122). Organizational components like these are just one aspect of often complicated institutional structures, rich with hierarchies and social rules and the production of texts, e.g., a new birth certificate granted upon conversion at a mosque (Abusharaf, 1998).

The organizers of the Religion, Ethnicity and New Immigrants Research project (RENIR) analyzed comparative data from a telephone survey, focus groups, and field research in 13 congregations, either mostly immigrants of one ethnicity or multi-ethnic in their immigrant populations, all located in the Houston, Texas, area (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). The 13 congregations varied from Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Zoroastrian to Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and evangelical. The congregations mirrored the significant immigrant populations in Houston, except Jewish because each of the various synagogues had not had enough of an influx of a group of Jewish immigrants for the comparative study: Jewish immigrants did not collect in one or two synagogues but rather participated in mostly groups of American-born Jews. Ebaugh and Chafetz applied the term "congregation," as I have, because the religious communities frequently corresponded in structure to the U. S. church model. Although not familiar in home countries among religions other than Christian, here a congregational model:

- 1) has a formal list or roster of members who elect 2) a local governing body (board or council) composed of lay members that makes policy for, and

administers the affairs of, the institution; 3) has committees/ministries composed of lay members who conduct the work of the institution; 4) has clergy who are selected by the local organization; and 5) raise most of its operating funds from its own local members. (p. 347)

In such a congregation, religion appears to both augment assimilation and maintain ethnicity (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000; Kim & Huhr, 1993; Yang, 1999; Yang & Ebaugh, 2001), as I argued earlier, creating a new sense of ethnicity. In making a congregational place to gather, unlike the worship form of the home country, a place that is inclusive of other cultural backgrounds, also unlike the home country, the place of worship has become a location of assimilation in the U. S. culture as well as a location of resistance.

One way to resist is to impart language through children's classes that may involve religious text. In El-Laithy's (2002) study, the Egyptian American Muslim youth group began meeting at a Muslim leader's house on Friday night to socialize and study the Koran and Islamic practice and enhance their Arabic. El-Laithy witnessed increased activation and interest in Arabic in the youth group afterwards. In the RENIR project, 9 of the 13 congregations had language classes for children (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). This struggle to maintain the language, as J. A. Fishman (1985b, 1989b, 1990) has commented, is frequently a failing one for most immigrants in the face of a public school system that teaches content only in English and a social system that awards speakers of English:

Successful RLS [reversing language shift] implies remaking social reality and that is very hard for minorities to do. The social meaning of being a minority is that

one is forced to spend almost all of one's resources on damage control, i.e. on merely staying alive within a reality that is not one's own making and not even under one's own substantial ability to influence. (1990, p. 31)

The external pressures are enormous, and the likelihood, of language maintenance is slim, only operating successfully, according to J. A. Fishman, in closed societies such as the Amish or Hasidic Jews, interestingly both remarkably cohesive in their conservative religion.

Within an immigrant religious congregation, the hierarchical structure that exists to reach these goals positions individuals into power roles among generation, gender, and between the recent and late immigrants, sometimes of different cultural traditions (Warner, 2000). Currently, there are few studies that focus solely on these issues among immigrant religious populations or on the literacy of religious groups. Mostly in my explanation, I derive what I can from social science studies of congregations.

One tension rooted in the pressures of assimilation is that of the first and second generation. Educated in the U. S. school system, the second generation is more comfortable speaking English and as teenagers experience conflict with their primarily native-language speaking parents, whose traditional authority they threaten (Rumbaut, 1996). In congregations the second generation tends to cluster together to speak in English (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). In response, the congregational leadership, in order to retain the younger generation, may begin a separate worship service or a youth group in English, as Slavic Fellowship did. The second generation may even demand their own service, as a Korean Protestant church did after holding a Bible study in English and then advocating for an English worship service (Chai, 1998). Goals for the second generation

in that particular congregation were to invite their non-Korean friends to a comfortable environment and to have services geared to their daily experience and youth culture rather than those of their parents. The service was quickly switched from traditional music texts of hymns to contemporary praise songs. Despite the success of that English service, Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) pointed out in their comparative study that only one congregation, the Chinese Protestant one, attracted a large number of the second generation to the English services, and to complicate possible generalizations, Spanish-speaking youth in another congregation, a Catholic church, resisted the priests' pressure for them to employ English.

The second generation as young people is also enculturated to follow their parents' religious and cultural values. Leaders may preach sermons on marital faithfulness and modest conduct or traditional gender roles, or parents may encourage youth to attend conferences, camps, or other activities to meet an ethnically similar mate (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). This concern over gender behaviors indicates the importance of the power relations between traditional views of male and female identities in the congregation.

It is often male ministers and male elders who are at the top of the hierarchy and enforce social rules such as how scripture is read as A. Fishman (1988) explained for the Amish. The tensions exist even in the Adventist church group, which was founded by a woman, Ellen G. White, and operates based on her writings (Kapitzke, 1995). Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) challenge researchers that see "immigrant congregations as bastions of male dominance" (p. 362) to rethink this image. According to Ebaugh and Chafetz, new congregationalism opens up opportunities for female leadership which cannot all be

taken by males, and other opportunities in the U. S. (or for that matter other western countries) which may not have existed at home may make immigrant women more conscious of a status to be resisted. Nonetheless, Ebaugh and Chafetz acknowledge that in all of the 13 congregations in the RENIR project, none had a female senior clergyperson, although many of them had female leaders in children, youth, women's, music, and social and missionary ministries. As NLS scholar Rockhill (1987/1993) has argued, "the shock of immigration, in and of itself, is demasculinising" to men used to traditional gender roles and feeling disempowered in their new work (p. 170). In the Hispanic community she researched, husbands barred further education for their wives, who viewed school as a symbol of the better life. In the literacy researcher Graber's (2002) study of six Russian Old Believer women in Alaska, she also found that male members of the immigrant community were resistant to college education for their wives and daughters. Male congregational members who lost their sense of status in migration may monopolize roles to regain that status (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000).

In one religious community, recent immigrant leadership reduced women's worship opportunities. A mosque once led by Sudanese was now led by more conservative Yemeni males (Abusharaf, 1998). Although not as examined in the literature, earlier immigrants and later immigrants from different cultural backgrounds, countries, and even languages create other power roles and tensions, affecting literacy practice in a congregation. In a Hispanic ministry in a church in the RENIR study, the pastor relieved stress among Mexican, Puerto Rican, and Central and South American Spanish-speakers by allowing the worship leaders to sing by their choice for that time

period, disregarding possible misunderstanding due to differences among dialects (Dorsey, 2000).

In a sociological examination of a Chinese immigrant church, Yang (1998) commented on groupings based on language (Mandarin, Cantonese, or English) and sociopolitical groupings of an anti-communist older generation exiled over time to the U. S., anti-communist children of that generation, and recent students and immigrants from mainland China who did not appreciate outsider criticism of their homeland, despite their own negative assessments. Organized into “fellowship groups” with their own leadership and budgets, they acted as political parties, challenging the pastoral staff or the influence of other groups on church goals, such as which language groups should be targeted for evangelism. Yang described the new mainland Chinese as unlike the rest of the membership in their “thinking patterns,” favoring “sermons and lectures that provide rational explanations of the world and moral guidance for everyday life” (p. 351). This group thought the pastor’s requests for money rude and expelled him from a Bible study, partly because they considered his biblical interpretations faulty. Yang’s example demonstrates that among a congregation, the ideology in literacy events, the literacy practices, may differ among groups.

Literacy is historically situated. Literacy practices change, and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making.

“Culture is a process that is contested,” Street (2000) has claimed (p. 19). The premise of culture as a process requires us to be aware of the flow of time, the changing ideologies within which literacies are embedded. Culture remains and yet culture changes dynamically (J. A. Fishman, 1994). Graff (1987a) applied the metaphor of

“thread” to literacy as “stitching and unraveling” through history (p. 6). The literacy of a community today shares some historical thread with the literacy of communities before—a proposition that the members of many religious congregations would attribute to a preexistent sacred text. Barton and Hamilton (1998) discussed contemporary literacy practices in Lancaster by situating the city in a historical context that began in the Ice Age and led to the Roman occupation, the 1600s, and the 1800s, while telling of educational changes within those time periods.

The spread of religious literacy creates ideological changes in a community. This is clearly evident in the missionization of non-industrialized people, and yet literacy scholars who have researched cross culturally have questioned the assumption that one ideology is replaced with another, although it may appear so on the surface. Viewing culture as a contested process, one can recognize that past cultural assumptions may exist but no longer be explicit in certain cases. For example in a literacy ethnography, Bloch (1993) recounted the three types of knowledge in a Zafimaniry (Madagascar) village: the talk of young people about temporal things such as an interesting animal, the talk of married and middle-aged adults about agriculture, and the talk of “elders” concerning wisdom expressed through proverbs and other formalized language. The last kind of knowledge is considered truth but not relevant to daily life. Schooling provided by the Catholic Church was regarded as the third kind of knowledge. It caused social change, upsetting the generational authority in that the elders had to mediate new ways to keep their respect. And yet perhaps unbeknownst to the Catholic Church, the students’ education, along with government information, was not thought of as practical or helpful to anybody’s life although viewed as unquestioningly true. Likewise, for a Papua New

Guinea village with a missionary school, “the very concept ‘Book’ is essentially Christian in nature,” yet the villagers saw schooling as a means for their children to gain access to the Cargo Cult, which they believed was hidden in the literature of the school (Kulick & Stroud, 1993, p. 39).

To understand the changes an immigrant community experiences, we must know something of immigrants’ previous life in their home country and their immigrant experience: “it is necessary to go beyond the borders of the host country” (Yang & Ebaugh, 2001, p. 376). I concur with Barton and Hamilton (1998) that “we need to take a life history approach, observing the history within a person’s life” (p. 12). Some writers have shared their literacy autobiographies, illustrating literacy’s identity-making power, most notably Mike Rose’s (1989) *Lives on the Boundary* and Keith Gilyard’s (1991) *Voices of the Self*, both mentioned by Collins and Blot (2003). However, there are none that I have come across on religious literacy that would be acceptable to an academic audience. Perhaps the closest to such a contemporary account is Merton’s (1948) *The Seven Storey Mountain*. And certainly I can think of none that would be a modern religious literacy account by an immigrant.

Then again, such stories can be told by researchers: Hones (2001) utilized narrative study supported by participant observation to tell the religious literacy story of a Hmong man, Shou Cher, who converted in Thailand in a refugee camp and began to learn English. Once in the U. S., Cher helped children to learn Hmong literacy through a church. One of Hone’s (2001) realizations regarded religious literacy and identity. Cher was willing to deny the sacrificial activity of his traditional religion, and yet gave up his relationship with his family by becoming a Christian in the refugee camp. For not

attending his father's traditional ceremony, a farewell to his spirit, Cher's uncle cursed Cher to prevent him and his wife from having children. In his telling to Hone, Cher commented that he was instructed by Christians that he would be protected from the curse because "*God is your father*" (p. 501). Hone wondered, "Perhaps Shou's sacrifices made in the refugee camp helped to recreate his identity as a sojourner, not of this Earth, whose Father and home is in heaven" (p. 502).

My Critique of the New Literacy Studies and My Critical Realist Perspective

But I must take a step back. The New Literacy Studies have set themselves up in a way that they see their model as able to examine any literacy situation—they have become a grand theory such as the autonomous model was. As R. Jenkins (2004) has said: "Most commentators on postmodernism are on a historicist mission by any other name, substituting a meta-narrative of fragmentation for the old story of progress" (p. 7). Applying NLS theory strictly without some revisions could be seen as condescending to studying a religious community, since to the disagreement of the community, NLS practitioners would claim that truth was confined to the community, not transcendent: NLS could claim the "enlightened" postmodernist view.

Within school systems, the NLS view has generated troubles when stakeholders in education have deemed it a "relativist" model that calls any child's attempts at reading and writing literacy whether the child's ability follows the literacy of the dominant society or not (MacCabe, 1998; Stephens, 2000). To some extent that objection does not affect this project. I am being descriptivist in my approach not prescriptive: I do not wish to determine whether or not the subjects of my study can actually read and write in Russian or English according to school literacy activists. Like R. Jenkins (2004), my

focus is not another grand scheme, but “firmly on the mundane: on how identification works, on the interactional constitution of identity” (p. 7).

In *Social Linguistics and Literacies*, Gee (1996) began by arguing that ethically those with stake in literacy must make their major assumptions overt. This may be the best point to explicate my perspective on critical realism. I am not a relativist and neither are the members of the congregation within which I was participating. I am a critical realist as are other linguist ethnographers who have been influenced by NLS (Tusting & Maybin, 2007; Rampton, 2007; Sealy, 2007), who have maintained that critical reality is *a priori* to ethnographic research. Similarly, Johnstone (2000) has noted it is challenging as a researcher of language not to be some kind of realist, to fall in a continuum between relativism and realism. As Johnstone has insisted, I am an empirical researcher but this does not imply I am an empiricist who believes that all knowledge is based on observation. Referring to Cameron (1992), Johnstone viewed all observation as “theory-laden.” Observations may differ, reality does not.

Qualitative research theorists Guba and Lincoln (2005) have assumed that positivist and postpositivist (critical realists) must have absolute control or would fear a loss of objectivity. Guba and Lincoln have had more flexibility for views of truth and knowledge—not all realists have to be foundationalists. Perhaps surprising to these researchers, I agree with the perspective of those they call the “New Paradigm” (not to be confused with sociologists in immigrant religion)--those proponents of critical theory, constructivism, and participatory research--in that I believe all data is interpreted. Likewise, I understand my observations of my research site as contextualized even though I and my study’s participants believe in the transcendent. Within my writing, I

have attempted to contextualize my data with a rigorous approach to validity (Maxwell, 2005). Requesting feedback on my tentative interview questions, considering the congregation-based interpreters as cultural informants, inviting interviewees to revise their transcripts, and receiving feedback from the pastors on the rough draft of my dissertation demonstrate that I have not attempted extreme control over my research in fear of a loss of objectivity—participants’ voices have contributed to my management of the study. Also, although I can point to the “people of God” narrative from scripture as important to the identities of the study’s congregation, I acknowledge that the narrative would be portrayed in other ways in other congregations. Like R. Jenkins (2004), I avoid promulgating master narratives with my research.

In their introduction to the third edition of *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) commented on critical realism, appreciative that its proponents recognize knowledge as socially constructed and do not follow the correspondence theory of truth although critical realists agree with positivists in a transcendent view of reality. However, Denzin and Lincoln have assumed that critical realist researchers are not “committed up front to issues of social justice, equity, nonviolence, peace, and universal human rights” (p. 13). They went on: “We do not want a social science that says it can address these issues if it wants to. For us, that is no longer an option” (p. 13). In contrast, Maxwell (2005) wondered if those who are not critical realists (he called them “instrumentalists”) may overcompensate by dealing only with the perceptions of participants rather than real phenomena, focusing on subjectivity rather than problem solving concerns that affect real people. Would my participants have recognized their voices in this text if I had approached them with an issue-oriented

agenda? At the same time, I believe that this work has revealed how marginalization plays a role in religious literacy's forming of non-nationalist identities.

Returning to my critique of the New Literacy Studies, as I see the interpretation of research data as multiple, I can without reservation affirm that each religious community's interpretation of text, and even each individual's interpretation, is different. Gee has explained that the concept of multiple interpretations, and thus multiple meanings, goes back to one of Plato's problems with writing: the author is not there to engage in dialogue with the readers. Readers "re-say" the meaning of the text, each interpretation being different. One way to manage this problem for Plato was to have other voices designated to guide what was considered the correct interpretation. For Plato, an authority for interpretation showed respect for the author's voice. Gee pointed out how Graff has exposed the history of religious leaders controlling literacy in nations where the state and church were once tied. Moral ideals, as previously mentioned, have been rooted in particular interpretations of text.

Differing interpretations occur on a much smaller scale. As A. Fishman (1988) explained in her study of the Amish, religious communities are often primarily communities of interpretation of a sacred text, the leaders of the community as critics of interpretation. What makes communities very similar in belief somewhat different is the differing interpretations of text. Baptists, as an example, have fragmented into multiple groups based on slightly different interpretations.

My belief in multiple interpretations reveals the "critical" component of my critical "realism." I do not, and no theologian, I believe, has the "right" interpretation of the text. My theology of humans is that they are limited in their knowledge, unable as

earthly beings to know fully. Nonetheless, as one who believes in the sacredness of specific texts, I cannot claim that all interpretations are equal. Better interpretations, in my mind follow “the hermeneutics of love” proposed by Anglican bishop N. T. Wright (1992):

However close the reader gets to understanding the text, the reading will still be peculiarly that reader’s reading: the subjective is never lost, nor is it desirable that it should be. At this level, ‘love’ will mean ‘attention’: the readiness to let the other be the other, the willingness to grow and change oneself in relation to the other. (p. 64)

As a critical realist, Wright has recognized the “both-and” of reading: there is a text, there is a reader, there is an author, and there are realities the author is attempting to describe, but all of these are situated and heard subjectively in a life-changing “conversation.” Another critical realist theologian, Vanhoozer (1998) noted that Soren Kierkegaard’s concern for “30,000 different interpretations!” has validity when the interpretations are not produced in “hermeneutics of humility and conviction.” New Literacy Studies as a post-structural theory has assumed with Gee Plato’s problem: “if all interpretations (‘re-sayings’) count, then none do, as then the text then says everything and therefore nothing” (p. 31). This is, as Gee has said, a difficult dilemma. If readings of sacred texts never generated more charitable readers, I would despair that my belief in sacredness of the text is false. My belief in the text as sacred reveals my “realism” and my hope for a more compassionate world, but my awareness of my and all persons’ subjectivity, a broken world nonetheless, reveals my “criticism.”

CHAPTER 6

THE EMERGENCE OF SLAVIC FELLOWSHIP

Local Context

The Context of Slavic Fellowship

As with other immigrant congregations, Slavic Fellowship started from a small assembly that met in an ethnically U. S. church building when the sanctuary was not in use. In my first couple visits to the church, Nicolai told me that a few families started meeting less than two years before and had quadrupled. The church moved in the summer of 2004 into its own building, which it shared with a private school unassociated religiously with the congregation, reducing the space most congregations would have. When I had a formal meeting with Nicolai, we did not meet in an office, but we spoke after Sunday morning service in a corner of the foyer on two chairs brought by teenagers.

Slavic Fellowship's building boasted an auditorium that held 150 padded chairs, two-thirds filled on a Sunday morning, with a center aisle before a raised platform at the front, on which a pastor stood behind the pulpit to the right and the worship music team to the left. The walls were simply decorated with candle holders and wreaths, and a large cross that appeared for Easter 2005 stood behind the pulpit. The PowerPoint screen at the top back of the platform, the visual focal point of the room, portrayed popular depictions of Jesus, photographs from church events, and nature pictures. Nicolai, a man in his 50s, struck me at first as the head pastor because of his gregarious personality and marked theological statements. Later, I found he traveled much and that a co-pastor, Ivan, had many of the administrative responsibilities. Ivan was in his late 30s or early 40s, had a gentle disposition, and tended to preach on communal aspects of being a congregation,

lived near the church, and included his extended family in its operation. When Nicolai was away on his other ministry engagements, Ivan opened the service.

The congregation was almost entirely Caucasian in appearance. Unlike most Russian Baptist churches, the majority of women wore make-up and highly fashionable and sometimes revealing dress. The men wore dark pants and sweaters or khakis and button shirts except for a few older men and the pastors in suits. Half the music was upbeat and often based on U. S. derived worship music, led by a U. S.-style vocal team. The music itself was played on an audio system. But the biggest contrast from other Russian Baptist churches was likely the status of its members: Nicolai told me that the majority of his congregation is highly educated, referencing some Ph.D.s, and that 50 to 70 percent of them were “new believers.” Like Nicolai, many of these new believers spoke a prestigious Russian dialect. Other members including some of the leadership did not since they were limited in their education in the former Soviet Union, making them sound uneducated to those who had their dialect standardized at the postsecondary level. It was these kinds of differences that intrigued me about Slavic Fellowship and compelled me to study the shaping of identities through religious literacy activities.

A Comparative Look at an Associated Russian Baptist Church

Slavic Fellowship is one of 19 Russian-language Christian congregations, mostly in the southern suburbs of a Midwestern city. Another one of these churches, much more traditional than Slavic Fellowship, was Mapleville Russian Baptist Church, a church that several of the socialized believers attended before joining Ivan and other leadership as Slavic Fellowship began. Mapleville was becoming well recognized in the Russian-speaking community and in the English-speaking conservative Christian community.

The larger church was such a lure to Russian Baptists that in a 2004 newspaper article the English Language Learning coordinator of the Mapleville school district credited the growing number of Russian-speaking students, 200, to it and the cost of housing in Mapleville. In late 2003, the church was the subject of a front page feature of the metro section of a local newspaper). This snapshot of a Russian family provided details not only about Russian-speaking immigrants but the fundamentalism of a more recognizably Russian Baptist church, the largest at 800 members at the time.

The young professional brother and sister interviewed, like many in Russian culture, lived with their extended families and had other family members in a house nearby in one of the outermost suburbs with rural scenery. Most of the families in the congregation were from small towns, and those who had been adults in the former Soviet Union had been restricted from higher education. The reporter stated that these families had been banned to live at least 60 miles outside of key cities in the U. S. S. R. The father had worked production in the U. S., but the two siblings attended postsecondary institutions and now worked in medium-paying jobs in the medical field. The siblings helped their parents research, build their house, and pay the bills. Although comfortable conversing in English, the siblings spoke in Russian only in front of their parents to honor them. The son in his late twenties was heavily involved in activities in his church and at a cross-denominational U. S. Bible study and did not drink socially nor date as most U. S. young people would, believing in the “courting,” a current trend among conservative ethnically U. S. churches.

The Migration of Russian Baptists to Midwest U. S.

Most Russian speakers settled in suburbs south of the city, near major employers such as the airport, hospitals, and malls but also near open country. The research site of this study, the building of Slavic Fellowship, is located on a quiet suburban street in a southern suburb. According to another 2004 newspaper article, even those Russian speakers originally settled in another location were moving to the southern suburbs. Jewish families from the newly independent states who were living in the east metro area, where a Jewish population was previously established, were moving south drawn by the lower cost residences and respected public schools. Unlike immigrants of other ethnicities, Russian speakers rarely appeared in the newspapers, except for occasional human interest articles on their communities, such as the one on the Mapleville church. Russian-speaking immigrants' almost invisibility may be related their skin color and their religious beliefs similar to those in the U. S., but another factor was their distrust of civil authorities.

As a center for immigrants in the Midwest, the city is known for its welcoming environment including its support systems such as social services with translators, sponsors, and resettlement agencies, the last two, often having religious associations. A refugee may be sponsored to come to the city and then later, due to U. S. immigrant laws' emphasis on family unification, arrange to have his or her family travel from the home country. In this way, immigrant communities are established.

Demographic studies ascertaining the number of members of immigrant populations are notorious for undercounting, not due to the researchers' inability, but rather the shifting patterns of migration and factors of the immigrants themselves, who

may respond that they are from the last country they temporarily stayed in, may not understand the question due to language obstruction, or may question the intentions of the interviewer. According to demographic information in 2003, the number of Russians in the Midwestern state was under 15,000. However, for the purpose of this study, the number of Russian-speaking immigrants is far more relevant than the number of Russians. *Russian Baptists* is a descriptive term for Russian-speaking Baptists, not necessarily Russians who are Baptists. One of Slavic Fellowship's pastors is from the Ukraine, and my contact with church was from Belarus originally. The best sense of the number of Russian speakers may be gained from the number of students in the public school system whose first language is Russian. In 2000, it was reported that over 1,500 public school students in the state spoke Russian at home.

Regarding religious status, because religious data is not gathered by census in the U. S., newspapers and state publications report only anecdotal information about Russian-speaking religious immigrants. Initially, it is suspected that the first Russian-speaking immigrants were Jewish followed later by Pentecostals with large families, although I speculate that some of the Pentecostals were mistakenly designated and were instead Baptists. The last portion of this chapter is the history of Russian Baptists beginning with their heritage when Christianity and its literacy first pervaded Slavic populations, to the origin of Russian Baptist identities before the revolution and their oppression by an antireligious government afterwards, and the Cold War relationship of Russian (or Soviet) Baptists with U. S. Baptists that paved the way for emigration to the U. S.

Introduction

Entering the labyrinth of history writing is not simple. I am not a historian, and like Barton and Hamilton (1998) I relied on others' histories. Before I go on, as with all fields of scholarship, history is theory based. Fulbrook (2002) has described the multiple perspectives, whether traditionally empirical or postmodernist that historians take. Like her, I agree that historians share "partial stories"—no historian has a one true metanarrative. However, I also agree with her that some partial stories lack veracity against shared standards of research in the field. To balance these first two goals, I looked for respected scholarly sources that would share the voices of Russian Baptists. Secondly, I attempted to draw from histories that focused on religious literacy. Third, I also had to envision not just the people "Russian Baptists" in the Russian Empire or the former Soviet Union but Russian Baptists here—what paved their road to the U. S. I applied a few minor sources on Russian literacy and policy mostly from sociology to contextualize and validate my central sources.

To avoid a set metanarrative, I have chosen the dissertation of Coleman (1998), an associate professor of history at a secular university, to narrate the story of the first Russian Baptists, who first appeared towards the end of the 19th century. Coleman's thesis revealed the "dialogue" of Baptist identities with the society around them. Coleman discerned Baptist identity by studying the personal conversion narratives and articles in the periodical of Russian Baptists, who were negotiating with the assigners of their "imposed identity" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) as a "dangerous sect" as

Coleman found in publications, correspondence, and personal notes of the time of other members of Russian society (p. 1).

For the time period that would prepare Russian Baptists for entrance to the U. S., I relied on the dissertation of Carlson (1986), who graduated from a major university. Carlson is a professor of history and politics at a Baptist-affiliated college in the U. S. and likely had access to “inside” Baptist sources that another researcher may not have. He examined similar documents--newsletters and other religious texts of U. S. Baptists in the 1950s through 1980. He established that the fundamentalist Baptists in the U. S, such as the General Association of Regular Baptist churches, aligned themselves with the unregistered Russian Baptists and that the evangelical U. S. Baptists, the Southern and American Baptists, aligned themselves with the registered. The work of a cultural geographer, Hardwick (1993) filled out what Carlson’s dissertation was missing. Hardwick’s work is comprised of over 260 interviews of mostly religious Russians in the diaspora of the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Pacific Northwest and with Russians in the Soviet Union during 1991. Both Carlson’s focus on newsletters and Hardwick’s focus on individual narratives, like Coleman’s, support a history “from below.”

What does not appear to support a history “from below” is the following compilation of the narrative of Cyril and Methodius, who are recognized for prosyletizing early Slavs and reducing their language to writing. When I met with Nicolai of Slavic Fellowship to discuss my request to participate in his congregation, he insisted that to understand religious literacy for Russian-speaking people, I must read about Cyril and Methodius. The story of these two ninth-century brothers in their missionary activity dramatically illustrated the ideological model of literacy. Choosing two histories of these

brothers by two scholars with connections to the Orthodox religion seemed wise viewing Nicolai's request because these historical constructions are more likely similar to the ones that Nicolai and other believers in the congregation share. I want to qualify these as sources, however. They are derived from ebullient hagiographies and fragments from archaeology, narrated by one author who ethnocentrically intones about "the Slavs' utter lack of any kind of culture before the advent of Cyril and Methodius" (Tachiaos, 2001).

Heritage of Cyril and Methodius

The two brothers were products of the Byzantine Empire, an empire divided culturally by the Germanic-influenced western region, including Rome, and the Byzantine or Greek-influenced eastern region centered in Constantinople. The brothers Constantine (who shortly before his death took the name "Cyril") and Methodius were likely raised in a well-to-do family in the city of Thessalonica, the "second city" after Constantinople and the last major city on the outer edge of the Empire. Because of its location, it had for a couple centuries been a primary target of Slavic tribes from the north, who had intermittently invaded Thessalonica and the rest of the Byzantine Empire and were now living in the Empire's territories, with a large population dwelling near Thessalonica, and controlled, tentatively, through transferring them to alternative regions. In the city of Thessalonica, for commerce reasons, Greeks were learning to speak the Slavic language.

Born in 826 or 827, Constantine and Methodius, born in 815, would witness the restoration of holy icons in 843, increasing the religious intellectual activity of their society, according to the historian Tachiaos (2001). After stints in an administrative post for the patriarch, a professorship of philosophy, and a possible ambassadorship to Arabs

in Samarra, Constantine and his brother Methodius, who had left a position as governor of a Slavic province, both moved to a monastic center on Mt. Olympus. From there in 860, they were called to join an ambassadorial trip to the Khazars, who lived near the Caspian Sea. According to legend, the Khazars requested a theological representative to contribute to their religious discussion as they considered collective conversion to a major religion: Judaism, Islam, or Christianity. On the emissaries' way there, they traveled through the Crimea, an out-of-the-way location, where it is probable that they assessed the situation of the local Slavic Rus' population (Balkan and Russian Slavs).

After this trip, Constantine and Methodius received another order in 862 from Emperor Michael III. Several Slavic groups had gathered in Moravia. Although the region had been missionized by the Franks, Rastislav, the Slavic prince of these people, sent a request to the Byzantine emperor, which was chronicled in the hagiography *Life of Constantine*:

Our people have renounced paganism and is observing the Christian law, but we do not have a teacher to explain to us the true faith in our own language in order that other nations even, seeing this, may imitate us. Send us therefore, Master, such a bishop and teacher, because from you emanates always, to all sides, the good law. (as cited in Dvornik, 1970, p. 73)

Such a move was, of course, not merely spiritually motivated since Rastislav's relations with the Frankish leadership, Louis the German, had turned bitter. Emperor Michael commanded Constantine, joined by a team that included his brother, to devise a Slavic alphabet in order that Rastislav and his people could have as he asked, "the true faith in our own language." Because this team left in 863 with the alphabet and some translated

materials, the “evangelistary” or passages from the gospel, historians have thought that Constantine had already been at work on the alphabet, called the “Glagolitic” or “Glagolitic,” through his engagements with Slavic speakers. There is some evidence that Constantine encountered a piece of previous Slavic, perhaps Russian, script on his trip to the Khazars, although some scholars have denied it as Slavic (Tachiaos, 2001). However, if so, it would not be unusual in the history of literacy for an outside source to bring in a script considered superior (Collins & Blot, 2003). Regardless, Constantine, would have still run into the difficulty of translating biblical terms, foreign to Slavic culture, into Slavonic. He resolved this problem by using Greek vocabulary, inserting more of Byzantine language and ideology into the changing discourse of the Slavs.

The influence of this literacy endeavor was far-reaching. Once Constantine was there, Dvornik (1970) has argued that he translated the eastern Byzantine liturgy and not the Roman liturgy. In Moravia, the work caused a reaction among later Frankish missionaries who declared that Slavonic could not be a language of holiness since it was not one of the languages on the cross—Hebrew, Greek, or Latin. Constantine and Methodius, and later only Methodius, after Constantine or Cyril’s death in 869, fought against this discrimination as the Archbishop of the Slavs. This policy of “Trilingualism” would eventually overcome Moravia, and Latin would become the designated language of the Moravian church. Methodius translated other works into the Slavic language, the rest of scripture and texts of the saints and of law and administration, further increasing the ideological impact of the Byzantine Empire in Moravia. Methodius and Cyril’s disciples spanned out in missionizing activities in other regions, most notably Bulgaria. One of the disciples in Bulgaria, Constantine of Preslav, is credited with modifying

Cyril's alphabet with more Greek letters and calling it the "Cyrillic alphabet," the ancestor of today's Cyrillic alphabet used in the Slavic states of the former Soviet Union.

The "Cyrilo-Methodian heritage," according to Dvornik (1970), spread to not only Bulgaria but Poland, Bohemia, Croatia, Serbia, and finally Kievan Russia.

Christianity was welcome in Kiev (in the Ukraine) through missionary activity and trade agreements in the late ninth and the tenth century. Kiev had originally been settled by Varyags, Viking colonizers, who had established the Kievan state. In 988, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II asked the ruler of Kiev, Vladimir, for his help. Vladimir agreed as long as he was recompensed with an imperial princess to be his wife. To please her, Vladimir had a statue of a Slavic god torn down and ordered everyone in Kiev to be baptized.

Surprisingly, this use of compulsory methods led to little resistance than may be expected because "the introduction of the Slavonic liturgy helped considerable in spreading the new faith across the Russian lands" (p. 273). After the Bulgarian Empire was dissipated in the beginning of the tenth century, Slavic priests traveled to Kiev with their liturgy and other literature. One book from Bulgaria was the text of civil law originally developed by the disciples of Cyril and Methodius. Dvornik has argued that Russians took up "the Byzantine notions of monarchism and absolutism" in correlation with the experience of two centuries of devastatingly oppressive rule by the Mongols (p. 282). When the Byzantine Church united with Rome in 1439, Grand Prince Basil II and the leaders of the Russian Church condemned this action. The Russian Church had already headquartered itself in Moscow, moving from Kiev, making Moscow the "Third Rome." In 1547 Ivan IV became the first Tsar of Russia, declaring autocratic rule, and in 1589 the Moscow patriarchate formed. The religious literacy endeavors of two brothers had run its

course—from the fading of one empire to the construction of a new one. Three hundred years later, Russian Baptists emerged in the twilight of Tsarist reign to negotiate themselves as controversial citizens in the new Soviet Russia.

Russian Baptist Identities in Late Tsarist and Early Soviet Russia

By the mid and late 1800s, Russians were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with authoritative rule and massive fluctuations within their own society as they came in contact with western ideas. In the 1860s, the serfs had been emancipated, but most lived in very similar condition as before as peasants, in 1900 making up 80 percent of the population (Fitzpatrick, 1994, p. 15). From the former serfs, a new working class would emerge to respond to industrialization, leading to urbanization that had been underway for some time in the west. These new workers were considered uncouth and dim-witted in their lack of education. Literacy became the perceived channel to create a civilization for a modern world, whether through locally governed primary schools in country villages (Eklof, 1981) or night classes taught by antireligious intelligentsia in St. Petersburg (Zelink, 1994).

Coleman (1998) has asserted that the Baptist identity gave Baptist believers, as mostly low to lower middle class people, a voice and a constantly meditated position in a time of upheaval as Russians re-constructed what it meant to be Russian. Baptists challenged, often not directly, the Orthodox Church, Tsarist rule, the intelligentsia, and revolutionaries. Coleman encompassed two groups of the time into the designation Baptist, one group which called themselves Baptists and another who called themselves Evangelicals, a group who was more welcoming towards those of other Christian persuasions who had adopted infant baptism. Both groups appeared to have a friendly

rivalry and yet united together as members of the Baptist World Alliance. They were the fastest multiplying sect of their time, despite their competitors, Pentecostals and Seventh-Day Adventists. Three defining characteristics, according to Coleman, were their commitment to Bible as the only basis of belief, their emphasis on individual conversion and baptism spread through active proselytization, and the independence of each congregation, each a far cry from the Orthodox Church that had formed the confessors' religious experience previously.

Russian Baptists emerged in three different locations roughly simultaneously in the Russian Empire—the Caucasus, the Ukraine, and St. Petersburg in the late 1860s and 1870s. German Baptists began missionary activity in the Caucasus while at the same time, in the Ukraine, German colonists, Mennonites and Lutherans, affected by Baptist beliefs, began hosting hours to read the Bible, sing, and pray together, supported monetarily by Baptists in the U. S. and England. Ukrainian and Russian peasants began to join these activities, called *shtundisty* from the German word for “hour.” Far away in St. Petersburg, Lord Radstock, a missionary of the Plymouth Brethren, a recent sect in England that doctrinally resembled the Baptists, persuaded several members of the aristocratic society to conversion to a faith that was at first seen as a reformation of traditional Orthodoxy. These aristocrats disseminated this new faith through literacy and skills training for the peasants in the outlying provinces and through social service programs directed at the lower classes in St. Petersburg.

In 1884, representatives of these three separate movements met in St. Petersburg for a conference. In the midst of their meetings, the police interrupted and jailed them all for a night and then told most of them to go home, except for a few of the key leaders of

the St. Petersburg stream, whom they exiled from Russia after their refusal to stop their gatherings. These tensions with authorities would characterize Russian Baptists' existence until the break-up of the Soviet Union. In the early years, the struggle was one of the collective identity of being a Russian who had distanced him or herself from the Orthodox Church: the Ober-Procurator of the Holy Synod announced in 1881 that "there are and must be no Russian Baptists" (Byrnes, 1968, p. 182, as cited in Coleman, 1998, p.16). To Orthodoxy, this religious persuasion had a definite western ideology in that its "rationalistic" nature did not balance the spirit and the mind as Orthodoxy had done (p. 33). In the villages particularly, families and other community members would react in violence as Russian Baptists took off the icon of the saint they wore around their necks and stopped venerating each home's icons.

In 1905, Russian Baptists in a "Short Note" to the government formally described themselves as a movement that, while affiliated with Baptists internationally, was independent from them and deserved to be legalized. Although they acknowledged the influence of western ideas in their emergence, they claimed that the actual cause of the movement was "the distinctive religious atmosphere of the day" after the emancipation of the serfs and the retranslation of the Bible into contemporary Russian (p. 28). (Another scholar, Batalden [1994] has noted how the distribution of this text was particularly appealing to sectarian workers and peasants.) In the note, Baptists asserted that as true Russians, their goal was an authentic "Holy Russia." In this way, the Baptists added an additional utopian vision to the public discourse at the time.

Although the April 1905 religious toleration decree allowed some freedoms—the right to part from the Orthodox Church and to gather in prayer in buildings designated for

that purpose, Russian Baptists, Coleman (1998) noted, would continue pressing for rights of assembly and free speech, implying, albeit perhaps unknowingly, a demand for a constitutional government. Such requests made them a threat to Tsarist rule and of temporary interest to revolutionary thinkers. Revolutionaries may have been intrigued by the democratic organization of Russian Baptist congregations, which allowed for modestly educated leaders, services in vernacular Russian, and spontaneous prayer by any believer, including women. However, in the passing of resolutions declaring loyalty to the Tsar, the Baptists attempted to curry favor with the government, possibly losing the attention of the already internally conflicted revolutionaries, although, Coleman (1998) has demonstrated that later Baptists exhibited “flirtation with socialist parties and ideas” during the revolution beginning in 1917 (p. 246).

At first Baptists responded in joy to the February 1917 revolution that broke them from the Imperialist authority. The year of “1917, the freest period of their existence until 1991” (Coleman, 1998, p. 239) began as one of a great number of conversions, renewed opportunity to publish their journals, and returns of exiles, but as Coleman described, the “religious experience of religion was transformed from Easter day to Judgment day” (p. 242). The Russian Baptists were grieved by the October Revolution, conducted in violence, when Lenin and his Bolsheviks took the reins of government. Remarkably, according to Coleman, their discourse changed from one that interlocked the early stages of revolution with Christ’s resurrection to one of waiting for the justice of the Day of Judgment. They had conceived as their responsibility in the spring of 1917 to create the kingdom of God on earth through proselytization in preparation for Christ’s

second coming. By 1918, they instead anticipated Christ's return to bring about the kingdom of God. Their theology had changed, but the felt desire to proselytize had not.

At first, Baptists and other sects were allowed to propagandize under the new constitution. The Bolsheviks focused their attention on the Orthodox Church, immersing those within religious vocations in "bloody terror" (Walters, 1993, p. 9) and ransacking the graves of saints. It took awhile for the Baptists to recognize that the Bolsheviks had collapsed private and public together to "create not just a secular state, but an atheist society" (Coleman, 1998, p. 302). The Bolsheviks determined that the social identity for individuals would be one of the "new Soviet man" (Coleman, 1998, p. 302). They viewed the laborers' desires for religion as mere "birth pangs" until this utopia was realized (p. 302).

One criterion for being a good "Proletarian" was the willingness to join the Bolsheviks in the ongoing civil war. The definition of "citizen" according to the constitution of 1918 included the fulfillment of the duty to go to war. However, Baptists, other religious sects, and Tolstoyans joined to support potential soldiers who claimed that their religious conscience prevented them from entering the military. Such a stance was recognized by the new government as "Anti-Soviet": teaching "love of the enemy" was harmful to the revolution (p. 407). By 1925, a law determined that conscientious objection was only accepted by those who had been members of pacifist sects since their birth. Conversion was rendered meaningless.

In 1922, all religious sects had to register with the government and were no longer allowed to own property. Although in the early 1920s, a Soviet security leader had managed to pressure leaders in both streams of the Baptists through imprisonments and

intimidation in religious congresses (that were afterwards banned until the 1960s) to renounce pacifism, other activities of the Baptists became matters of concerns. It seemed to the government that Baptists, instead of becoming full members of the Soviet society, were making their own “parallel community” (Coleman, 1998, p. 318). Baptists had been welcomed, along with other sects, in the early days of the new leadership to form their own communes and collectives. Already tight-knit communities, some Baptist groups were more quickly successful with this than the more slow-going efforts by the Soviets. Unfortunately, Baptist promotion of trade among their religious comrades smacked of a dangerous economic autonomy. However, what created the most anxiety for Soviet monitors were the Baptist organizational strategies, such as evangelization campaigns and Bible training and particularly the ones involving youth activities that indoctrinated children in the ideology of the religious sect rather than that of the state.

The Bolsheviks had grasped that the making of a society was in the making of its children as constructed by education but also other activities. Early on, Lenin had wanted to eradicate all perceived illiteracy (Medynsky, 1944), recognizing the importance of literacy to his vision of Russia’s future. Trade unions started literacy programs for their workers (Clark, 1995), local communist leaders set up reading rooms with “red corners” in the country (Clark, 1996), and newspapers followed only the government philosophies in their articles (Brooks, 1998). Initially, the new government required children’s education to be devoid of religion, but by 1929, it demanded antireligious curriculum, and post-secondary institutions ousted religious believers in their ranks (Walters, 1993).

One of Coleman’s (1998) most assertive statements is that the Baptists, although attempting to counter the ideology of the Soviet government, were not attempting to

model the same activities of the Soviets in an extensive, intricate scheme as the government claimed; rather these gatherings, while shared among the Baptists, were locally managed, not components of a large-scale plot. Coleman noted that Baptist young people had been engaged in youth groups that joined for evangelization, poetry, music, and socialization since before the revolution. To the Soviet government, these looked like purposeful activities to lure future adult proletarians away from their true calling. Government observers commented on how the “clean,” family-like environment of youth activities was appealing, especially to young women, for whom the Bolsheviks had struggled to find an appeal in their own gatherings. Coleman has insisted that the titles the Soviets applied in their discourse to these Baptist activities and groups modeled the titles of their own: “By applying their own specific language to the structure and the activities of the evangelical sectarians, the Bolsheviks constructed a worthy enemy which to rally, but also to browbeat their own cultural forces” (p. 409). The “Bapsomol” and “Kristomol,” the equivalents of the Soviet national youth organization, the “Komsomol,” were in Coleman’s view constructs of the Soviet imagination.

To dissuade this threat to Soviet cultural construction, in 1929 all gatherings of sect members, sectarian organizations, and sectarian financial activities were forbidden except for worship services, and the constitution was amended to allow confession but not propaganda of religion. Coleman (1998) commented that sect members began to lose their union status, and thus their food rations, leaders were jailed or exiled, and congregants were barred from their meeting locations. In 1932, the League of Militant Atheists allegedly formed a five-year plan in 1932 to eliminate all religion (Walters, 1993). Many Baptists (possibly half a million in the 1920s) and other sects were pushed

underground into small house gatherings until after World War II and in the 1960s and 1970s when restricted religious organizing was permitted (Coleman, 1998). According to Hardwick (1993), the result of this oppression in the 1930s led to further proselytization: “Whole communities were exiled to Siberia as persecution intensified during the Stalin years, thus diffusing Christianity far and wide” (p. 43).

Russian Baptists and Relationships with the U. S. During the Soviet Union

In Coleman’s (1998) mind, “Through their very existence and the voluntarist principles of their communities, the Russian Baptists challenged the ascriptive culture of pre-revolutionary Orthodoxy and the increasingly ascriptive culture of class in Soviet Russia” (p. 420). What Coleman does not bring up is that after 1929, the last year of her focus, Russian Baptists became more ascriptive themselves as they negotiated their identity under the oppression of an aggressively antireligious government. Russian Baptist churches in the former Soviet Union and the U. S. were and are known to be fundamentalist, visibly recognizable in that women do not wear make-up, dress very modestly outside of church, and in church wear headscarves, and that pastors keep tight reins on the congregation (Hardwick, 1993).

Knowledge of the separatist ethic is vital to comprehending not only Russian Baptist congregations in the former Soviet Union and in the U. S. but to understand the cohesive binds that linked Baptists under oppression with Baptists (and other conservative Christians) in the U. S. and paved a path for them to immigrate in the early 1990s. Religious restrictions were relieved during World War II because Stalin cleverly recognized that religion was a “potentially useful, unifying factor” (Hardwick, 1993). Stalin’s government appointed a council that joined together delegates from both streams

of the Russian Baptists, a difficult process, and not long later the Mennonites and Pentecostals (the majority of Pentecostals, Hardwick says, left over doctrinal issues). This body, the All-Union Council of Evangelical Christians and Baptists (AUECEB), which presided over the activities of the registered congregations of these sects, was allowed some but very little interaction with the Baptist World Alliance. The existence of this body splintered Russian Baptists into two new groups: those who trusted the government enough to register their congregations and those who did not.

The separation was made worse in that towards the end of Stalin's leadership and after his death, although both oppressed, the consequences for unregistered congregants were more extreme: "the unregistered faced prison terms, labor camp sentences, fines, and stays in psychiatric hospitals, while the registered faced job discrimination and were banned from admission into higher institutions of higher education" (Hardwick, 1993, p. 44). In the 1960s, new pressure was instituted under Krushchev, and the Baptists would split again (Walters, 1993). The government reinforced that children must be absent from church services and sometimes removed parental rights. Inflamed by evangelicals' illegal religious literature and religious children's education, the authorities allowed more freedoms in the 1970s to registered Baptists than to the Orthodox Church in order to persuade unregistered Baptists to accept their order (Walters, 1993). Under such an atmosphere of suspicion and potential punishment, Russian Baptists came to trust only those in their families and congregations (Hardwick, 1993, p. 128).

Carlson (1986) explained that U. S. fundamentalists used this alliance, fueled by the narratives of religious émigrés, as a rallying cry against communism with 60s-styles protests and as a position from which to denigrate the actions and beliefs of the

evangelicals as not being marked by the true gospel. The fundamentalists did point out legitimate violations of human rights, but Carlson expressed that, in their manner of activism, “the Fundamentalists undermined the good name and good intentions of several whole-hearted and vital Christian leaders who were struggling to make an effective Christian witness in the world including a number of Christians behind the Iron Curtain” (p. 322).

Those Russian Baptists who had been able to flee the oppression as émigrés to the U. S. found the fundamentalists most welcoming, although evangelicals and those of evangelical backgrounds, such as Southern Baptist President Jimmy Carter would advocate for the human rights of the religiously oppressed in the Soviet Union, including prisoner exchanges that received well-known dissidents into the U. S. Russian Baptists would also be allowed, beginning in the 1960s, to found their own human rights organizations in the Soviet Union. The connections forged between the U. S. and Russian Baptists would create sponsorships and ease resettlement in the U. S. after Gorbachev declared emigration as legal in 1987.

Before I leave Carlson’s (1986) dissertation, I would like to note the possible religious literacy activities in Russian Baptist congregations that can be derived from the observations made by religious foreign observers. In the late 1950s, a group of evangelicals visiting a Baptist congregation saw slips of papers giving greetings from guests and prayer requests being dropped from a gallery passed to ushers. More importantly, stated again and again in the periodicals of the 70s that Carlson read was the small number of printed religious texts such as Bible and hymnals employed in church services because of the strict restrictions placed on religious publishing, a reason for the

popularity of “Bible smuggling” among visiting fundamentalist Christians from the U. S. According to one evangelical observer in a registered church in 1971, one per 15 or 20 people had a printed hymnal (p. 385). To alleviate potential problems, a church leader read one verse at a time, and some congregants had written hymns down. Multiple sermons were given in one service and several musical numbers were performed by a choir as well as a significant time of prayer and welcoming guests. The entire service lasted from two to three and a half hours. Another observer in the 1970s noted that poetry was read. Services also included young people. During a communion service with a table laid with a cloth, goblets, and bread in the 1970s, a Canadian visitor recognized several of the hymns, especially enjoying the closing song, “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” (pp. 509-510). In another church, leadership elicited responses for baptism, but after being questioned some respondents were refused. These literacy events would be repeated afterward in U. S. Russian Baptist churches or Russian Baptist-influenced churches, such as Slavic Fellowship, after Gorbachev opened up migration in 1987.

CHAPTER 7

DESIGN OF STUDY

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to answer in what ways does religious literacy shape the identities of Slavic Fellowship? Additional questions include what are individual and social identities constructed by religious literacy within this community and what is the relationship of ethnicity and religion within these identities constructed by religious literacy? Answers to those questions can be achieved through ethnographic literacy methodology, or linguistic ethnography (Rampton, 2007), following mostly the practitioners and theorists of the New Literacy Studies, especially those methods of the Lancaster School.

Collaboration with Interpreters

Before I proceed, I should deal with one major issue of validation that may bear heavily on a reader's mind, that is, the question of working with interpreters. I do not speak Russian or Ukrainian. To accustom myself to Russian-influenced culture and language, I spent five months studying Russian and volunteering as an English tutor at a Russian educational center before my 12-month study began. Unsurprising to many readers may be that the majority of this time was consumed with pronunciation and identification of Cyrillic characters, providing me with some greetings and the ability to recognize a few words on the PowerPoint screens at the church site.

Due to my lack of language skills in Russian, I was dependent on interpreters. Of most concern for the inclusion of an interpreter is normally the likelihood of distortion, the layer of bias of the interpreter, and the decreased control of the interview by the

interviewer. Additional concerns may be the effect of gender in the interactions between interviewee and interpreter and misreading of nonverbal cues provided (or neglected) by any members of the interview (Jentsch, 1998).

However, as Temple and Edwards (2002) have argued the inclusion of interpreters in the research process benefits as much or more than it hinders. They note that regardless of whether or not the interviewer converses with the interviewee without an interpreter, subjectivity exists. They have called the interaction among all three members of an interview-- interviewer, interviewee, and participant--“triple subjectivity.” Separately, in 1998 Edwards questioned the assumed loss of “control” of the interviewer and referred to the interpreter as a key informant. Influenced by feminist research theory, Temple and Edwards questioned transparency of communication that supposedly occurs in a same-language interview of native speakers. Rather, researchers should include interpreters as active collaborators in research. To remind myself of this dynamic, I have attempted to assert the language of “working with interpreters” rather than as Temple and Edwards criticize, “using interpreters.” During the later analysis, the interviewer can examine the “borders” made explicit with and from the interviewee (for example, openly disagreeing, switching language from first to third person, and so on). Thus, “valuable insights into the politics of locution and identity can be reaped” (p. 19).

In this study, I chose interpreters who were insiders not just for practical reasons—for services, they were provided by the church--but secondly because their insider knowledge and status was valuable: they understood religious vocabulary that outside professional interpreters may not have; they were respected as interpreters by the leadership in the church, increasing trust on my behalf. Although Jentsch (1998) advised

against working with “lay interpreters” because of their already full schedules and potentially negative interactions, perhaps because of this particular context, I found that my interpreters were highly motivated—I had to pressure them to allow me to provide compensation—and interviewees appeared comfortable. All my interpreters were experienced interpreters and used to negotiating language challenges between Russian and English. Also, as several sources recommended (Edwards, 1998; Jenstsch, 1998; Murray & Wynne, 2001; Temple & Edwards, 2002), I prepared interpreters with explanations of the importance of confidentiality, our roles in the study, and the tentative interview questions. In addition, following Temple and Edwards (2002), I interviewed interpreters for their literacy framework and identity construction and noted their “border” comments in interviews, which I combined with their identity construction analysis, I also made them visible in my writing by indicating when quotations were interpreted.

Research Methods and Data Analysis

Overview of Research Methods and Data Analysis

My ethnographic research in this community was comprised of observations of public services, collecting and analyzing literacy products by the community or by myself for my self-ethnography, and interviews with participants. My analysis was ongoing for 12 months of my time at Slavic Fellowship. I began by formally documenting participant observations of the service, and then held interviews and analyzed documents.

In my data analysis, I applied multiple codings that here appear to be accomplished in a neat and orderly process, for the purpose of explanation, whereas the

actual process was much more recursive. First, I coded for contextualization (Hodder, 2000) to understand how the parts of a service, event, product, or interview were connected, providing a background to later recognize the fluctuation of literacy practices or of identity. Second, I coded for literacy practices—assumptions and values about literacy. Third, I coded for the identity framework, the most complicated coding.

For coding for identity, I applied Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) categories of identity as 1) discursive and ideological about language, 2) related to power roles, 3) numerous, broken, and recombined (as often coded by me "multiple"), 4) "imagined" in symbol and story (and I added desire and resistance), and 5) narrative. These categories lent themselves to my adoption of R. Jenkins' (2004) proposal of identity as dialectical. I particularly noted when relationships between literacy coding and identity-framework coding coincided. More specific coding emerged in my initial analysis, adding subcategories. Following Barton and Hamilton (1998), my analysis was partially based on grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), in a recurring process of "reading, memoing, coding, and developing themes" enhanced by computer capabilities (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 71).

Observation of Public Services

Data Collection of Service Observations

I observed 49 Sunday morning services, 4 Saturday-evening fundraisers, and 1 early Sunday morning baptismal service during the 12-month period. Sunday services, which were scheduled to start at 11:00 a.m., usually began 10 to 15 minutes later, and although scheduled to end at 12:30 p.m., usually ended at about 1 p.m. and occasionally

later. Fundraisers were scheduled at 6 p.m., the greeting occurring at 6:30 p.m., and ended at around 8:30 p.m.

During services, I identified and documented literacy events. A church service influenced by the Russian Baptists is highly participatory in that lay individuals are given public opportunities to contribute. Typical literacy events at Slavic Fellowship included those with one of the pastors speaking: opening to the service, transitions between activities, short messages, sermon, and closing. Others activities were collective music with the lyrics to the songs in Russian projected on a screen, vocal performance by a lay person, poetry reading by a lay person, children's message by a lay person, testimonies given or read by lay people, presentations by visitors, and passing notes to a pastor. Fundraisers included a greeting from a leader in the church, either Nicolai, or others comfortable with English speaking, prayers, a meal served buffet-style, a program with guest vocalists, and slides of photographs with explanations by an English speaker. The baptismal service, scheduled at 8 a.m., beginning at 8:30 a.m., and ending at 9:20 a.m. included worship music, an introduction by Ivan, a short message by Nicolai with a scripture reading by Nicolai and Ivan, baptism of the candidates, and prayers. Because I did not wish to tax the kindness of my interpreters anymore than I already had and because I had a principle of observing public events when invited (as well as needing to limit my study), I did not observe the Sunday school session with the children that took place during the last half of the service (although I later was told that much of the Sunday school classes were in English).

In the Sunday services, I took extensive notes. I and other "Americans" were given headsets when we entered and heard a translation of many activities from an

interpreter who sat before the sound operator booth, although rarely an interpreter was not available. For Sunday service, my observations begin when I drove up and ended when I drove away. I took notes on what I saw and heard, including the interpreter's comments and conversations that I may have had. Because I brought friends with me to the fundraisers and because note-taking was more obtrusive as we ate at round tables, my fundraiser notes were less detailed. I took "jotted notes" (Fielding, 1993). For the baptism, I also jotted notes afterwards. For all my notes, I added comments on what I felt could be topics of inquiry. During the communion part of a Sunday service once a month, I did not take notes. Not only would the participants have viewed such behavior as inappropriate, I personally would have been uncomfortable doing so. After I left, I drove home and, if a Sunday, typically typed out the "thick description" (Geertz, 1973), cueing my memory with the jotted and extensive notes.

Data Analysis of Service Observation

As I began the literacy practice and identity coding, I commented at the top of each service's notes on the name of the interpreter and special events for that service. After making literacy practice coding, I coded following Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) identity framework. I coded my fieldnotes not only for spoken language but also for behaviors, clothing, and material culture, including literacy materials and the images on the projection slides. For example, Hodder (2000) has explained that decoration can be a "form of silent discourse conducted by women" (p. 705). His position was that material culture has two meanings: symbolic and evocative. This understanding of material culture is particularly applicable to the characteristics of identity, imagined and narrative.

I began coding public services after I had analyzed the first interviews of the pastors and continued this coding by first looking at individuals and then looking at public services throughout, until towards the end of my analysis I coded the rest of the service notes. Part way through my analysis, I began to assemble themes related to identity coding, such as when women appeared to have leadership, English was used in church, or when Israel was mentioned by other than the pastors. Also part way through my analysis, I typed up a summary of the events of each service and the transfer of authority between leadership during these events. This contextualization was vital in noting power relationships. Towards the end, I assembled my coding and the data on certain literacy events into separate documents so that I could analyze them for patterns and discrepancies over the course of the 12 months: these were the children's sermons, the sermons for adults, testimonies, poetry readings, communion, collective singing, and scripture readings.

Collection of Literacy Products

Data Collection of Literacy Products

Locally created texts were the "text world" that members of Slavic Fellowship were constructing (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 107), demonstrating the agency of their own identities and yet also the external forces which shaped them. I found a couple of outside texts used in the "home groups" central in the mind of the church leadership as worthy of comment. Other established written texts such as the Bible and the written lyrics of the collective music were essential in that I drew from their use in the services to flesh out the developing story of Slavic Fellowship, but I did not perform a content analysis on them as I did with the created texts and lightly so with English versions of the

two other outside texts. I observed the passing of notes and their visible consequences, but I did not request copies of them due to their personal nature. The locally created texts I have identified for analysis are Sunday service programs, Slavic Fellowship's website, handouts on gender roles for the youth group, and the church constitution. For the Russian ones, I compensated Raisa, Ivan's wife, to translate them.

For my analysis of my literacy practices and identity, I analyzed my own personal documents. As is my habit, during my preparation for research and the fieldwork, I kept a personal spiritual journal. For several months, I also produced a blog in which I shared my critique of myself and my faith. Later, I typed my journal, omitting references to some intimate matters and analyzed it along with the text of the blog.

Data Analysis of Literacy Products

Examining literacy practices and identity, I conducted content analysis on literacy products, contextualizing them first in their place in a service or event, their genre, and their audience. As with the notes for events and interviews, I coded for literacy practice and identity. Photos, symbols, pictures and other visual presentation were important to contextualize the text and to note their contribution to the identity framework. I created separate documents on each type of literacy product arranged by the patterns in my coding.

To examine and demonstrate my own biases and religious literacy practice and identity, I analyzed the texts of my journal and blog. I coded it as I did the texts of interviews and services. To observe changing identity, I divided my journals into four time periods, varying from five to seven months, applying my concept of discursive identity. The first period was July through December 2004, when I worked on my

background research for my dissertation, also leaving the church of my membership. Second was from January through May 2005, third from mid-June through December 2005, and fourth from January through August 2006. It is not coincidental that major transitions occurred in my life either during the winter or summer breaks of the academic school year since I was a full-time faculty member who often could not ruminate fully until I withdrew from coursework. I created separate documents based on the patterns of my coding, drawn from my different personal texts.

Interviews of Participants

Sampling for Interviews

I interviewed 14 church participants. I interviewed both pastors and my interpreters twice (Ivan with Raisa). Typical interviews were from 43 minutes to about an hour, but a few, the ones with the pastors and one with Vasily, who explained his scientific theories, extended to about 1.5 hours, excepting the first interview with Ivan and Raisa that included tea and went from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. The total interview time was 17.5 hours. Other than the pastors and my interpreters, I selected among members who had been raised as Russian Baptists—the “socialized believers”—and the “new believers,” all whom I interviewed once. Among the socialized believers, I interviewed the music director because of his influence in the visual presentation of lyrics and slides in the church as well as music’s way of setting the tone of the service. I also interviewed a socialized believer who was a Sunday school teacher since I did not have the opportunity to observe the children’s Sunday school. I interviewed one socialized believer and her husband a new believer, because, unlike the others I had interviewed, she was a young person who was also married. Among the new believers, I attempted to

also reflect the various populations of the church, such as gender, age, education, and their status as first generation or generation 1.5. I interviewed one of the scientists in his fifties, one young man (married to a socialized believer) who was recent to the U. S., another who was generation 1.5 and involved in leading the youth group, a woman in her 30s recently married and with two daughters, and two recent visitors to the church who publically converted. One of these, a woman, was a poet. My “theoretical sampling” of specific individuals changed somewhat as I continued my participation in the church service before I started my interviews (Charmaz, 2000). For the last new believer, I had hoped to interview her before a public conversion, which I could not have predicted.

Data Collection of Interviews

I considered the interviews as “semi-standardised” (Fielding, 1993) as were the first interviews of Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) research team. I crafted a list of questions, occasionally asking beyond the questions, as when in my interviews of lay members I asked them about their interest in specific literacy events in which they participated. I gave a text of the basic questions in both Russian and English to potential interviewees (appendix). Raisa had translated the interview questions and the informed consent form for me. Some interviewees on their own talked beyond the questions and felt free to tell short narratives, describing what Hamilton and Barton called their “ruling passions.” Each interviewee signed a consent form and agreed to being recorded. Three of the interviewees requested an interpreter. One brought along her adult daughter as an additional interpreter, and the daughter also agreed to sign the consent form. Although these interviews had interpreters, often the interviewees would speak partially with me and the interpreter in English. Because interviewees were much more comfortable in a

group setting, I interviewed two of my interpreters together and the young married couple. Likewise, Raisa's voice was equal to Ivan's in my interview with him: she did not just interpret but shared her own views. Afterwards I gave the interviewees English versions of the transcript and asked that they make corrections if they wished. Four did so.

I asked those who interviewed if I they preferred that I come to their home, interview them at the church building, or meet them at another location. Both pastors invited me to their homes, as did one interpreter, and two others. For my second interview with two interpreters, my key informants, I invited them to my fiancé's home and interviewed them in a private room after a meal. Three of the men I met at church and interviewed near an event time. Four others I met at coffee shops after the Sunday service.

After I did my initial analysis on church documents, I interviewed the pastors a second time asking about the production of congregational texts and the organization of private literacy events, such as home group meetings. After I had analyzed the texts of the first interview of two of my interpreters who were women my age, and markedly single in this congregation of people who mostly married young, I shared my impressions of their first interview and asked questions related to religious literacy and gender.

Data Analysis of Interviews

My analysis of the interviews included brief notes I took on the setting during the interview and the dialogue itself. In these dialogues, I heard more explicit expressions of literacy practices and more specific instances of individual identity. As with the other methods, I coded for contextualization, literacy practice, and identity. For each

individual, whether interviewed individually or not, I produced a document arranged by my coding. After my third interview, I came up with a list of individual literacy practices that I added to and revised as I analyzed other interviews. Once I realized that I would write one chapter on socialized believers and one chapter on new believers, I produced charts comparing the individual literacy practices among the individuals in each group so that I could more clearly see shared practices.

Integration of Methods and Cross-Analysis

My integration of methods occurred in my data analysis. Each method had its strengths and weaknesses. While interviewing supplied my descriptions of interviewee's perspectives, I used observations of public services to note interviewees' "theory-in-use" (Maxwell, 2005). I found myself gaining valuable information from my interpreter, Anna, when she sat next to me, but I sometimes missed what occurred for the literacy event during the whispered conversations, as well as the challenges of language interpretation. A difficulty I had in interviewing was that if I asked about literacy events, the question might seem obvious to the interviewee who recognized me as an ethnically U. S. Christian. Thus, I found my second interviews awkward. For example, when I asked Nicolai about the creation of the church constitution, he responded with introductory comments to his sentences such as "and like any other church in the U. S." Or when I asked, Marie "Why is that important--to read books about being a woman or being a Christian woman?", she answered, "I guess, because I strive to be a woman who is Christian and godly," assuming that I knew why it was important to be a "godly" woman. The answers would have been more explicit if I had not identified myself as a

Christian, and yet because of my faith I gained trust in my interviews and an absence of time that may have been spent in my proselytization.

After realizing the importance of private literacy events, I decided I needed to assemble what data I had on references to them in my early interviews, and in later interviews, I asked specific questions about them, but because of my tentativeness to tax my interpreters and the remarkable change to the atmosphere an English speaker would bring, I never observed a home group. While I constructed descriptions of perspectives of these events, my analysis is missing “theory-in-use.” This data has some triangulization in that church members gave me the English versions of texts used in home groups, but again I am challenged by increased subjectivity—this time with no translator to interview--because only a few groups used the English versions of the texts. Secondly, I was given the impression in interviews that in Ivan’s groups, which the new believers I interviewed attended, the agenda was looser than focusing on a chapter for the week.

From my data, I assembled interviewees’ references to church literacy products in separate documents and then added to them references to the same literacy products in public services for cross analysis. Likewise, I joined the codings and my comments on particular literacy events referenced in interviews and referenced and enacted in the congregation’s services to examine for similarities and discrepancies. After I had analyzed each transcript for an interviewee, I analyzed his or her participation in public literacy events from my observations and compared the two analyses by joining them together in one document. I also assembled collections of pieces of data from both interviews and services on the topics of the interaction of insiders and outsiders of the

congregation and on the comments made about government literacy events, such as submitting information for passports, visa, and citizenship.

Validation and Ethical Concerns

Validation

My study is validated through the *triangulation of data* based on three different methods of participant observation, document analysis, and interviews (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 69). I understand the possible multiple constructions due to multiple languages that can occur with collaboration with interpreters, which is why I included them in my interviews. Following Maxwell's (2005) stress on validity, I wrote "rich" data in my thick descriptions and sought feedback from participants and colleagues outside of the study. Because asking "attitudinal" questions cross culturally can lead to misunderstandings (Fielding, 1993, p. 150), I reviewed my questions with a church contact and offered opportunities for member checks of transcriptions of the interview. I also requested feedback from Nicolai and Ivan after I had completed a draft of this dissertation. They both responded positively to the dissertation, appreciative of learning multiple perspectives of individuals and grateful that the history of Russian Baptists and the restrictive culture of some traditional Russian Baptists had been exposed.

Ethical Concerns

As a fellow Christian, I may have had a different influence than a researcher who would not make similar claims. In the congregation's eyes, I was a contact with ethnically U. S. churches and other Christian organizations, a position for me to negotiate when I was invited to bring my friends to fundraisers. When engaged in conversations about authors and institutions that approached scripture differently, I was careful of my

purpose when discussing these to contextualize my view to myself. As with A. Fishman (1988), an acquaintance at the church may have casually made a comment that would divulge more information than she or he would have given in an interview, and I made the decision not to use that information if potentially harmful within the community to the individual or another.

The unique collective identity of Slavic Fellowship makes it almost impossible to hold all information truly confidential. However, I used pseudonyms and avoided personal details in conversations. In view of potential conflicts within the sensitive environment of a religious community, one where the discourse is comprehensive for seeing all of reality, it was of the utmost importance that I created space in the written presentation for the voice of my study's participants, as validated by member checks.

CHAPTER 8

PASTORS' LITERACY PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

Introduction

On a typical Sunday at Slavic Fellowship after the first congregational song, a guest would be greeted from the pulpit by Nicolai, a pleasant man in his fifties, usually in a dark suit. Besides speaking in Russian, he fluidly and fluently switches to English if a guest is ethnically U. S. or may pop in a pro-Ukrainian comment about his heritage or a Hebrew word as he sees fit. He welcomes the congregation, reads a short passage of scripture, and prays before leaving the pulpit. After another song, possibly in English, Ivan, the co-pastor stands up, not at the pulpit but on the front-center floor with a mike to make announcements and give prayer requests. Gentle-faced and a decade or so younger than Nicolai, he speaks entirely in Russian. He is referring to a paper copy of the program as he speaks. If it is winter, and especially, if he is preaching this day, he too will be wearing a suit. Ivan, the master of ceremonies for this event, introduces most participants' performances and other activities during the service, often finding something affirming on which to comment or drawing a theme together from each before moving on to the next part of the program. Likely, no one enters the pulpit again, set to the right of the communion table decorated with a large open Bible and candles, until the sermon at the end of the service. And then either Nicolai, Ivan, or one of two other men preaches in Russian.

Before I describe my analysis of the collective identity, I will follow my emphasis on individuals, starting with the pastors. What role does each have in shaping the literacy practices of the collective identity of this community? My early, naive impression at the

church was that Nicolai held most of the influence. It was Nicolai I talked with about the project and who wrote me a letter of permission for the Institutional Review Board. But as I continued my fieldwork, I recognized the roles that Ivan and Nicolai had defined for themselves. Nicolai's role according to my conversations with Ivan and his wife Raisa was that he is "a kind of missionary pastor": he "attracts people." Raisa specifically said that Nicolai "ignites a fire" while Ivan does "the rest of the counseling."

Nicolai explained in an interview how he became involved in the church. Three couples visited him in his home after he had made presentations in several local Slavic churches about his evangelistic trips to the Ukraine and Russia. The men among the couples, including Ivan, requested his aid to "organize a church." Nicolai responded, "'No,' because I didn't have time for that. I was traveling. I was still gainfully employed. And they pleaded with me to start that for at least a couple months. Well, this is our eighth year." During the seventh-year celebration of the church, Ivan narrated a projected slide show, interpreted by Marie. His first slide was a photograph of him and another man in Nicolai's living room: "We thought if Nicolai said no, no church. Nicolai didn't know us." In the fledgling church, two of the men left criticizing the music style and wanting to recruit more from traditional Russian Baptist believers. The church at 30 people, split by to 14 by 14--"a hard time."

The church maintained with Ivan as the pastor who handled most of the daily responsibilities and Nicolai as a pastor who networked as a public face to non-Russian speakers, including benefactors, for the church building, and inviting secular Russians to services. I return to my question, "What role does each have in shaping the literacy practices of the collective identity of this community?", but I am waiting until the

chapters on literacy events and text to discuss more fully the power relationships of Nicolai and Ivan with each other and the congregation. In this chapter, I present Ivan and Nicolai's stories and their individual literacy practices, as I do in chapters 9 and 10 for socialized believers and new believers. In chapters 11 and 12 I explain the contribution of the church's literacy products and private and public group events to the collective identities. My rationale for appearing to waylay a comprehensive discussion of power is simple. Explorations of power relationships often and for good reasoning engender negative critique of the major power holders. I want to introduce the individuals of the church, including the leadership, as "fellows" based on individual identifications, for which readers may have more empathy, before delving into collective identifications, in order that at the end my judgment and the readers' in regards to power is as measured as possible.

Ivan and Nicolai's Shared Literacy Practices

Both Ivan and Nicolai shared some common literacy practices, indicating their influence in the dialectic of the collective identity of this interpretive community: the first three practices are common to the conservative baptistic symbolic community, focusing on who they are centered around scripture: *the Bible as authoritative, reading scripture and other Christian texts as transformative to one's identity, an interpretation of scripture that Christians share in a continuing narrative of scripture with Jews*. The last one suggests a boundary: *value of participating in a church welcoming seekers in resistance to traditional Russian or Ukrainian Baptist churches in the U. S.* I end this section by describing the relationship of their shared literacy practices to the

congregation's sense of stability, meaningfulness, and tensions in its particular non-place identity.

The Bible as Authoritative

The belief of scripture as having the highest authority—the final word—on all matters was not stated as much in my interviews with Ivan as tacitly assumed. Ivan told me that Russian Christians “strongly believe” that they are not to make a pledge to the government—because what if they were ordered to do something wrong? He supported this by looking up a passage in the Bible. Nicolai, on the other hand, was explicit. He responded to my question regarding his reading of religious books with “well, of course, there's the book of books. And that's number one,” adding “there are so many other books written, and yet there is one that was quoted so many times by Christ himself when he said, ‘It is written.’”

In a July 2006 sermon, Nicolai stated, “I want to share with you about church, and of course, these are not my thoughts, but from scripture” (tr. Marie), assuming not only the authority of scripture but that it had a plain, literal meaning, easy to interpret. With this view of ease of interpretation, he was wary of individual revelation that would counter what he considered the plain meaning of the text. Since prophecy, new revelation, was considered a gift of the Holy Spirit, in a fall 2005 November sermon, he had to negotiate prophecy's worth: “Prophets in Old Testament for edification. I'm skeptical if someone comes up with a prophecy unless it's from the Word of God, the Bible. Yes, God sometimes speaks, but please be careful” (tr. Marie). Nicolai included a narrative in the later July sermon:

Apostle Paul says people who say “Yes, I know God, dear brother, the Lord told me to do this and this.” When I hear this, I say, “No, Jesus Christ told me not to do because it is not according to Bible.” You know, one sister came to church, but before she came here, the pastor told her this husband not from God, divorce and marry another. So, she got another word...this is craziness. I’m so glad we have truth in front of us.

Unlike most personal revelation, Nicolai was confident that “truth” could be found in the text of scripture.

The scenario of a leader crossing the authority of scripture with a countering interpretation was expressed in a different context by Raisa and Ivan. In a conversation about the differences between registered and unregistered churches in the former Soviet Union, Raisa and Ivan talked about how the unregistered churches were constantly splintering in their attempt to “be in the world and not of it.” Raisa wondered if these underground churches were taking scripture out of context in making new rules to avoid resemblance to “the world,” and stated that such churches regard of themselves was “sometimes I think higher than the Bible,” unknowingly echoing the theologian Vanhoozer (1998) that the importance of maintaining the narrowness of interpretation can make fundamentalist interpreters more authoritative than the scripture itself.

As authority, the Bible was considered a source of information about reality that was uncontested. “Where is it written?” Ivan asked for his audience when giving a point about on baptism in a July sermon, and then he referred them to a specific Bible passage. In January, after a dramatic testimony ending with a man who died after hearing about God but was not fully cognizant of his surroundings, Ivan stated: “Bible is real book—we

don't live in a haze but in a real world. Religion isn't real, but serving God is" (tr. Marie). He encouraged the listeners that reading the Bible would provide explanation of the realities of death. In his November sermon interpreted by Marie, Nicolai expressed: "The book we learn from first is the Bible. People write about Bible and can be wrong. I saw a program on Channel 11—anyone see it?" No one raised his or her hand. "Very scary facts. The first person said no virgin birth. I sat there and thought what if God sent a falling star in Channel 11." Although other sources could provide truth, he viewed the Bible as the "first" or authoritative source.

As authority, the Bible was an instruction manual for the ordering of people's lives. This principle was particularly evident in Ivan's Father's Day sermon that delineated roles of men and women within a family hierarchy. Worried that "man is disappearing" in today's culture, Ivan taught based on the apostle Paul's scriptural command "Husband, love your wives; wives, respect your husband" and that the "father is head of family" (tr. Marie). It is "important," he went on to say, "how wife and mother looks at husband, that's how kids treat him. An example would be a mother saying, 'Hey, kids, your father has nothing going for him.'" Almost two months later, he announced a new Bible study for "brothers" where "we'll talk about if man is head of family" (trans. Marie). Later in August, as translated by Marie, he introduced a scripture reading by explaining it was a passage in Bible about obedience to parents. He thought that children needed to be reminded to obey and parents reminded to discipline.

Reading Scripture and Other Christian Texts as Transformative to One's Identity

With the authority of scripture as a premise, Ivan and Nicolai saw reading the Bible, and often other Christian texts, as a central activity to the construction of a

Christian identity. However, they emphasized different motivations in reading scripture which I turn to later in the sections on their individual practices. For both of them, reading scripture could *initiate* seekers into the Christian identity. Nicolai offered the youth going on a ministry trip a coin that read on the front “Where are you going to be after death?” and on the flip side a quotation of the verse John 3:16 (tr. Marie). He once asked during a November service that the congregation pray for a couple he had attempted to evangelize: “both supposed to be reading the Bible, so pray for them, beginning to have the life” (tr. Marie). In an interview, Ivan shared that his commitment to Christianity began with reading the Bible as a 14-year-old and then an experience of reading a Russian translation of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, “the first Christian book” he had read. Both also thought that people should read the Bible “for themselves.” Ivan tried to persuade the congregation to follow a program to read through the Bible in a year. One July service, Nicolai bemoaned the naïve response of wedding attendees to a message he had given the day before. The attendees, he stated, must have “never read the Bible for themselves” (tr. Marie).

However, in line with traditional Christian belief, Nicolai and Ivan were careful to qualify that the transformative power of scripture reading requires another agent other than the individual reader: the Holy Spirit. A transformative reading of scripture or other Christian texts is never one that is performed truly alone. In a March sermon, Nicolai reminded the attendees that the “Holy Spirit is the one who can open hearts and mind to what the scripture says.... You read the Bible, and it just opens to you—pray that we’ll understand because it’s his love letter to us” (tr. Marie). Ivan, as the Bible reading program was starting in January, preached on reading the gospels books to become like

Jesus. He rhetorically inquired why it appeared that people can read scripture but seem unaffected. He answered that believers can recognize their ability to pursue the imitation of Christ in scripture because they “have the Holy Spirit to do the right thing” (tr. Marie).

Neither Nicolai nor Ivan saw Bible reading as the only identity-changing activity of a conservative Christian. In an August segue from a musical performance during a service, Ivan exhorted that there are “two factors for living differently—prayer and communication with God” (tr. Marie). When I interviewed Nicolai the second time and brought up the Bible reading program, he was quick to note that he had hoped to convey the Sunday before four transformative activities of Christians:

But in my sermon, I wanted to actually let people know that there are several things, actually four, that Christians were distinguished by in early church. That’s in Acts 2, verse 42. It says that: “They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching”—that’s one, “and to the fellowship”—that’s two, “and to the breaking of bread”—that’s three, “and to prayer.” So, all of those four ingredients are very, very important. You know, and if you take one, or put more emphasis on another, you know, then you become warped theologically in a way.

A Narrow Interpretation of Scripture that Christians Share in an On-going Scriptural

Narrative with Jews

A conservative baptistic interpretation of scripture that drove some of the congregation’s projects, central to its collective non-place identity, was not only the belief shared with other Christians that the narrative of scripture was continuing with their activity as the church but that they were responsible for a prophetic time when multitudes of Jews would become Christians. As Nicolai said in a March sermon

interpreted by Marie: “Today, be on alert and await for coming of Lord. We are awake as Gentiles. Lord is waiting for fullness of Gentiles, and Israel will be saved.” Thus, the current political situation of Israel deserved mention from the pastors—from prayer requests to actual events. Towards the end of my fieldwork in August 2006 during a turbulent time in Israel, Ivan introduced a speaker from Israel, telling us the speaker would talk a little politics about the “land that God gave to Israel. As Christians we understand both sides of conflict” (tr. Marie). As I will express later, this interpretation of scripture had special significance to this church in its evangelical projects in a city with an earlier wave of Russian-speaking Jews. It also was a focal point for Nicolai’s own identity, his specific location of himself in this narrative.

Value of Participating in an Interpretive Community Welcoming Seekers in Resistance to

Traditional Russian or Ukrainian Baptist Churches in the U. S.

A “seeker” is a U. S. evangelical term for people who are interested in God but not committed to a particular belief in God—the seekers that motivated Ivan and Nicolai were people who had been socialized as atheists in the former Soviet Union. Nicolai’s and Ivan’s imagined collective identity of a Russian-speaking church was a baptistic one that was outward oriented unlike most Russian Baptist churches, which they considered inward oriented, trying to preserve not Slavic culture but specifically Slavic Baptist culture from the home countries. In one of his interviews with Raisa, after explaining how their initial church of 30 split, Ivan said that there were two kinds of Russian-speaking churches: “those who adopt culture and those who don’t.” Raisa added that “we’re judged for using English in our church.” Ivan followed by saying, “Russian

churches say our brothers died for it [Russian culture].” Slavic Fellowship, Raisa said, was criticized because “we sing American songs, don’t have three sermons.”

A unique situatedness of a historical thread of literacy was evident in this immigrant congregation. One strand of the thread was that Ivan and Raisa’s background differed from some Russian speakers in the U. S. Ivan and Raisa were from a now independent state in the Central Asian region of the former Soviet Union. There, they had participated in a church that was a “mixture of mostly Russian, Ukrainian, and German” in a multicultural city. Raisa explained that “we were influenced by other cultures” such as the Germans who demonstrated good works, tithes, and large families. Ivan noted that the environment in the Central Asia location was more open to religious beliefs: because of “more government control in Russia,” churches in Russia were “smaller” with “more old people.”

Likewise, as a three-decade immigrant married to a woman raised in the U. S., Nicolai had a personal history facilitating acceptance of an accommodating Russian-speaking baptistic church that appeared somewhat like ethnically U. S. churches in its music style and number of sermons. After Nicolai told me in his first interview how he joined the church despite its meeting distance across the metro area, he said,

I’ll be very honest with you--what propels me and encourages me is that we have new people that come to Christ. That we’re not becoming a holy huddle so to say because so many other churches are just that, you know. They do not have newcomers. They actually shun newcomers away because they’re different. He was not implying recent Russian *Christian* immigrants—those he claimed would be greeted by the more conservative pastors with flowers at the airport--but rather non-

Christians. “Our church is a missions church—first thing is evangelism of world,” he declared one day in July when he preached on the topic of a church body (tr. Marie). Although he grouped Slavic Fellowship with other baptistic churches, he categorized it as different from a “holy huddle” in his nominalization of a “mission church.”

*Shared Literacy Practices and the Stability, Meaningfulness, and Tensions of this
Particular Non-Place Identity*

With the authoritative, fixed element of the sacred text providing stability and maximizing a collective non-place identity, Nicolai and Ivan could lead the church in meaningful services by doing things in new ways without fear of the loss of identity that preoccupied traditional Russian Baptist churches. These new ways could be as basic as celebrating multiple holidays, utilizing resources both Russian and ethnically U. S., such as the celebration of both Russian and U. S. holidays--whether the socialist-initiated Women’s Day or the consumerist-driven Mother’s Day.

With their view of scripture, Nicolai and Ivan freely called upon both material and spiritual resources for members of the congregation experiencing the difficulty of immigrant life. They recognized, for example, the challenges of interacting with the U. S. and Russian and Ukrainian governments involving passports and visas. Nicolai used his political connections to advocate for a mother married to an ethnically U. S. man to be joined with her high school daughter who had moved to another state. He publically gave her a Bible before she left. When a key member of the church, Victoria, was deported, Ivan introduced one of his sisters, Galena, to share about her, and she told a narrative about how long it took her fiancé to come to the U. S. and that it was not until after years of letter-writing to the government and her personal “humbl[ing]” that he came (tr.

Marie). The effective work of revising someone's migration status included not only literacy events with government officials but the revising of one's spiritual relationship with God. Ivan supported this theory of spiritual relationships causing change in the world when the following week, he brought Victoria up during the prayer request time, as well as noting that the church was sending her a monthly care package with sermon tapes (tr. Marie). Nicolai and Ivan led in interpreting the day-to-day and tragic situations that affected immigrants.

However, while their interpretations could produce a sense of stability within the congregation, their individual interpretative versions and varied deepness of their non-place identities, could also produce occasional tension. Both Ivan and Nicolai generated language that combined religious and political discourse and interpreted political actions. Perhaps because Nicolai was not socialized as a believer as a child, growing up as a privileged member of Soviet society although later disenfranchised, he placed more emphasis on place, including the U. S. Nicolai in a service interpreted by Marie in February said about the then President George W. Bush: "Any immigrants down on President should know he is born again, prays in morning and before bed. He said that American soul is not in weapons but in heart and soul of Americans." Ivan, whose identity was more obviously non-placed, saw scripture as explaining political contexts, but not necessarily supporting them except in the case of Israel, noting that the apostle Paul wrote letters to churches that were persecuted and had "no freedom," but now there was "too much freedom" (tr. Marie). Near Independence Day, Nicolai stood and read in English a text titled "Do You Remember Real America?" that was sensationally right winged in its critique of the U. S. Afterwards, Ivan rose, and interpreted by Anna,

softened the harshness of Nicolai's reading: "Interesting. This is odd for most Russians: respect of countries if you remember Soviet Union." He followed by reading a passage about government in scripture. He did not look at Nicolai for some time afterwards. Ivan's identity in the U. S. had a functional quality to it (Hanauer, 2008)—his identity as a believer with spiritual resources was more pressing in his understandings of relationships with the government.

In a July service interpreted by Marie, an elderly U. S. man who knew Nicolai gave a long-winded message in English, explaining worship practices in the Hebrew Scriptures, while dressed as a "high priest" from the text. Nicolai's orientation toward his imaginings of Jewishness and Israel played into this as well as his own belief in affirming a converted individual as one of God's people and worthy to participate in a church service. I was surprised to recognize eventual open resistance from the congregation: Jewish instrumental music started playing in the background, people shifted noisily in their seats, an old woman in a scarf leaned heavily on the front of the chair ahead of me, and a couple prominent members of the church walked to the back and did not return until he was done. However, even when the microphone went dead, Nicolai smiled and looked at the back requesting sound since the man wanted to tell the church about his turban. Afterwards, Nicolai said in English, "We would like to pray—you've served Jesus for 75 years."

Ivan, too, with a sensitivity toward the challenges of being a immigrant, provided meaningful opportunities for people to share who could have been detractors from the project of the church to attract new educated members, such as allowing a shrill, never-smiling traditional believer to read poetry. Another individual who attended the church

was not as slickly dressed as other participants, with un-styled hair and in jeans and casual sweaters or sweatshirts. Like the “priest,” he tended to be long-winded and he sometimes froze with nervousness before a stream of words and yet Ivan still scheduled him for testimonies, once saying (tr. Marie), “He has waited a long time to share this with you.” Ivan seemed to allow him to speak once a month to once every two months, and the man told extended stories of events from his past that he had later recognized as supernatural. However, on one occasion, he told a current story, demonstrating the meaningfulness of his sharing of testimonies to himself and the congregation. He told of how he applied for 10 different jobs and then received one only a mile and a half from his home: “God’s hand in this,” he stated at the end (tr. Marie). The congregation erupted with “praise God” and clapping.

Additional examples of Ivan’s interpretation of church attendees’ suffering were driven by his individual interpretation of scripture. I begin the next section with Ivan’s individual literacy practices since he, with others at the time, approached Nicolai with the idea for a new church, and then turn to Nicolai, mentioning his contribution to this church identity that Ivan thought was utterly necessary. My analysis corresponds with Barton and Hamilton’s (1998) in that two other kinds of categorization emerged as prevalent. They noted both “ruling passions,” something the interviewees “wanted to talk about” (p. 83) and “themes,” the interviewees’ theories about their literacy. Because of my focus on discursive identity, applying Pavlenko and Blackledge’s (2004) framework, I have chosen terminology that tends more toward the conceptualizations of language and Gee’s (2000) term of projects, products and imaginations of the future as projected identity.

Ivan's and Nicolai's Individual Literacy Practices

Ivan's Individual Literacy Practices

Ivan's Story

Ivan's interviews included Raisa, his wife and sometimes interpreter, and they often laughingly talked at once with equal passion. Interviews were held in their suburban home, and Raisa served me tea and desserts both times. Ivan began his narrative by starting with his conversion at 14 when he read *Pilgrim's Progress*, an old copy that was printed before the Revolution because new translations were forbidden at the time.

Like another man that I interviewed, he moved to his two-year mandatory military service at 18. He told me that for Christian men in the former Soviet Union, "army, kind of test for you because you're alone, around non-Christian people." His church and others thought it would be wrong to have a girlfriend during military service because "when they got to the army, they change a lot, became different." Because he refused to take a pledge to the government since he held the Bible as his first authority, he was imprisoned for 10 days. He wrote his parents to tell them what happened, Raisa saying, "I remember the letter was read to church. That I remember vividly."

The second part of his narrative was becoming a youth pastor at a church. He and other young men had been trained before they joined the army--"school at home"—to study the Bible and preach. Besides returning from the army to find work—he could not attend college because the vow of communism was against his Christian belief—he was expected to begin a role of leadership in the church as a deacon, a man who helps the pastor, or a youth pastor. He became a youth pastor. Although Ivan said he attended

seminary later in the U. S., as a young person he had read through all his father's books from semi-formal seminary training taken on occasional trips to Moscow.

Next, Ivan spoke about moving to the U. S. with his family, supported by a sponsor, attending an ethnically U. S. church, and then joining a Russian church in 1991 that would eventually split before trying another one before he helped found Slavic Fellowship. In the former Soviet Union, pastors were not allowed by the government to make a living wage, so most worked full time. That expectation still exists from Russian Baptists in the U. S.: Ivan was a laborer, who started his day at 6 a.m. and left for home at 1:30 p.m. to attend to his other full-time responsibility of pastoring.

Language of Contextualization

Ivan's language in his interview was punctuated by comments asserting that his experience was situational or unique. He was always quick to prevent me from generalizing his experiences in a Central Asian state to all of Russia proper, such as holding religious training for children in homes because the government had disallowed it in the church building: "It's different than Russia." He included: "Some area control more, some less." Or, when he told me about registered and unregistered churches in the former Soviet Union, he stated twice, that "[his] opinion" was that Baptists in the U. S. had been misinformed: some of the persecution was "not necessary" just as "[his] opinion" included that some registered churches were "bad" and some were "good," always "depending on the church and area and leader of course." He also talked about the church system paralleling the Soviet structure: "It may be good. It may be good. It's not--kind of part of history--you should do something to survive; that is why they did it."

Ivan's approach to situation combined with his firm tenet that scripture is authoritative may be why he could appropriate or interpret scripture to fit a variety of experiences, providing boldness for himself and a sense of emotional strength for the congregation at Slavic Fellowship. Thus, in the past, literacy was a form of resistance for him to both secular and later Baptist leadership, and, in the present, a route of therapy for others.

Literacy as Resistance

Ivan was socialized to resist with reading government-suppressed books. He began with an old copy of *Pilgrim's Progress* on his own. While in his informal seminary training, he continued with "mimeographed" works of a theologian who was influential to him as a young man, the Orthodox Vladimir Lossky, who wrote from outside of the Soviet Union because of his father's exile after the Revolution. When Ivan told me about rejecting the pledge in the military, he paged through scripture to show me the validity of his claim. Ivan was willing even in his past, not to resist the government but also those in church leadership. In his second interview, he said that a book he was putting on his list for church members to read was one that he had been dissuaded from in the Soviet Union. Although published in the U. S. in 1975 (he showed me an English copy), he was able to obtain a Russian copy of it in the mid-80s at about the same time he was coming here: It "changed my life actually." His church leadership at the time said "It's not good" and "You can't read it" because it seemed to "disable" God in its explanation of prayer. Regardless, he and some friends read it for a men's group: "Even, they make more attractive book when they said, 'You're not supposed to read it.'" I agreed, and he added, laughing, "It's always like that. If something not allowed you, it

kind of attract you.” Because Ivan had a higher authority in his life than organization or government, religious literacy had been a way of resistance whether alone or in a group.

Emotion-Work through Religious Literacy

Ivan had liked the previously mentioned book on prayer because “in Russian churches, they don’t talk much on real life much, how important to praise God.” In this statement, he differentiated his church from other Russian churches. In his own church services he talked about “real life” frequently. Before coming to the U. S., he had found the church his community and a location of meaningful work, neglecting in his narrative to mention his secular employment in the Soviet Union. As a religious individual, he had been marginalized and was able to transfer this experience to immigrants undergoing a different kind of marginalization in the U. S. He led the “emotion-work” (Wittner, 1998) of a congregation. His reading of scripture was a factor in his ability to lead emotion-work because he somewhat mystically felt himself affirmed by God through scripture. In an August 2005 sermon, he shared:

On Monday, people say it’s a hard day. I was working, and in mind I got this passage from Bible—would come and go: “This is my son, beloved, in whom I am well pleased.” And the last time, I stopped working. Tears came into my eyes because God told me I’m beloved son. He loves me and loves you just like his beloved son. (tr. Marie)

The scripture he was quoting was God’s declaration to Jesus as he arose from his baptism, which Ivan had appropriated for himself. Likewise, when he was writing or preaching a sermon he testified to being overcome with positive emotions: “If I got to this point--I find out that God wants me to say that, something-- I feel, kind of, like fire in

side [laughter] make me write a sermon. It easy to do—not easy but kind of excited.”

Ivan’s heart for emotion-work may have resulted in the pressure he put on his congregation to be involved in ministry. I give more details on this pressure in later chapters.

Emphasis on Scriptural Explanations of Suffering

The “theologizing experience” of immigrants (T. L. Smith, 1978; Warner, 1998) is displayed in Ivan’s emphasis on scriptural explanations of suffering. He would make these comments when he gave the announcements, including prayer requests for those undergoing cancer treatment. Looking in the Bible, in February, he said, “Do you remember words of God in Revelation? He would wipe all tears away, but until that time we have sickness and death” (tr. Marie). The following week, he presented a sermon on suffering, telling the congregation that suffering would help them to mature as Christians, whether physical suffering or grief: “I know in this church we have very hard suffering, if not at this corner, around another” (tr. Marie). He then read a passage and applied the family metaphor of Christianity, that “God is treating us like sons.” The week following that, during communion, he talked about Jesus’ suffering, noting that both the apostle Paul and Jesus cried, reading from a psalm he considered about Jesus, and then ending with “let’s look at Christ and learn from him how to go through suffering” (tr. Marie).

Ivan also contextualized this suffering to current U. S. culture. Ivan preached in early April that for believers to have a relationship with God they must not try to fulfill themselves with the U. S. tendencies for noisiness, busyness, and consumerism but, instead, listen to Jesus knocking quietly in their hearts, referring to a verse in Revelation.

He said, “[Jesus] loves you so much, respects you and won’t knock down the door” (tr. Marie). After this, he prayed tearfully as others sniffled.

Suffering could be alleviated, Ivan believed, through reading scripture and prayer. “Two factors were necessary for living differently,” he said. By reading scripture with prayer, “God will relieve your stress and give you peace. Some people go to food or internet games, but what helps is the Bible—reading through that will help you” (tr. Marie). In May, during a period of sermons on prayer, he applied the narrative of the prophet Elijah being “depressed” (tr. Marie). He told the congregation that to pray, “You tell God what’s on your heart. God will understand. He knows.” Afterwards, he spoke about the stress of Hannah who was answered in her prayer for children. He insisted that prayer had the emotional benefits of visiting a psychologist.

Suffering, Ivan frequently urged congregants, should not be a lonely experience in the church. One day in January after an individual, Ina, gave a testimony of personal struggle, Ivan stood up next to her and announced, “When one of us is suffering, it touches all of us,” and then he and Nicolai prayed. In March, he read scripture about Christians sharing the same Spirit “and yet [apostle] Paul points the finger, where one member suffers, we all suffer” (tr. Anna).

Emotion-Work by Tying Other Discourses to Scripture

In my first interview with Ivan, he conveyed that for his sermons he used many books translated from English--these are books about the family. Laughing, he told me that he had Anna bring a “huge” Russian book back from Russia about the family: “When I start reading it--it’s Russian author--he got it from other books, from Americans that are over here.” He explained that in the past “in Russia, you never find any books

about family—how to do the family, about relationships, none of them.” He included, “Few of them maybe exist, but you never get a chance to buy or get it,” insisting nonetheless that “the best books about family is from America. I think so.” He believed it to be the “Russian way” that Russians “don’t work on their relationships.” These sources in addition to scripture were evident in his sermons—his Father’s Day sermon in particular highlighted statistics about families combined with scriptural discourse such as “statistics show[ing] that single men who are alone and unmarried go through depression that most—not pressuring single men, but God made Adam wife as helper” (tr. Marie). When teaching on repentance, a turning away from sin, he read aloud someone’s personal narrative, and stated: “You understand that moral, healthy life is very important to someone’s psychological wellbeing.”

Nicolai’s Literacy Practices

Nicolai’s Story

Nicolai also invited me to his suburban home for both my interviews with him. In a house decorated with Ukrainian crafts, he served me refreshments for both interviews. He also gave me articles about himself to which he would refer. Whereas my interviews with Ivan and Raisa tended toward the conversational, Nicolai spoke as a teacher and a historian, describing events in Russia and Ukraine’s past and present. When I asked Nicolai to break up his life into periods or themes and describe each to me, he declared first off “twenty-seven years of heathenism.” He had been brought up to be an atheist, a member of Komsomol, in a well-respected family. He studied language at university, served in the military, and succeeded in athletics and music and became a college professor. In the 1970s he met and fell “very much in love” with a U. S. tourist, to

whom, with severe obstruction from the government, he later married, and then he emigrated to be with her in the U. S.

Since he had married an evangelical, he attended a Russian and Ukrainian Baptist church, where he was shocked by the lack of education of the congregation and their uncultured language: “But one brother suggested that ‘Nicolai, close your linguistic ears and start listening to that with your heart because they are talking about Jesus.’”

Eventually, “I asked Christ to come into my heart. It was an amazing day. I’ll never forget it. Before or after.” He then began a life-long pursuit of biblical knowledge. He continued teaching at the university level and later moved into business until becoming a full-time evangelist, with a particular interest in his home country.

Religious Literacy Providing “True Knowledge”

Nicolai often referred to knowledge or used language about knowledge in his interviews with me and in services on Sundays. He was especially concerned that the church youth understand what he called “true knowledge.” Although Nicolai respected education, he saw public schooling as ideologically opposed to faith. Early in September 2005, he addressed the youth before their school year. He read a scripture passage and said in English: “Best thing you do is discern. Remember you’re in a hostile environment [at school]. This is absolutely amazing--that in U. S. with its beginning you are told there is no God but you were created by evolution.” He went on say that “real knowledge is from God.” After he repeated what he said in Russian to the rest of the congregation, he prayed in English, asking that the students would have “true discernment” to know wrong from right and valid from invalid, mentioning that “true wisdom” comes from God. In November, in a short English message to the youth, he spoke about the importance of

virtues, particularly “discernment” regarding education, and quoted Immanuel Kant. He noted that this philosopher was not Jesus Christ but an important one nevertheless and that he was studied in schools where Jesus is not studied. The following April, he gave another short message to youth, reading an article in which a student questioned his professor in order for his professor to consider the existence of God. Saying that the student had been Albert Einstein and that Charles Darwin “came to Christ in the last year of life,” Nicolai then affirmed to the youth that the “Christian faith” is an “intelligent” and “sophisticated faith.”

Other markers in his language indicated the significance of knowledge to him. In my first interview when I asked him to show me memorable religious books, he used the word “reveal” three times about the books, two of them being “revealing books,” and inserted the word “reveal” four more times in the interview. One of the books criticized another form of conservative Christianity, one answered the “toughest questions” of Christianity and the other two explained the historical background of Islam and Israel and of religions “still binding the Slavic world.” After his conversion experience, he explained:

I was reading the Bible at one point from cover to cover, especially the New Testament. I really wanted to know. I cannot brag about the Old Testament. There were a number of things I could not quite understand, but the New Testament, the Lord was revealing that to me. And as years went by, it’s a continuing study, and until I see my savior, I’ll be still studying about him and, and pondering about his word, you know, what he had to reveal to us.

This quotation suggests the major assumption that Nicolai had about religious literacy: it provided powerful knowledge as long as the interpretation was correct. The text is implied as a container of knowledge, since as related earlier, he was confident that reading the text could begin the process of salvation.

However, it is important to note that Nicolai saw an additional aspect to this knowledge. In a February sermon on inner freedom and independence, he told his listeners:

If faith is only in mind and not heart, it is only intellectual, “hip” as in former homeland. Karl Marx wrote about Christ in highest terms—in his writing agreed with what God said. A teacher asked did you believe in true vine? He did not answer...He knew about God and true freedom but did not accept it in his heart.

(tr. Marie)

In Nicolai’s mind, the knowledge could be understood but not necessarily spiritually transforming.

Along with his assertion that the Bible provided true wisdom, Nicolai had a high respect for secular post-secondary education, frequently mentioning to others that I was a Ph.D. candidate when he introduced me or commenting in services or fundraisers that the church had a molecular biologist and physicist. He believed that his own personal accomplishments were designed by God for him to be able to evangelize comfortably: “If they have achieved education, so have I. If they have achieved something in athletics, so have I. If they have achieved something in music, so have I.” He went on to say:

All of that is good. It helped me to understand the world maybe a little fuller. To have a little bit more of the worldview, you know, of Christianity and history as

is, and, you know, intellect as you will. But, you know, the main point, is whether you're saved, you know. Do you have the highest wisdom in your heart? Can you say right or wrong with apostle Paul, that road to Corinthians, that we have the mind of Christ? We have the mind of who can instruct God? We do have the mind of Christ. That's amazing. That's the highest of the high.

Value of Religious Literacy Being in an Accessible Language for True Knowledge

As a student of language, Nicolai frequently enjoyed peppering his messages with a Hebrew, French word, or even accented pronunciation. When Nicolai was not away on a trip, he always opened the service from the pulpit, and if he was aware of English-speaking guests, he spoke a greeting in both English and Russian and read a scripture passage in both. In my second interview, I mention to him that Mikhail, the music director, had commented that there would be a need for more English in the services for the youth. Nicolai responded: "We're authentic Christians, you know. We cannot just be doing that in the language that many do not quite understand. That is Russian. In other words, we have to have English and Russian." He added that not only were there youth who spoke English but "mixed couples" attended the church as well. In November, Nicolai conducted a dedication in both English and Russian for a child of an English-speaking father—after reading a Bible story, he prayed in English, and then Ivan prayed in Russian. He was also the one that announced at the end of November that the pastoral staff had decided to give a short message for youth every Sunday (eventually, an occasional occurrence).

Nicolai's Personal Location in the Continuing Narrative of Scripture

Besides emphasizing “true wisdom” or “true knowledge,” Nicolai often commented on history in interviews and in church services such as telling the audience on Easter Sunday to read the works of Josephus Flavius. When I asked if he read other historical books besides religious ones, he answered that he did as common to “people from Europe,” and appended:

The entire history of the world is in the good book, in the Bible, you know.

There's so much of history that the prophets and of course the disciples of the Lord Jesus and Jesus himself presented. So in the view of a biblical history, a person can see the world a little differently, you know, and realize what is coming to their world.

As obvious from the quotation, Nicolai enjoyed studying scripture portions related to eschatology, the doctrine of the future. He located himself and other believers in Israel's scriptural narrative, blended with Israel's historical narrative. In a visit to Israel, he told the mayor of Jerusalem that “their Bible has become mine, and I'm grafted into the Jewishness, if you will, and my heart has become Jewish because I believe in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who revealed himself in the Lord Jesus.” For him, the generation of ethnic Jews who were alive in 1948 during the “birth of Israel” was a special generation foretold in scripture, and they soon would take part in some “apocalyptic events.”

Nicolai's special role to the Jews is obvious in that he frequently named “Jewishness” in his conversation—delighted whenever he had the opportunity to share the gospel with someone who self-defined as a Jew. This project had been long-term in

that in a publicly read letter he wrote to a recently deceased friend, he reminisced about how they had met 25 years before for a Bible study for Russian Jews. This interest in evangelization of Jews was most prominent during an evening fundraiser where he had a special performer from the Ukraine who also sang in Hebrew. Although the other three fundraisers I had attended had targeted English-speaking ethnically U. S. attendees, in this one Nicolai spoke in both English and Russian and told me he had invited local Russian Jews. He did not assume his audience's status as Christian and noted to that the church believed in Christ "who was brought before Pilate years ago." I demonstrate the influence of this project on the congregation later when I describe the narrative and literacy practices of two of the new believers with Jewish backgrounds.

Jewishness was not the only ethnicity Nicolai showed interest in. He mentioned others as well—particularly his own heritage—Ukrainian. In a culturally Russian way, the articles he gave me and his own testimony (translated by Raisa) published on the church's webpage, commented on his prestigious family's lineage. Ukrainian nationality and historical narratives merged with a religious narrative. In his webpage testimony, he reframed Ukraine as a place with people whom he was called to soul-win: "The first time, I went back to my home country I knew this was my calling, I knew that God wanted me to preach the Gospel to these starving people." The national narrative still had influence, and yet another narrative of non-place identity was claimed as more important to these situated-place identities, a narrative he believed began in scripture.

Ivan and Nicolai's Imagined Interpretive Religious Community

Ivan and Nicolai's imagined religious interpretive community church was not what Nicolai first experienced in the U. S., a group of uneducated, poorly spoken

believers--rather this church touted not only one university-educated pastor with impeccable Russian but recently converted members with equal or higher education. It was also not a “holy huddle” that sought after already religious Russian immigrants. Rather it was more what Ivan had imagined in contacting Nicolai—a “missions church,” where seekers were accommodated with a highly educated pastor who could tell his culturally Slavic narrative of his ancestry along with his new role in another grand narrative, inviting others into another kind of identity, non-place. Once introduced, visitors met another pastor who came alongside, welcoming them as members of the family and speaking directly to the disappointments of the Soviet and American Dreams.

These pastors, although still “critics” as A. Fishman (1988) wrote about Amish leadership, saw the Bible as more than power for determining morality but rather offered the hope that T. L. Smith (1978) suggested in his concept of a “theologizing experience.” In addition, the principle that “literacy is historically situated” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998) reveals a complexity in an immigrant church composed of such multi-layered leadership both transferred from different soil and different times. Ivan and Nicolai were not the only baptistic believers who had this vision. In the next chapter, I address the individual literacy practices of other socialized believers in the congregation, those who had been believers for years in traditional Russian Baptist churches in Russia and the U. S. and now attended Slavic Fellowship.

CHAPTER 9
SOCIALIZED BELIEVERS'
LITERACY PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

Introduction

It's Sunday morning, just about 11 a.m. I receive the written service program as I cross the threshold of the church. If very young, the young man who hands it to me may greet me in English because he knows I do not speak Russian. I walk past groups of chatting people, speaking mostly in Russian. If I hang up my coat and dart into the restroom, there is a likelihood that high school girls are clustered in there, readjusting their hair and catching up in English in relative freedom from their parents. I head into the auditorium, not only to pick up my translation headset but to greet my friend Marie, who if she is fortunate this morning has been given a copy of the sermon before the service begins. She is seated in front of the sound booth looking up all the scripture references in her English Bible. Marie and I compliment each other on our outfits before I proceed to a seat in a row of padded chairs to start taking notes. Sometimes, she mentions she had to stop for a coffee on the way here. After attending her charismatic ethnically U. S. church last night, she may have hung out with friends far into the evening. We will talk more later.

I sit toward the front left, observing Raisa preparing on the platform with the rest of the music team. To her right, a large Bible is open on the communion table, decorated with flowers or a table scarf matching the season and lit candles—this aesthetic touch is likely her doing. The service begins at 11:10 or 11:15 a.m., and a few minutes later, Anna slips beside me. Like Marie and many of the other female attendees here, she is

stylishly dressed in a trim-fitting outfit, always a skirt or dress. Inside myself, as we whispered our “how are you”s during the music, I may have felt my growing frustration that Marie and Anna, both women in their late twenties with spirit and intelligence, are thought as old maids in this environment. On a morning like this, I receive the additional benefit of Anna’s side comments during church. She may show me her sermon notes on another church program of a popular U. S. Baptist church, where she sometimes attends the early service.

I chose the term “socialization” from psychology to name those believers in Slavic Fellowship who grew up as children raised in Russian Baptist religious interpretive communities. Of the *socialized believers*, excluding Ivan, I interviewed six. Raisa, Anna, and Marie I interviewed because they were my interpreters, and I believed an understanding of their literacy practices would demonstrate their voice’s influence in their interpretation and affirm their role as cultural informants, fellow research associates (Temple & Edwards, 2002). In my research site, in which I was considered an insider to the extent that I was a Christian, I maintained trust by not bringing in outside interpreters. I participated as another ethnically-U. S. attendee by listening to their interpreters at Sunday services, Marie and occasionally Anna. I benefited the church by compensating Raisa with a grant won from my institution of employment for her interpretation of my interviews with her husband and her translation of church documents.

The other three socialized believers were Mikhail, Katherine, and Elena. One realization for me as I conducted my interviews was the number of attendees with traditional Baptist backgrounds who were members of the Petrov family. Ivan had eleven other siblings—although at least one of these lived outside of the U. S.--many who chose

with their families to leave Mapleville Russian Baptist Church to be involved in Slavic Fellowship, although they still had a brother there, whom Mikhail thought was a deacon. Anna was the youngest sibling Ivan, Katherine was another sibling, Mikhail was a husband of a different sister, and Elena, as I would determine after my fieldwork, was a niece. Mikhail I interviewed because he was one of the other two preachers in the church, and he also set much of the tone on Sunday mornings by being the music director and providing the majority of computer-generated projected slides for music and other activities. Katherine was recommended to me by Ivan and Raisa because I wanted to interview one of the children's Sunday school teachers, and I did not know who they were. Elena I asked to interview with her husband Max because she gave several of the children's sermons during the service and because her husband Max was recently baptized and growing in his participation in the church. I thought their story as a couple from different backgrounds would show the complexity of the religious literacy practices of the congregation. (Max is featured in the next chapter.)

Socialized Believers' Shared Literacy Practices

Bible as Authoritative: Reading the Bible as a Responsibility

Like Ivan and Nicolai, these socialized believers saw the Bible as authoritative—a theory that was explicated by only a few, perhaps because they saw me as a fellow believer with a like assumption. Not surprisingly, the preacher Mikhail responded to the question about important religious books: “First, is Bible.” And added: “Because I am Christian, and so this is foundation of my life's beliefs. So, how I build my life, my relationships with people. This is, Bible is most important in my life.” Elena, who highly respected her pastors' teachings, wanted to comment as well about reading the

Bible: the “Bible teaches us how to live, and it’s just something that I, my desire is to learn a whole lot more about God so I could love him personally.”

Most of the socialized believers mentioned regular Bible reading, thus assuming scripture as an authority in their lives. Katerine told me she read the Bible everyday by herself and with her children. Marie told me about a secular book she was reading about relationships, but she read it “when I have a free minute, when I’ve read my Bible” and other Christian books. Anna who was a lay theologian and Bible teacher in her own right participated in Bible studies that required daily Bible reading.

Reading Other Christian Texts as Responsibility

All mentioned religious text as resources that provided explanation and meaningfulness for life. Elena did not like to read but tried, specifically citing the church-recommended book, *The Purpose-Driven Life* (Warren, 2002): “I would say, I’m trying to stick to Christian literature because I don’t like to read that much, but I know that you know if I do devote my time, it should be Christian books because they’ll teach me some life lessons.” Mikhail was careful to name the specific kind of religious books he read: “And after that [reading the Bible], I like to read many books, religious books, I mean, Christian books, not just simple religious books.” He included, “I really like C.S. Lewis....Especially in Russian.” Katerine showed me an academic-looking book in Russian “about the prophecy and prophets and stuff” in the Hebrew Scriptures and also mentioned two popular U. S. evangelical authors’ books: *No Wonder They Call Him the Savior* by Max Lucado and *The Purpose-Driven Life*. She read *The Purpose-Driven Life* as a resource in that she read only what she wanted from it: “I read it before, but I kind of read it over some. Not, not whole book, but I find some like what I like and read it over.”

She also explained, “from time to time, I like to read about Jesus again and again. Something different from different sources. I don’t know it’s a good reminder, you know. Everything what—I wanted to know more about Jesus and tell my kids too.” Her religious reading is a resource for her in her children’s religious education too.

Marie shared that she was currently reading an English Christian book about “the struggle women have with being able to keep everything in control.” The meaningfulness of the book to her was illustrated in that she read it slowly: “once you read parts of it, you have to re-read it so that it stays with you as well as pray and repent and whatever needs to be done.” A book that was important to Raisa was called the *History of Christianity*, a Russian translation by a Hispanic author who was not a conservative Protestant. Raisa explained that she read it because she “love”[ed] history—she enjoyed it.

Religious Literacy as a Way to Hear God Speak or to Record God’s Speaking

Except for Raisa, who said she once journaled, most of the socialized believers talked about reading and writing as ways of hearing God, selecting words such as “speaking” or “telling” when talking about his communication. Katerine had been praying about a plan to return to Russia with her family for a long-term visit: “We will see. I’m not sure. I keep asking God, and he always tell me kind of yes, but I still not sure.” She stated she had been told “many small yes’s” through reading and listening to the radio or sermons in church. Anna, who had a heart for ministry to Russian orphanages, talked about reading a book and being moved by the intertextuality of scripture within it: “This book, *The Strength of Mercy*, the--especially not the stories—it’s about adopting children from Romania, but the Bible passages just spoke so much to

me.” Both Anna and Marie journaled, at least occasionally, as a form of prayer, often in response to scripture reading. In my second interview with Anna and Marie, I asked them to tell me more about how they hear from God in their journaling. Marie said, as she wrote, she would begin to remember scripture where she felt that God was promising good things to her. She wrote “them down and then, you know, one after another, and then you kind of look over that, and you just draw a conclusion that is full of hope.” In the first interview, Anna urged Marie not to dispose of her journals. Anna too wrote down scripture passages or quotations she liked from books: “So, I go back, that, to my journals and just see what God showed me, and often times he reveals something, and we’re not ready to grasp it yet.” After time, she said, “We say, ‘Aha. You told me years ago.’ And only then, we’re able to fully realize.”

Although most experiences of “hearing God” when reading or writing were in solitude, Elena spoke during a Sunday service of the excitement of “devotions” performed individually and as a group on her trip with the youth to a Russian orphanage. Elena said that each team member would attend the group devotions with a “different passage” from scripture (tr. Marie), and Anna, who was seated next to me, filled in what I missed in Marie’s interpretation: a theme would emerge in the group sharing. Elena told me later in her interview that if she did not spend enough time preparing for the team devotional, “I would be like off the key. It would be, it would be like—it’s so amazing, and sometimes I’m thinking, ‘Why am I not along with them,’ you know, ‘with the same topic?’”

Value of Attending Ethnically U. S. Churches

With responsibilities as members of Slavic Fellowship, four of the socialized believers, nonetheless, expressed appreciation for attending ethnically U. S. churches, and three were currently attending an ethnically U. S. church while participating at Slavic Fellowship, a behavior declared appropriate in Slavic Fellowship's church constitution. When Raisa and Ivan had first come to the U. S., they had attended U. S. churches before Russian churches began to emerge. Disappointed with their later involvement in Russian Baptist churches, Raisa wondered before Slavic Fellowship was founded if it would be better for her children to attend a U. S. church, especially once they reached their teenage years and could be involved in a youth group. Katherine, too, was disappointed with her experience with a Russian Baptist church in the U. S.: "They wanted to keep old traditions, same clothes, same rules, like everything, and I knew in my heart that I wanted something different." She sometimes took her children to two nearby, large, conservative Protestant churches. "And I visit American church because they're like not old-fashioned. They're more like kind of new. They love more happy songs, you know, and stuff. And I like it better." She added that they had "very good teaching" too.

Marie and Anna both attended ethnically U. S. churches. Marie attended regularly because it was a campus church she had been part of a long time where she had friends. It also appealed to her because the "the pastor is absolutely wonderful," and the services were in English: "And, you know, one other big thing, I've been reading the Bible pretty much 99 percent in English, and, so it's more close, it hits home. And so that's, and so, because of that, it's very valuable that I go there." Anna attended an internationally known ethnically U. S. Baptist church "when I have an opportunity."

Following the advice of friends, she said that attending another church was a relief because in her ministry at Slavic Fellowship “I feel drained.” It was enjoyable “to just sit and receive something” at another church. Because the church is so large, she felt that she had little community there; however, she stated: “I go to American church for the teaching, you know, supplemental spiritual food, and also for worship. I like [the church name] because they have a wonderful mix of modern songs as well as the hymns. I love hymns.” She pointed out a praise song, a short, contemporary song, that she thought was “shallow” unlike many old hymns.

Value of Reading Culturally Russian Books

Despite the responsibility of reading Christian books, even church-pressured ones, all the socialized believers who came to the U. S. as adults told me they read Russian classics currently. Mikhail brought up the poets Aleksandr Pushkin and Sergey Aleksandrovich Yesenin and the writers Anton Chekhov and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He seemed to want to check that I knew who they were. He told me that not only did he have books by Solzhenitsyn, but he had Russian books of folklore. Raisa and Katherine both said that they “love”[d] reading books by Fyodor Dostoevsky and Leo Tolstoy. Raisa was reading hers in English because she had bought them for a son to read. Laughing, she said, “No way, he’s going to read it.” She thought of her two eldest sons as “advanced readers”; however, “they read American.” Raisa, Katherine, and Mikhail read these classics to remain connected to their cultural heritage. When I asked Katherine why she enjoyed Tolstoy’s short stories, she felt frustrated in her attempts to explain that she identified with Tolstoy’s thought as her “point of view” too:

I don't know I think I love it because it's easy to read and understand. And it's so close to us. It's like Russian culture. We understand—we can understand it very easy, you know? It's like—I don't know—it's hard to describe why I love it, but I love his like point of view and opinion in it. It's not like I'm just reading to like read something new. I like his point of view. It's like my point of view too. On, like, events happen or some—I don't know—like family traditions or anything like how they do stuff. I just love it—I don't know, it's my point of view too.

Mikhail commented on the familiarity of Chekhov: “it's really nice stories from, from normal life of regular people in Russia.” Raisa's enthusiasm has to do with the psychological intrigue of Dostoevsky's and Tolstoy's characters, as Katherine also noted, but Raisa added:

And it's very Russian too, and I guess being here, living here, you kind of want to, and I read a lot. Well, I read a lot of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky when I was young, and I was a teenager, so. And then, for a while, I did not read any of them. When we came here, it was just a stressful time with adjusting, having kids, one and another, and then just getting a house, churches, so kind of, I did very little reading when we were here for a few years. And then, I guess, when I read that, it is very Russian to me, so close to home. I get homesick.

This is a good point to hear more of Raisa's story and literacy practices.

Socialized Believers' Individual Literacy Practices

Raisa's Individual Literacy Practices

Raisa's Story

As a child, Raisa remembered attending Sunday school in a house. She remembered wanting to be an archaeologist. She considered her childhood through age 10, when her mom died, as the first of three periods. The second period she lived with her uncle and his family, and then in the third period she was married. She moved back into the apartment where she had lived with her mom. During our interview, she pondered the sense of attachment she had to that home, unlike the one here, the one where her children and Ivan felt at home. She said, "It's my house back in Russia where I remember, my apartment, every corner, everything I knew was mine. Like, bus station was mine. If I go back there, the whole bunch of memories will be there."

Within three years of being married, she and Ivan began their move to the U. S. In the transition, Raisa lived in Italy for six months where she had her first son. "Italy was a big thing." At first she was shocked: "it was hot, it was humid, it was loud, it was dirty." She was overwhelmed by the "first exposure to the western world and all the shopping and everything," and they had little money. However, unlike the U. S, she had "a huge attachment to Italy," telling me "if you give me a choice to live there or in Russia, I would choose Italy." Really, why, I asked? Perhaps, she thought because of her child's birth, but she also told me she loved the history of the place "in all forms"—Roman history and Christian history: "The things would be standing there. Half-ruined but still standing. So, I guess that part, I just fell in love with Rome." At the time, she insisted, she was not impressed: "I didn't like it that much, but when we left, I realized what went

on there.” She had been back to Rome three times after they had visited friends in Germany, a location where several Russian Christians with Germany ethnicity went in the early 1990s.

In the U. S. she had the rest of her children, the oldest not in formal school yet. The Soviet Union, 17 years before, seemed to be “a different lifetime,” while “here completely everything is different, and I’m still adapting to it.” She attended a few conservative Protestant Russian churches and vowed she would never return. Nonetheless, she supported Ivan in his founding of Slavic Fellowship and became a vocalist on the music team, the written program designer, and often, the one who decorated the church—I would see her lighting candles occasionally as I first walked in, and from what others said, she was the decision-maker regarding its look for remodeling, a look that was not the barren hall of a typical Baptist church but one with artificial stained glass in windows re-designed to look Gothic.

Raisa’s Imagined Religious Interpretive Community:

Naming a Different Kind of Russian Christian

Perhaps because she was the wife of a pastor, Raisa’s comments relating to her literacy practices often had to do with her religious interpretive community and especially her concern for her children and husband in this community. Even her comments on the literature she read indicated her social groupings of varying Christian identities. She felt she liked Tolstoy more “from a Christian point of view,” whereas “Dostoevsky, although a Christian, “would not accept any Russian person who abandoned the Orthodox faith at all.” He viewed that “if you’re Russian and for some reason become Catholic or any other, you’re just, you, you no longer Russian.”

Raisa wanted and imagined a church that was more open than the ones they had attended in the past and yet not a Russian Orthodox community. She thought that she had left “a closed society” and did not want to return because life outside of it had a “different perspective.” Admitting her own mindset when in the traditional Baptist church, she stated: “They have their own culture. They have their own way of thinking. They’re very judgmental, and just, and we were too when we were there.” She no longer wanted to think “this is the way, this is the only way, and everybody else who doesn’t think your way is just bad Christian.”

However, although Raisa’s thinking had changed, it had not changed entirely. She still recognized meaningfulness in being identified as a Christian and wished others shared in it. What eventually drew her to Ivan’s desire to create a new kind of church was the outreach to other Russians who were not Christians. She empathized with what she saw as the emptiness of their lives in the U. S.:

I think it’s very important to reach the people who are Russian but kind of lost here in money making and they have businesses, and they have--you just see they have no desire to do anything else, to accomplish anything else, but just to be somebody, and they have very much materialistic views of life, and that’s it. And you kind of know that the end of their life what waits for them.

She understood that the collective identity of the traditional Baptist churches would never appeal to them but saw the Orthodox church as lacking too. “I don’t think they will find what they need there,” she stated although they might be compelled because of its reinforcement of Russian culture: “For Easter or Christmas they will go there, and they

pray, light a candle maybe. There would be no Christian life. There would be--I don't think they'll find salvation and its true meaning there."

Raisa's Imagined Religious Interpretive Community:

Concern for One Social Grouping in Slavic Fellowship--The Youth

Raisa imagined Slavic Fellowship in the future as one that had more leadership for the children's ministry and youth. As a mother of teenagers, she was especially concerned for the youth: "We don't want to lose them." She said that there had been problems, "drinking, drugs." She acknowledged that issues with youth are "going on in the other churches too, the others strict churches too, they do have the same problems too," and worried about the draw of these massive youth groups in the larger more traditional churches because after the official youth meetings, the youth hang out for hours in the parking lot up to what she was afraid was no good.

I asked her if she felt that her children's needs were being met at Slavic Fellowship. She answered: "Sometimes I do. Sometimes I don't." One of her older sons had "been complaining that he doesn't understand everything in Russian." Thus, the church began some occasional short messages in English during the service along with the youth ministry, which was completely conducted in English. "When it comes to immigrants, I feel very bad for the youth and teenagers here," she said as she described the youth's identity struggles: "They trying to fit in, to be somebody, and then the two cultures—they are somewhere in between. Their parents is saying one thing, and school, they're trying to fit in something else."

Katerine's Individual Literacy Practices

Katerine's Story

Katerine, a sister of Ivan, also came to the U. S. as an adult. She invited me to her warm suburban home, and we sat on the couch as I interviewed her in English, and she kept an eye on her school-age children. When I asked her to divide her life up into periods, she told me a continuous narrative without any named divisions. She reminisced about growing up in “a big family”: “I have 11 siblings, and I am number nine.” She remembered “that we was doing a lot by ourselves, like cleaning, taking care of our clothes, and do the gardening. We work a lot.” She enjoyed taking care of the chickens and playing outside everyday “even in the winter time”: “We should do the same in these days too. The kids are all playing outside together.”

Then, she moved onto her education: “And when I was finishing eighth grade, I was very kind of sad because if you wanted to be Christian you could not go to college or to get any like profession you wanted to get. It was hard.” She said this while her eyes formed tears, explaining that other “girls in my church was dreaming too,” “but in the days we cannot.” Still teary, she added: “If you choose to follow Jesus, it--you could not become teacher or doctor or anybody, you know, like you could be like manufacturing work and like just sewing or cooking or stuff like that. It was kind of hard.” Later, she told me she had dreamed of being a nurse or doctor, and it seemed as if she had researched the possibility later in life because she pointed out it took twice the years to become a non-surgical doctor in the U. S.

At the age of twenty-two, she was married, having met her groom on a visit to a sister in a different city. Four months later, they moved to the U. S.: “I was happy to

move here. And I remember that I liked moving here.” She began having children, a few year apart, and this “life was so hard when kids was so little.” When I asked why, she answered: “I don’t know--you’re just so busy with them. Like, taking care of them all the time. Days and nights. And right now, it’s really better and easy.” She regretted that during that time she could not participate as fully in church: “When my kids was little, I could hardly do anything in my church. I cannot. I need help myself.”

A pastor asked for volunteers when Slavic Fellowship first started, and Katerine started teaching under the supervision of a woman who had studied for certification in Christian education under U. S. citizens in a Moscow training program. Katerine told the woman, “I want to try it, but I wasn’t sure if I will be good at it.” Katerine forged her own process of instruction and curriculum: “And I started to do it without any like material, just from my own ideas, how to teach and how to do like with kids like memorizing verses, do crafts, and stuff.” Her supervisor was amazed and said to her, “You never study, and you never learn how to do it, but you can do it better than me.” Katerine was touched: “I thought it’s kind of—I don’t know—like God show me that he give me gift of teaching.”

A dream Katerine and her husband Dmitry had was to return to Russia for a year or two for service to orphanages and other churches there, but also, she asserted, “We want to take our kids, and they will experience how they to live in Russia too. I love Russia. I like America, but it’s different. You cannot compare it.”

Language of Diverse Experiences

Katerine’s desire to live temporarily in Russia again with her family is an illustration of her language that often returned to her passion for diverse experiences. She

wanted to be in two kinds of churches, live in two countries, have a “a mix” of U. S. and Russia in church but not a mix where people were consumeristic, read both U. S. Christian books and classic Russian literature, read the BBC news for more awareness of world events, and imagined Slavic Fellowship as multiracial.

Reading and Writing to Stay Connected to Oneself and One's World

Recording her memories was important to Katerine, who journaled, although she did not say anything about directing the journal to God as Anna and Marie did. Rather, Katerine journaled once a year on her birthday about her “thoughts,” and “some of my dreams in the future and stuff.” Laughing a little, she shared, “I wanted to look back and see how what I was thinking and doing like in my thirty years. I guess you keep everything in your brain-- sometimes it's hard to recall what you were planning to do and stuff.” This planning for a future connection to her past self was one way of connection she performed through writing. Katerine also maintained correspondence with her friends from her home country and in Russia, informing them about her life and the happenings at Slavic Fellowship, especially the interesting guest speakers. She stayed connected to the world by “checking news on BBC world news” and reading the BBC online in Russian. She wanted to “see what it's like in around the world,” giving an example of “suffering in Africa.” She remarked, “I wanted to know about it, but in America news they hardly talk about it.”

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community: A Mix of Russian and Ethnically U. S. That Invites Participation

Along with her visits to ethnically U. S. churches, Katerine joined Slavic Fellowship with her family for two reasons: the opportunity to participate with “some

kind of work” and the opportunity for her children to be exposed to the Russian language in a setting that she defined as “little bit Russian, little bit American church.” She imagined Slavic Fellowship in the future as a multi-ethnic community composed of new believers:

In the future, I think we will have more people who will be saved. I, I believe it’s going to be like Russian-speaking people, maybe Jewish people, or maybe other nationality. And I think it’s going to be more interesting when we grow bigger. [laughter] I believe it’s going to be all kind of people, you know, like young and old and different background and everything, like Korean. And just anybody. That’s how I picture my church.

Additionally, she expected that the church would be “seventy percent” English.

She also hoped that Slavic Fellowship would fund full-time ministers, Ivan and missionaries going overseas, since she knew that “many churches are smaller than ours, and they are sending and paying for missionaries around the world.” She worried that people were not giving enough: the church could “hardly cover mortgage and utility.” She thought that the stress of Ivan having two full-time responsibilities could damage him: “Maybe five more years, and he will be broken because we are, we are—he’s not, he, he is like, he’s like everybody else--human being. He’s not built from iron, you know.” I asked her why she thought people were not giving more: “They want to live good here. They want to spend their money here, not in heaven” or because “they maybe they don’t really believe that it worship,” but she also despaired of any rapid change because people had come with a Russian mentality of ministers not being paid.

Mikhail's Individual Literacy Practices

Mikhail's Story

Like Katherine, Mikhail told me an unbroken narrative of his life, starting with being born in the Ukraine and specifying that Ukraine and some of the now independent republics were “one country.” The year of his birth 1964 was “really deep Soviet Union at that time.” The Soviet Union “was at the power, and I, I remember really nice that time.” He was of the age that the communist party had its influence in the school from first grade up. He told me that that “every person must be first *Oktyabryonok*,” a Little Octobrist, and receive a “real small, small star” that had an image of Lenin before moving to Pioneer in fourth grade, with symbol “with red piece of fire in it” and then a “red tie.” Next, was *Komosol*, which was “right between Pioneer and Communist.” Mikhail was a member of the Komosol briefly, as he said, “because at that time, my, my parents, they were Christians, but so like many people I wasn’t just because I was born in Christian family--until like up to 16 years, 17 years.” From 14 to 15, he lived wildly—“it was really rotten,” adding that it was “God’s grace” that he was not put in jail. Many of his friends were, but he thought that he was not partly “because my mom prayed for constantly.”

At 17 he moved to the Caucasus area, where he loved the mountains. “My spiritual growth was over there,” he commented, and he was baptized, attended a church, and met his future wife, another one of Ivan’s sisters, while she was visiting her uncle. After having three children, they decided to emigrate to the U. S. in 1993. At first his parents were against his leaving: “They didn’t want to go because I had ministry in the church over there too. Not pastor, but I preached and choir, and they told me, ‘We don’t

want to bless you on this trip' [laughing]." In time, he said, "my mom, she told me very wisely that I'm, I'm an adult. I have my own family, so I have to decide for myself, so, where to go. But it was God's way." They came to the U. S. in 1993 with "just 100 dollars" "in our pocket." Because of the inflation in Russia at that time, "We bought little house for 15,000 rubles. After two years because we were emigrated to United States, we sold it for 1 million rubles." He paid half a million from Moscow to Chicago: "you know, it was really cheap ruble at that time, so we just gave some money to relatives. And spend other money to train from Caucasus to Moscow." After arriving in the U. S., the couple had two more children. In two years, he filed the paperwork for his parents, saying "right now, they glad to be here" because of how much their pension would have had to stretch back home. His parents lived in a retirement community and attended a "little Russian-speaking church" about a mile away. Five years before the interview, he and his family became U. S. citizens.

Making a Written Message Relevant to an Audience:

Reading and Writing in a News-Oriented Work Domain

When I asked Mikhail about his writing, he mentioned preparation for sermons, but before he came to the U. S., he had been a journalist for a quarterly Christian magazine: he had "traveled all over the Russia, Russian Federation, Far East, and Kamchatko, almost Alaska." When the U. S. evangelist Billy Graham held an event in Moscow in the late 1980s, Mikhail was there: "I was their man." He transferred this sensitivity to news event to his sermon preparation, for example, when he gave a sermon critiquing the popular book *The Da Vinci Code*, telling his audience he researched it on the Internet in English.

Mikhail stayed aware of current events by listening to radio in his job as a truck driver. At the end of the interview, Mikhail apologized for his English, but I protested, insisting that I was surprised at how well he knew English idioms. Mikhail told me that his phraseology was due to his radio listening: “And listening, listening. And if I don’t have any Christian preachers, I, my, just turn on public radio and listen to all those news, all those commentaries.” For structuring his sermons, he valued finding fitting illustrations for his audience: “Constantly I’m trying to update what I know. For example, if I live in the United States, I try to find examples from this life, not from Russians, because it’s kind of different, it’s really different life over there and here.” Therefore, he kept a piece of paper in his truck, saying “when I have some thoughts in my mind, I’m, I’m thinking about it, and God gives me some ideas, some example.”

Tying Historical and Current Events to Bible’s Narrative

A fellow preacher in the church, Mikhail, like Ivan and Nicolai, perceived contemporary time as a continuation of the narrative of scripture, and he applied his knowledge of current events to support this theory. One day in September 2005, he transitioned between an English song sung by his youngest daughter and a Russian hymn sung by him by saying that Hurricane Katrina had shown the congregation how global warming can happen, with just a one-degree change. Global warming was a fulfilled prophecy that Jesus’ second coming would be soon. Therefore, believers needed to have a kind of life where they hoped in God.

Like Nicolai, Mikhail had a special interest in Jerusalem, indicated frequently by a favorite tie decorated with a Star of David and oft-repeated Jewish-sounding praise songs. On Palm Sunday, the Sunday before Easter when many Christians celebrate Jesus’ last trip into Jerusalem, Mikhail preached a sermon in which he delineated

Jerusalem's history from the days of the patriarch Abraham to Israel's nationhood in 1948. He called Jerusalem—"one city that has a special relationship with God," and questioned the importance of Russian ethnic identity in the light of religion by asking, "When you read Revelations, what city do you read there, is it Moscow?" (tr. Marie).

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community: English to Survive

Mikhail's penchant for research helped to construct the church identity. He included two or more English songs every service and believed that Slavic Fellowship would eventually move to an additional English service and someday become an entirely English-speaking church. He based this view on research through talking with earlier immigrants and reading books. He connected with "old immigrants from Ukraine," speaking to them in Ukrainian, and studied "some books from really old immigrants from east shore, Massachusetts." He explained to me the history of Russian immigrants, the first wave after the October Revolution and the second after World War II: "those two waves, first and second, they telling us right now that they made mistake, and they ask us, don't do the same mistake they did." Their mistake was that "they try to keep their language, their traditions, their beliefs, their service, ever since exactly same as they did in Russia." His bottom line was that "when kids grew up, they just left the church." He went on:

But actually if you keep growing up in this country, he never will be Russian, even if he has parents Russian. He will be American in what country he grown up because culture, you know, environment not Russian, it's American. You, you can, I can teach them Russian language, but this is not culture. It's just language,

and they, and they can know language worse or better, but it doesn't mean they're Russians, so.

The children went two directions after leaving their conservative churches: “most of them, they went into the world. And they, they don't believe, at least they're not member of any church, not even American.” The rest joined ethnically U. S. churches, and the immigrant churches died out as the old people who remained aged. English was necessary for survival of the congregation. Mikhail gave the example that his friends who were Russians who moved to Germany now had all German-speaking churches, and the churches had “big congregations”—“You must have language of this country.”

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community: A “Bordered” Freedom in Contrast to Narrow Interpretation of Traditional Russian Baptist Churches in the U. S.

When I asked Mikhail why he was at Slavic Fellowship, his discourse was comprised of the vocabulary of “freedom.” He said when he first came to the U. S. thirteen years before the interview, “It was Russian, one Russian-speaking church. It was one Ukrainian church and one Russian. And, then, more and more immigrants came here from different parts of Soviet Union. And, so, kind of sometimes, we couldn't live together. [laughing] So, we just a, apart.” He noted the multiple Russian- or Ukrainian-speaking churches, and he used the pronoun “we” to identify himself with those in them and yet separate himself afterwards by the church in which he participated: “Right now, we have, yeah, many churches. And I want to be here at this church because it's more, more freedom to express yourself. You can sing song, songs using sound tracks or contemporary music.”

Besides music, he added that the requirements of conservative dress for women at other churches disturbed him. A recurring theme can be noted here—throughout his interview, Mikhail often spoke fondly of his several daughters, resulting perhaps in sensitivity to gender restrictions. I mentioned to Mikhail the head coverings women wore at Mapleville Russian Baptist Church. “This is why the sign,” he said, “as they explain, it’s like Paul says in Corinthians that wife she has to have cover over her head as a sign for angels.” However, he insisted, “nobody knows what that means, ‘for angels.’” Therefore, “In our church, we allow every woman decide for herself. If she wants to, she can. But she, she cannot press another people to do the same as she do it.” In his mind, what he called “conservative” churches such as Mapleville emphasized too much that each individual “looks holy, and without sin.” He had a principle of changing the internal before the external: “We, in our church, we try to change people from inside first, their heart. Then, and when heart will be changed, they will dress properly too. This is how we believe in. We believe how Bible tells us. [laughter].”

Mikhail’s interpretation of scripture is not as narrow as the leaders of Mapleville--“nobody knows what this means”—but in his understanding of freedom, he recognized what he called “borders” provided by scriptural references. He had added to the conversation that women at Mapleville were not allowed to wear jewelry, and in response I remarked that women at Slavic Fellowship were often quite dressy. He stated: “On the other hand, we, we don’t like when people make in fashion in the church, you know, kind of dress up as latest fashion,” and then said “Yeah, it’s, it’s another (pause) edge.” “Another edge,” I pondered, and he presented his theory of balance: that dressing up must be balanced and “what kinds of songs must be balanced, always balanced

between two edges—left and right. And so, we try to keep this balance in our church.” He explained this as a biblical principle: “Even Bible says our left or right,” pointing out the right and left of God’s throne. “Any freedom,” he added, “has the borders.” No one can “be absolutely free from everything. No. You always working for somebody. Somebody’s your boss [laughter] always. If not God, it’s devil or your own manners, or something else, habits.”

Two individuals who spoke openly to me as women uncomfortable with the dress of traditional Russian Baptist churches were Anna and Marie. Over a meal first at Anna’s house and after a meal at my fiancé’s house where we talked in a private room, Anna, Marie, and I held two interviews. Knowing they would be open to a second interview, I had followed up with additional questions after my first analysis, especially exploring their commitment to small groups, ethnically U. S. churches, and their desire to read books about being a woman and spirituality.

Anna’s Individual Literacy Practices

Anna’s Story

Anna was my best cultural informant in that she was doubly an insider by being in the inner circle of the Petrov family. As a person who loved learning and knowledge, Anna broke up her life in portions by her school experiences. As a Christian in grade school, she said, “you different, didn’t fit in Russia.” Once she entered the U. S. school system, she described it: “I went straight to high school, no English whatsoever. Quite a shock—and not fit in here either.” Although Anna, did not think she was “born again” as a child she had a clear memory that she could “stand up for her faith. And know it was God” who gave her the ability. While a second grader, she, like other Russian children,

was frightened of her teachers and principal, intimidated by their authority. She told a story: “So, the principal walks in and his assistant and another assistant, like three or four of them, and they ask, ‘Who believes in God? Stand up.’” Anna stood up, and a friend of hers who was not a Christian did too. The principal was flabbergasted by the second girl because, according to Anna and Marie, he would have known who the Baptists were: his intent was to “put you on the spot” and “make fun of you.” He stared at the teacher, but the teacher did not know how to respond. The principal asked Anna’s friend, “Do you go to church?” She said, “Yup.” “So what do they do in church?” “Well.”

Anna shared that it took her “years to appreciate” what this friend had done. But the story did not end there. After class, Anna approached another friend who was a Christian but had remained sitting. “I said, ‘Why didn’t you get up? Don’t you know it’s written in the Bible, ‘If you will deny me before the man, I will deny you?’” Anna may have been in second grade, but the memory stayed vivid: “to this day I remember she turned bright red. But she didn’t say anything. And I feel bad because I was afraid for her, you know.”

Anna believed that she had transferred her skills gained as a marginalized person of faith in the former Soviet Union to being a marginalized non-English speaking immigrant in a U. S. high school: “Being persecuted for my faith as a child has taught me a lesson that you don’t belong in this world kind of.” She thought it was pointless to try to “try to fit in with other teenagers” because she already knew that she was not like them. Therefore, she did not try underage drinking or associated activities. However, she did want friends and picked up on one friend’s “worldly mentality” because “here in America, of course, couple of years, you felt very isolated, even though [there] were

other Russians, but they're also, you know, you're, like, torn from your familiar and placed in unfamiliar, and it was really hard to adapt."

Afterwards she attended college "first or second year" and "had no direction in life," not knowing what she wanted to study or major in. She also fell in love. In her words: "And then repented of badly, and this was turning point in my life. I look back at it, and I say that God performed a dramatic surgery on me. He de—in order to build something, I guess I was so messed up that he had to destroy things completely and start afresh." Part of this fresh start was investigating nursing. She had no interest in the medical field, but she saw it as a route to ministering to orphans, even though she had to leave a job as a restaurant server where she had the opportunity to discuss philosophy on a regular basis with her colleagues.

At the time of the interview, besides nursing, leading a small group for young woman, occasionally presenting a children's sermon, and serving as the alternate interpreter for Sunday services, she was exploring Christian bachelor's degree programs in ministry or biblical studies with the goal of someday teaching at a "Christian college, preferably overseas in Russia." Dietrich, a popular guest speaker from a Slavic church in Germany, had spoken to her personally, telling her "he has a dream life for me: to be a professor and to travel all over," as he does, occasionally entering countries illegally.

Value for Good Writing to Articulate Truths

As Anna said when speaking about looking into nursing: "Like some people are good with science, all this, no—I'm a literature kind of person." Her love of text scripture, Bible study books, and in an earlier part of her life poetry shaped how she saw the world.

Anna had a value for precise writing style and imagery, value for the articulation of a text over one's own words, and value for text in its original language. Of the books we discussed, she mentioned one by the Catholic British author, G. K. Chesterton, from the early twentieth century. She called his "writing, very clever" and exclaimed: "But I love his style of writing. It's just very fresh and challenging too, makes you think." She showed me another, commenting on the imagery in it: "And, this particular book by Ray Stedman is a commentary to Leviticus, probably one of the most boring books in the Bible, but he makes it so captivating." She continued: "It's really interesting how everything is a symbol. Like, I never thought, like, why God didn't allow honey and—what is it—to use in a bread of offering—yeast.... So, yeast is a symbol of pride, and the honey is natural sweetness."

In Anna's ideal, she wanted to read authors in their original languages. She preferred reading Dostoevsky's works in Russian and the works of ethnically U. S. and British writers in English. She had read a classic Christian devotional from the early twentieth century by another British author, saying "his language was difficult for me to understand. " Nonetheless, she preferred it in his first language: "And I've read it in Russian, and I thought no I'd rather struggle a little bit with English."

With this love for well-turned phrases, Anna liked to quote authors in the interview and in conversations during church, such as defining the difference between Christians and non-Christians once with a thought from Chesterton: Christian lives revolve around joy, so suffering is peripheral, but non-Christian lives revolve around suffering, so finding pleasure becomes all important. During the first interview, she asked that Marie and I ignore her for a moment while she looked for a "quote that I

absolutely love” in a book she had. Even in the interviews, she made statements that may have been from books. In the second interview, she defined church unity or fellowship with an image: “Somebody compared it to glass marbles that they touch either but nothing happen to the grapes. When you squeeze the grapes, you get wine.” These kinds of quotations about suffering or friction between believers clearly were a way to articulate a more meaningful life for herself. As I wrote earlier, she favored hymns that she considered “deep,” wondering in response to “shallow” contemporary music by quoting a famous hymn: “Where is this man who said, ‘Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I know’?”

Relationship with Author, a Compulsion to Read His or Her Books

Anna’s question “Where is this man who said...” is an indicator of the importance of not just the text but the author to her. When Anna spoke about books, she remarked on authors’ lives and referred to authors in relational terms. In context of her saying moments before that many friends of hers were no longer close, and, consequently, she had more time to read, she said: “Another of my favorite authors, I forgot to mention, he’s my friend, even though he died a long time ago, I used to think of him as my friend and teacher.” She explained:

During my critical time in spiritual development, I would go online in college and print his sermons and go and read. Like, who cares about the homework? And I always looked forward to it. You know, when I see him in heaven, I’m going to tell him, you know, you were so helpful.

Despite an author’s ability with language, Anna no longer admired authors if she found that his or her life was characterized by “emptiness.” She spoke of one of her favorite

poets in the past: “Yeah, so, she knew a lot, a lot about the Bible but probably wasn’t saved. So it’s, you know, your values change with time. You no longer admire somebody who is just gifted. But you see that it’s very sad.” She identified with authors who had suffered in their past and now had a Christian message to share. She liked to read Bible studies by Beth Moore because she associated herself with Moore’s “brokenness” and ability as a teacher: “I see myself a little bit in her, I guess, that’s why.” She attended a conference at her ethnically U. S. church partly to hear one of her “favorite authors as well, devotional authors,” who was a quadriplegic, talk about suffering for God.

Ongoing Scriptural Narrative

Like Nicolai, Anna saw herself as a member of an ongoing narrative beginning in scripture. Likely due to her sensitivity to story and her love of scripture, she recognized the story of her life as minor theme in an ongoing spiritual drama. She named writing and reading texts as one way of involvement in the drama. She told about her friend who led an orphanage ministry and was encountering obstructions in completing a newsletter. To Anna, such obstructions as a jammed printer could be caused by Satan because he would recognize the influence that the newsletters had. She herself was moved to tears by the newsletters, identifying herself in the “amazing things” God was doing: “And I usually cry, just sob, because I can’t believe what God is doing, and that I’m a part of it.”

The belief of her role in a grand narrative mediated her understanding of gender in the church when she read books by Beth Moore, one of her role models. According to Moore, “Satan is unleashing his power” in the current day. God’s reaction, as Moore saw in scripture and Anna explained, included a place for women:

And it talks about, you know, the end of time, and I like how she [Moore] says, this is the worst of times and the best of times because Satan is doing everything, but God, you know, as in prophecy, he said, “I will pour out my spirit on sons and daughters.” I think it’s true in the last days. Sometimes I think women are so much involved in ministry, and they were not even fifty years ago. I think it’s a fulfillment of a prophecy. That, you know, in the Old Testament you don’t hear much about women doing things, so.

As someone with the Spirit poured out on her, Anna was resisting her traditional church background, in which women often marry without completing bachelor’s degrees. In the first interview, I had made a comment that I had observed several young wives at Slavic Fellowship. Anna suggested that this practice had been passed on from church culture in the former Soviet Union, where Christian women who did not denounce their faith in an atheism class were not given the opportunity for college: “So people got married early because there is no career, no school advancement, none of this,” and she also attributed the early marriage to the avoidance of sex before marriage.

Imagined Interpretive Community: Participation by Multiple People Creating a Family

Ana told me that she was drawn to Slavic Fellowship not only because of her brother, but that many people were encouraged to participate: “There’s a place for everything.” She felt that there was less orchestration in a church service with Ivan’s “fresh” transitions between each activity: “Typical church, you go there. Before you go, you know the choir is going to sing a song. This is going to happen. This, well, maybe one solo or two, one poem or two, but it’s all the same.” In our second interview, she cited the open testimony times earlier that Sunday, and said that the participation brought

a sense of “closeness” and that the service was not “sterile.” When a testimony was given, “It makes the church service real, and it brings life, not just something the preacher prepared a week ago or during the week, but something that God is doing, you know?” She compared this to a story of acquaintances at Mapleville Russian Baptist Church, two young women who were questioned by the elders, “20 men sitting” before the service:

And they were interrogated. “Well, do you believe in tongues, speaking of tongues?” And this and that. And this girl, not [name of friend], but the other girl was scared half to death because she doesn’t understand this biblical Russian language. She was like, “What are they asking? What’s going on?” They were scared half to death...

According to Anna, at Mapleville “You can’t be different.” The atmosphere, she said, “just almost pushes on you, like you feel—yeah--constrained.”

Anna’s project for the church’s future was that even more people would become involved, “working with non-Christians here, especially elderly. There is a lot of, you know, Jewish elderly people who are very lonely because their children are into careers and everything.” She also hoped that more would go on mission trips because she had felt transformed by her own trips: “Like, you really come alive, and I want others to experience like apostle Paul said, ‘I’m jealous for you,’ you know, with godly jealousy. You know, to go there and experience it, it, I think church will become much more alive.” She also believed the church members would love each more after such an experience—she had heard of a church’s story where people not only took the trip members to the airport but wept with excitement upon their return. She herself defined the sense of closeness she had with church attendees as “family” once she had returned

from a ministry trip: “It’s like coming home to my church. Because everybody, I know the people who say, ‘Welcome back,’ they mean it, you know. Yeah, it’s like family.”

Marie’s Individual Literacy Practices

Marie’s Story

Marie agreed that Slavic Fellowship was like family. Marie told her story by dividing her life with what she called “separators”: the move to the U. S., high school, college years—a time when “everything wrong then,” and “post-college.” Her childhood in Ukraine was not dramatic for her except that she remembered being called names and teased at school for a Christian. However, she had positive relationships with her teachers and wrote them for some time after she came to the U. S. at age 12 with her family. At first the U. S. was hard: “When you come here, you have to grow up in some degree. You really do the first few years before high school, you know, just growing up, mature. I mean not grown up, you grow up, you mature extremely quickly.” In high school she had both Russian and “American” friends, and she attended a “Russian, the Ukrainian church.” After she had acquired some English, she said, “I was really getting to become very, not just familiar with the culture but entrenched in it now, becoming part, part of it.”

In college, the majority of her friends were ethnically U. S. because few of her Russian friends attended college. Although at a Christian college, she claimed she had a “party life” while working 30 hours per week, playing soccer her first year and cheerleading the next. Marie remarked on the difference of her life from those of her Russian friends’ or the lives of others in her past country:

M: But nonetheless, it just seems like it was very selfish in the sense it was all about me. No responsibilities in the sense of like, besides me there was no other responsibilities. Where women my age, if, should I have been back in the Soviet Union or Ukraine or even now were getting married, were married, you know, so it seemed like—

H: --Is that normal?

M: Yes, very.... I was an old maid at 21.

She resisted marriage at the time, despite the attention of several men, and one man telling her he wanted to marry her: “No, I didn’t want to be married then. I mean, that’s when, you know, I wanted to finish college.” She took two years off to work and then returned to school, finishing at 24. Afterwards, she started receiving pressure to be married. To which, Anna in the interview inserted, “Isn’t it awful?” Marie agreed, saying that people who did not know her but knew her parents would ask questions about her relational status.

Now wanting to be married and also pondering her career in business, Marie called her current stage a “working” and “waiting stage,” a time of “preparation,” one in which she hoped that a “new leaf, you know, is about to turn” and yet felt “you’re treading, your wheels are spinning.”

Reading Culturally U. S. Texts to Negotiate Identity as a Christian Slavic Woman

At the time of the first interview, Marie was reading two books related to her gender. One of these books, *It’s Not About You--It’s About God*, she had been reading for two months and was halfway through. She had chosen to read this book, as she said:

I think that book really explains the struggle women have with being able to keep everything in control whether you're married, your single, in both your household and your life, and just being able to why's, wanting to know why's.

Marie appreciated that the book was written by an African American women, and she identified with the author's generalization of a "strong black woman." Because Marie saw herself as one of "strong Russian women," she thought, "It's talking to me, it's talking to me." The message to her was that as a Christian woman, "strong" or not, she could accept being "weak" and "humble."

Marie was also reading a secular book, "a research book," which her sister had found at the library, *Why Men Marry Some Women and Not Others*, although she felt guilt if she did not do her reading of Christian texts first: "It's very interesting. But yeah, so that's kind of been sitting there, and so it's like, when I have a free minute, when I've read the Bible and read my other..."

God Schedules Books in One's Life to Influence

According to Marie, "God knows when to give books at what time for his purposes." She believed that in her season of "waiting" for what would be the next "new leaf" in her life that she could trust that "God gives you things to read to direct your desire." Her desire to move into a different place in the business field had been mediated by "these things that I read" given by God, although she was still hoping for a "clear vision." For the Christian book she was reading, she stated: "It's not heavily written, but once you read parts of it, you have to re-read it so that it stays with you as well as pray and repent and whatever needs to be done." This time "in reflection" had been rewarded by "confirmations in both the churches." I asked her what she meant by a book being

confirmed. “Oh, no, just certain aspects of, that, you know, she touches in the book, it’s been addressed during the sermon.” She was more confident that God had something to tell her or that the message was true because of her participation in both the Russian-speaking and ethnically U. S. churches.

Value and Regret for Reading Primarily in English

At work, Marie played a role of communication in her company, requiring written English, and she would skim in English the news web sites for politics or celebrity lives. Despite a lifestyle and vocation that required mostly English, Marie had regret that she did not read more in Russian. Close to her adult and grade-school sisters, she appreciated that the elder would seek out Russian books at the public library and take them to Marie’s apartment to read Russian poetry aloud to Marie and the youngest sister. Reading in Russian was “too much of a struggle” on her own. A deeper regret was that she could not read the Bible in Russian. Marie had once told me at a church service that she could not understand the older Russian translation of the Bible. She said that this version was like another language to her. Afraid that when she attended a Christian college that she would be asked to read the Bible out loud, she had practiced beforehand reading an English Bible with no accent. Citing the difficulty of the older Russian Bible translation, she remembered her reaction to an English translation: “It was so simple, and I understood it. I was so excited. I was like, uh, I know what it’s saying!”

Imagined Interpretive Religious Community: In Contrast to Traditional Russian Baptist Churches, an Atmosphere of Freedom and Intelligence

When describing why she participated at Slavic Fellowship, in one short, uninterrupted utterance, Marie spoke a form of the word “free” six times:

And the testimonies, the sharing, that free atmosphere, the freedom, the freedom that's in the church, you know—I love that, and yeah. So, I mean, just the freedom, and obviously the feeding is wonderful. And, yeah, I mean everything. I like everything about it. It's free, it's free.

This freedom implied that, unlike in another Russian Baptist or what she called a “religious church,” “You're not judged. Nobody's checking you out when you come in the door, when you're leaving.”

Hand in hand with this atmosphere of freedom was an atmosphere of “intelligence.” Anna asked Marie if she meant “education,” but Marie insisted that she was thinking of something more than education. Even the sermons, the teaching or “feeding,” “was different in the sense of how they're structured.” Also, the people in Slavic Fellowship “speak differently.” Her picture of Slavic Fellowship in the future was of a church body who would be disseminating such people outside of the church.

Elena's Individual Practices

Elena's Story

Similar in age to Marie and Anna, Elena had been in the U. S. for 14 years, arriving at age 14. A special memory from the former Soviet Union was attending church with her dad. Even though sections in her church were divided by gender, she would “get to sit” with her dad. Her father was very “strict” about her movement and noise. She took his discipline as “where he was teaching us, you know, how to love church and how important it is to sit through the whole service and not to”--at this point in the interview, her husband Max made a brief comment in Russian, and then Elena

continued: “like really—to respect, so that’s where we learned the respect for church and stuff like that.”

Elena’s teenage years and early twenties were her second stage. Elena talked about this time with mostly positive terms—“good changes” in “learning language” and “making friends” although occasionally “it was sad.” She graduated from high school and college with an associate’s degree. The highlight of this time for her was her conversion--“I accepted Jesus”—and baptism. After baptism she became involved in the fledgling church that existed before Slavic Fellowship with “another group” that left later. She began to teach the children’s sermon, teach Sunday school, and be a treasurer for the church. Before she moved onto the third period of marriage, she remembered one more significant event from the second, buying a townhouse. Since Max was emigrating from Russia, she “had to buy it before he came because he had absolutely no credit history” in the U. S.

Her third period of marriage to Max was an “adjustment” of life from being single, when “you’re like your own boss” after leaving her parents’ home, to marriage in which “he’s now my boss,” causing Max to laugh in the interview. “No, no,” Elena suddenly insisted. “We make sure were on the same page.” She may have been embarrassed because as she mentioned later she knew of marriages where the husband did not treat the wife well, whereas she said, “I feel like a princess.”

Value for Authority in Her Interpretive Community

As Elena’s anecdotes reveal, she had high respect for those she viewed as authorities. She seemed to understand that an outsider may not share her view on male figures in her life because she included explanation when she answered that it was her

father's influence that brought her to Slavic Fellowship: "And it's kind of like the decision that my dad made because at that time I wasn't married and to us the father figure in the house is strong." Her respect and appreciation for Ivan was obvious. She was grateful that he was willing to sign the marriage certificate before the ceremony in front of the church because of the visa laws conflicting with their desire to plan an ornate wedding. She portrayed the new small group that Max was leading as Ivan's desire: "Ivan wants us to invite like people that just got married." Her respect for authority dictated what she should read. She was timid about the new Russian translation of the Bible after her first experience of it, when she found "it opens up some different things" and "it's like totally different book." To assure herself, she approached Ivan:

And then I talked to my pastor. I was so scared that it's just a different—you know, what if it's not the Baptist version Bible or something like that, you know? What if it's like a different, you know, somehow changed? "No," my pastor said, "It's, it's really good to read books from different translators because it opens"—because I guess nobody's perfect—"then it just opens up a lot of different perspective, like how to view this certain story or this certain event," so, which was good.

She followed this up by explaining that at her church in the former Soviet Union she would have been dissuaded from looking at a new translation.

Elena did not respect only Ivan's authority although she was closer to him as a relative but also Nicolai's. Early in my research period, she gave a children's sermon entirely in Russian on a Sunday morning. Afterwards, Nicolai stood up for a different purpose related to the children but began asking them basic questions in English about

Elena's message, such as whether it was a big or little spider in the story. He then said he would speak in English so that they would all understand. Unlike a few of the other women who gave children's sermons, from then on Elena always incorporated some English into hers.

Reading and Writing for Personal Connection

and Recruitment for Interpretive Religious Community

Although Elena claimed that she did not like to read much, she had spent significant time in the reading and writing of personal communication. She still wrote to friends in the former Soviet Union. She and Max were set up by e-mail, and they wrote for one and half years (with a few visits from her) before their marriage. With her friends and Max, she had another intention than mere keeping up. A couple of those friends were not Christians as Max had not been until she told him about God and he began attending church. She detailed her relationship with one old friend, a friend whom she was concerned did not know that "the joy is in Jesus." Elena's identity, which is tightly bound to church membership, is revealed in that her fear for this friend was that "nobody that's around her that could ask her, you know, to come to church and stuff like that."

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community: Participation Creating Family

Elena affirmed her father's decision to urge his family to attend the neophyte church that Slavic Fellowship was to become because she, as Anna and Katerine had also emphasized, valued the "opportunity to participate." After having been in multiple other churches with her family, the opportunity to participate in a smaller and physically nearer church made her "feel like part of the family." She was not speaking of her biological family but of Slavic Fellowship as corporate. Participating gave her a "part in it" and

drew her to “want to come to church.” Her desire for the church in the future, after observing its growth since its inception, was that it would grow even larger with people who had not been Christians before.

Discussion: Identities of Socialized Believers in Slavic Fellowship

It was my advisor who pointed out that religious literacy for the socialized believers had an affirmative role in their non-place identities shaped by marginalization in the former Soviet Union. Their literacy was fulfilling for their self-meaning. Raisa, who had wanted to be an archaeologist, read books about Christian history that supported her compulsion toward a city that she only experienced as a traveler but held as precious: Rome. Katerine, who had wanted to be a doctor, was affirmed in her role of being a Sunday school teacher in the literacy act of preparing curriculum. Mikhail from a journalist background found energy in listening to a public news station as a truck driver and took notes to contextualize his sermons as relevant to his audience. Anna in her voracious reading was complimented as knowledgeable by a highly respected missionary, church-planting scholar who wanted her to follow in his footsteps. Marie in her own reading of a book by an African American U. S. Christian could affirm herself as a strong woman. Finally, Elena in her literacy practice of listening to authority for interpretation of her reading found fulfillment in supporting that authority, such as her husband’s leading of a home group.

In the socialized believers’ response to traditional Russian Baptist churches, particularly, Mapleville, we can apply R. Jenkins’ (2004) concept of identity as a “dialectical synthesis of internal and external definitions.” In the imagined community of Slavic Fellowship, the socialized believers wanted the church to be created differently

from traditional churches. They wanted the opposite of what they ascribed to Mapleville as restricting. They experienced more opportunities to “participate” (Katerine, Anna, and Elena) that made them feel members of a larger family. They enjoyed an atmosphere of “freedom” (Mikhail and Marie) that included more allowance for expression by women in dress and education. They desired a congregation that was “open” enough to welcome secular people (Raisa, Katerine, Anna, and Elena).

Although Katerine re-named this kind of church as a mix of ethnically U. S. and Russian, Mikhail and Raisa, who are closest to the highest levels of leadership, defined Slavic Fellowship as another kind of Russian church. Raisa did so by implication, when she mourned that Dostoevsky did not recognize Christians outside of the Orthodox Church as Russian. Mikhail’s creation of difference from traditional Russian churches had no comparison to U. S. churches either: rather he argued for a better interpretation of scripture. The fewer restrictions on women’s appearance was a consequence of the view of “how Bible tells us,” part of the “balance” that he observed in scripture. In addition, Raisa and Katerine noted that they thought mature faith was different from the broader U. S. culture—it was not consumeristic.

The two mothers in the first generation showed that although they wanted to pass down elements of Russian heritage to their children, it was more important to pass down Christianity. Raisa wanted her children to read Russian classics, acceptably in English, and yet when she spoke of traveling overseas with her family she visited friends in Germany, not the independent state from which they came. Katerine had plans for her children to live in Russia for a time, but she also took them to ethnically U. S. churches. For the one father, Mikhail’s approach was that regardless of what the church did,

children would become ethnically U. S. even if they maintained the language. He affirmed his eldest's daughter's frequent attendance with a friend at a massive ethnically U. S. evangelical church.

As Tusting (2000a, 2000b) explored in her study of the literacy events and products of a Catholic parish, domains are also marked by time, evident in Katerine and Elena's sense of pressure in fulfilling the literacy acts they see as Christian: preparing for Sunday school or reading their Bibles. But Anna and Marie's journal, acts of self-construction, addressed to God—transcended the domain of the church, illustrating the primacy of a religious discourse (Gee, 1996). Religion cannot be neglected in the study of ethnicity. The characteristics of ethnicity are apparent in personal journaling for Anna and Marie because they identified with another grand narrative. Anna directly inserted herself into it as a woman gifted with the Spirit in the end times, and Marie acknowledged it when she treated God as an author or storyteller telling her life, timing when she was supposed to read particular texts and then hear their messages “confirmed” at one of her church communities.

During our first interview, Anna mentioned that she read the BBC home page and was surprised to see the native language of the independent republic she once lived in. She had been required to study that language in grade school although the medium of teaching was Russian. This mention of language is a reminder that many of the socialized believers—at the very least, Anna, Elena, Raisa, and Katerine—had likely been interacting in a third-generation immigrant community since the influx of ethnically Russian immigrants to their former Soviet republic had been in the 1950s and 60s. For the natives of that area, they may have been viewed as intruders or oppressors and yet

within the Russian-speaking context they were marginalized for being Christians. It is no surprise that they still read ethnically U. S. books, when so many of the Christian books that they had read in the former Soviet Union were translated western books. To the U. S., they brought their ability to be adaptable, enculturated by an earlier complex immigrant situation. They are unlike J. A. Fishman's (1989b) "ethnolinguistic elites" because they had not left the ethnic group and then returned—their ability to assimilate to the outside and reinforce their version of ethnicity inside had already been nurtured, a non-place identity. Writers of the New Testament appropriated Hebrew Scriptures' language of being "aliens and strangers" (1 Pet. 2:11; Heb. 11:13). A previous life had transferred this view to a U. S. context.

CHAPTER 10

NEW BELIEVERS' LITERACY PRACTICES AND IDENTITIES

Introduction

The rain has stopped. I arrive at the lake at 8:30 a.m. after missing a turn. The congregation had been told the baptism would start at 8 a.m., but young people arrive in their cars the same time I do. The six baptismal candidates are lined up in their white robes on the sand near the grass. They are in stocking feet except one who is barefooted. The women candidates have covered their hair with white scarves. Nicolai and Ivan wear sky-blue robes over white dress shirts and ties. Other people are standing and talking on the grass—most are dressed up despite the forecast except for some young people and me in jeans. Music plays on a stereo system set on a picnic table beneath a tarp.

I stand in the center of the crowd of about 100 people and am greeted by those I have interviewed when they pass by. Marie is translating for me and an elderly Lutheran pastor and his wife who attend fundraisers. Up in the woods near the beach, I see a bald man who occasionally comes to the church services but always seems to be on the periphery. He attends with someone else who had been baptized recently. We sing a couple songs: some people have paper copies of the lyrics.

Ivan, holding a mike, says something about the covenant the candidates are making through baptism. Nicolai, who has his big Bible underneath his left arm, opens it and reads a psalm about having a new heart—he says something about the people of Israel and the Holy Spirit being a fire. He reads in the New Testament about Jesus' baptism. I wonder if he is choosing to mention the people of Israel because two of the baptismal candidates are Jewish.

The two pastors enter the lake through an entrance formed of two flower stands. At chest deep, Ivan and Nicolai each pray with arms in the air, facing us. Marie starts interpreting the prayer—Nicolai prays to the God of Abraham and Isaac and to Christ—but then she stops herself. One at a time, a white-robed deacon leads a baptismal candidate out, alternating between Ivan and Nicolai. The candidate says, “I believe” and then “I obey” to questions about receiving Christ and having his or her sins cleansed.

After they come back toward the top of the beach, the six candidates, three men and three women, kneel on two long rugs. Nicolai and Ivan lay their hands on their heads and pray for them. People rush forward with bunches of flowers to distribute to the baptized--roses, carnations, even wild flowers that a young man may have picked nearby. I watch the baptized individuals receiving the flowers: two were young people whose stories I did not know except that one had publically repented not long ago; the other four had received or were receiving support from Slavic Fellowship for relatives undergoing medical treatment.

It may be easy to understand a religious person clinging to his or her previous faith in a immigrant situation, but what of those who come to the U. S. and eventually claim conversion and undergo baptism as these six did? And of interest to for this study, what role does literacy play in this negotiation of new identities? Specifically, I want to discuss why those of a Russian national identity, and one generation 1.5 individual, would want to identify with a Russian-speaking baptistic church. I call these individuals “new believers,” a more general term, rather than applying “converts” or “newly baptized” because of the following. Some Christians have a theology that does not necessitate baptism for conversion. Ivan, however, saw confession of sin—repentance—

as the first part of a conversion process that was “seal[ed]” (tr. Marie) by baptism. One of my interviewees had not undergone baptism yet but stated her belief.

Two of the new believers claimed an earlier encounter with God before attending Slavic Fellowship: Max and Phillip. They both had been baptized within a year or two of my research year. Max was the husband of Elena, who through e-mails, began to investigate Christianity and attend a church before he came to the U. S. to marry her. Elena acted as Max’s interpreter during the interview. Phillip was the son of an influential couple in the church, Senka, the church secretary and his wife Natasha. They were known as two of the first new believers when Slavic Fellowship began. Phillip was in military service overseas when he began to become interested in God.

Those who claimed conversion after a relationship with the church were Victoria, Vasily, Martin, and Valerie. Victoria was baptized four years before my interview. Vasily was a scientist, though not the same field as Senka. Vasily said that he had become a Christian five years prior to his baptism by Ivan. Most of Vasily’s interview was interpreted by Marie. Martin publicly repented and was baptized during my fieldwork. Although my intention was to interview Valerie as a “seeker,” she publicly repented two months before the end of my research period. Marie and occasionally Valerie’s adult daughter acted as interpreters for Valerie’s interview.

New Believers’ Shared Literacy Practices

Scriptural Text as Authoritative

All the new believers assumed the Bible as authoritative, as shown by their commitment to reading it or their use of excerpts for articulating a spiritual point or supplying evidence of what they recognized as truth. Victoria who had been longer at the

church than the other new believers told me she read the Bible every day. I asked her why, and she spoke of how the narratives of believers' lives were meaningful because of scripture:

Why it's just the only book because it's the Word of God, and this is the book we can learn about God, we learn about ourselves, we can learn about why we're living in this earth, and where we're going to go, and about our future, about our eternity.

She added, "Because this is just all why we're here, and what our life means." Martin and Valerie both mentioned giving significant time to reading the Bible. As Marie translated, Valerie stated that along with reading the text in her small group she was "of course, reading the Bible." Martin had read Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament from cover to cover as he first started attending Slavic Fellowship. When giving a testimony, Martin, Max, and Phillip would frequently read a fitting scripture verse at the beginning or end. Before his public repentance, Martin did this once when his son's cancer went into remission. Phillip also said that when he taught the youth group concepts from Russian Orthodox philosophers he would "find some proof to their words in the Bible." Vasily, after studying science for years, claimed that in the study of the Bible "you realize truth," recognizing it as a source of knowledge, providing facts about the world. Vasily, as I explain later, also was open to other sources of truth—including contemporary revelation--as long as they were confirmed by scripture.

*Reading Other Christian Texts as Responsibility: Meaningfulness of Reading Christian
Texts, Particularly in Russian*

It was through interviewing the new believers that I became aware of the influence of “home groups” as Ivan called them or “Bible studies” as Nicolai said. The members of these home groups had portions of a Christian text to read. For much of my research year, one group was reading chapters from evangelical pastor Rick Warren’s *Purpose-Driven Life* (2002). These new believers began early in being enculturated into a habit of reading Christian books as a responsibility. Victoria’s had attended a home group on a Friday night for six to seven months before visiting the church on a Sunday morning. When Martin started attending church, he was in a home group where he was able to ask questions and was in one at the time of our interview. Valerie was reading *Purpose-Driven Life* for a home group. Vasily’s first involvement with multiple church members was a home group, and Ivan later called him his “helper” for a home group and planned on him leading one on his own. Max led a new group on *The Purpose-Driven Life* for young married couples and singles his age. Phillip was a leader of a youth home group. Also, Anna had mentioned one Sunday service that Phillip gave a testimony that he had been in a Bible study while in the military, led over speaker phone by a pastor in the U. S.

Despite the external pressure of reading religious texts for a home group, several new believers shared about other religious books that they were reading or had read recently. Max and Phillip reported books that supplemented their leadership in home groups, but the rest of the new believers seemed to be reading books for their personal enrichment. Victoria told me that in the last four years she had read only Christian books

and no secular ones: “And, I don’t have enough time to read the Christian literature that I want to, so I don’t have enough time for the other ones.” Vasily was reading a book that explained God’s love—he read it to his wife in the evenings and translated the English text to Russian for her. Martin and Valerie brought up the same biography of a Jewish individual who had become a Christian—although neither mentioned the source of that specific book, Martin said he was getting most of his books from the church library.

Reading in the religious domain had been transformational for these believers in that reading was a component in their move to “repentance” or baptism, from reading e-mails from a future spouse (Max) to reading the Bible or another book. Victoria had once read biographies, historical books, and romances “in the whole” of her “36 years,” but now she wanted to read books such as the several she had purchased on prayer: “I need these books for my soul.” For all but two interviewees, Phillip, who was generation 1.5, and Vasily, who was the most educated, transformational reading—religious reading—needed to happen in Russian. As Martin, one of the interviewers said:

If you want to get not to your brain, you want to get to your heart, it’s better in Russian. Otherwise, you know, you’re reading in English, you have a lot of work to do to your brain. And there’s not enough space to kind of heart thinking.

New Believers’ Individual Literacy Practices

Victoria’s Individual Literacy Practices

Victoria’s Story

When I asked Victoria to divide her life into periods for me, she divided her life not into pre- and –post immigration as many interviewees stated, but pre- and post-God.

Victoria told me what life was like when she first moved to the U. S. as a single mother of a small daughter, who was almost 16 at the time of the interview:

And it was really hard time for us because I have to, like in two weeks, I went to work, and she was—I worked 12 hours a day everyday, seven days a week. And for, like a year and a half, I had only three days off—Christmas, New Year, and her birthday. So, since, she was four years old she was staying at home all the time.

This time of loneliness was about to change, a change which Victoria credited to the church.

Victoria's mother was Ina, whose testimony was on the church's home page. Ina and Victoria's father emigrated to the U. S. three years before Victoria. Ina "found" Slavic Fellowship and was baptized the following year after her arrival. In church services, Victoria struck me as an independent, attractive, and assertive woman, and she seemed aware of this perception of her, telling me that Ivan had said "when he first time, he saw me, and he met with me, he thought that I would never ever came to the God [laughter]." She attributed her conversion to her mother and Slavic Fellowship: "And, I really believe that her prayers and other people just lift me to God." After attending a home group from the church, she experienced the following: "It just happened, that, you know, I really, like one day I just woke up and said, 'Yeah, he does exist, and he's calling me.'" It was a new day: "I guess after that everything changed like, you know, I start my life again." Within a few years she married and had another daughter, making it a "completely different life now." "But," she maintained, "I don't want to just, you know,

scratch this life without God because I have to remember about this life so I will never come back there again.”

I asked Victoria, if there was something that she wanted to add at the end of the interview. She told me about her daughter’s repentance. Anna had called Victoria saying that she could not lead the female youth home group and requesting that Victoria would lead it that evening. Victoria agreed: “I don’t know what to do. I’ve never done that.” Victoria led the young women through a chapter of *The Purpose-Driven Life* and had tea with them. While she chatted with her mother afterwards, her teenage daughter approached them and told them that she wanted to make a confession of sin. Victoria stated: “So, we went to her room, and she was praying, and we were praying for her.” In Victoria’s mind, “I mean it just, just happened, see. I know a hundred percent that God just--the whole situation is under his control. It, it was supposed to happen that day, so I guess he needs me to be there.”

Unfortunately, there is an epilogue to Victoria’s story. Two months after I interviewed her and less than a month before her sister was baptized, Victoria and her baby were deported to the Ukraine.

Language of Attribution in Tension with Language of Performative Speech: Prayer Mediated by Reading Text

As the one who had been a believer the longest, Victoria most reflected Gee’s (1996) description of discourses being a “ways of being” or “form of life.” In particular in her story, her language was about attribution of events in her life, seeing them as influenced by God. An illustration is: “It was time, I went through, I guess, really hard time, but I’m not complaining because I think that God prepared me for meeting with

him.” The painful experiences of migration now had a theological explanation.

Victoria’s life had been charged with meaning.

Another kind of language marking her narrative is language that may best be understood by speech act theory—the idea that language does things. One area of speech act theory is performative speech. *Performative speech* is a linguistics term meaning that the utterance is the same as the action. Saying “I warn you” is not only to speak but to do the action of warning. Likewise, in an address to God to say “I confess” or “I pray” are other examples of performative speech. Despite Victoria’s consistent attribution that God was in control of her life events, she regularly used language that demonstrated that she thought when addressing God in prayer she or others were doing an action that would influence him. Her narrative holds both these assumptions together—that God controlled her life events and that he could be influenced through prayer: thus, God directed her toward her conversion, yet her mother and others at Slavic Fellowship were responsible for “lift”ing her to God. God was in “control” of her daughter’s confession, but she and her mother prayed too.

As reading *The Purpose-Driven Life* in her home group may have led her to viewing her life as one filled with purposes, Victoria was involved in other literacy events enculturating her in speaking to God to order to shape those purposes. At the time of the interview, Ivan and other preachers had been giving sermons on prayer. In addition to listening to these sermons—literacy events, Victoria was reading books on prayer. After 10 months of a reduced schedule from the church while she cared for her newborn, she had returned in leadership of the women’s prayer meeting. She was glad “to be back on track” because she had “miss[ed] a lot about church. She told me, “I

would kind of change that group little bit.” In order to make changes, she had bought Russian copies of books on prayer by two well-known U. S. conservative Protestant women. Two of the books were quite practical, explaining how a parent prays for his or her children and how a wife prays for her husband. Such practical concerns show that by reading these texts, Victoria was seeking out ways for her future life to be meaningful and also manageable through prayer. Reading religious texts not only contributed to the construction of her life, but her reading of them was also contributing to the construction of other lives: those in her group and her children and husband.

Imagined Interpretive Religious Community

Victoria said what drew her to the church was the people and Ivan: “I mean they don’t care about my past, and they were so happy for me that, you know, that I just follow God. And they, you know, they just all give me their like, I don’t know, kindness and help.” As with several of those who had been churching long term, Victoria’s desire for the future of Slavic Fellowship was that more people would be involved instead of only attending. She named the ideal church member as “a life member.” She told me that “like honestly, the whole church exists just because of the one group of people,” which she thought were 35 of the 70 official members (likely in contrast to attendees) of the church. With laughter, she added, “Everybody else just, you know, dead bodies.”

Vasily’s Individual Religious Literacy Practices

Vasily’s Story

The next individual that had been enculturated more as a believer before I met him was Vasily. Interpreted partially by Marie, his interview was primarily interviewee-driven. He was eager to share his story and ideas. I never directly asked him how he

divided his life into periods or themes because the interview was running long, and he had shared with me much of his life story, mostly in the form of anecdotes. An individual perhaps in his fifties, Vasily had been baptized as a baby. Although his parents were atheists, his grandma was not, and as a Pioneer he was determined to convince her otherwise: “‘Grandma, you know, there is no God. There is no God.’ But she’d say, ‘You know, leave me alone. I know there is a God.’” His grandma once told him a story that as a young woman, when doing laundry in a hole broken into ice, she fell in and was weighed down by her clothing. Trapped, she prayed to be saved, and “she felt like some kind of a force, some kind of power, you know, pushed her out from the water and threw her out up on the ice.” When first told this story, Vasily was not impressed: “a story’s a story.” However, during the interview interpreted by Marie, “Now he understands that it’s the truth and God can, you know, definitely do such things in one’s life.”

Vasily came to the U. S. eleven years before, living in a variety of locations where large companies welcomed him as a scientist. After three years, he was in need of another job and was prepared to agree to one of multiple offers but then received an invitation to the state where Slavic Fellowship is located. He and his wife deliberated and decided to move, and as Marie translated: “But now he understands it was the plan of God for him, for his life.” In the airport, he bumped into Nicolai, who invited him to church, and when Vasily moved into his house, Ivan showed up at his door, saying, “Okay, what can I help you with?” He was surprised: “And that was very different for him because he’d, you know, figured out in America you have to pay for everything.” In response, he began to attend a home group.

A couple of years later, he had “come to Christ,” a statement he made in English in the interview. After a few years of resisting a second baptism as an adult, he heard a preacher state that baptism was a way to “cleanse” (tr. Marie) the body before heaven. Vasily thought of the myth of Hercules cleaning out the stable and became insistent to be baptized, despite his family’s argument against it. Although baptism were normally scheduled in late summer, early fall, Vasily convinced Ivan that he must be baptized right away. Ivan scheduled a baptism at a park, and that day they were greeted by an iced-over lake and a park ranger who informed them it was no longer the season for entering the water. In Vasily’s words interpreted by Marie: “But my decision was strong, and I decided.” He told Ivan, “Let’s do it” (he said this in English in the interview), and Ivan broke the ice and baptized him. He had been warned that his life would get hard after baptism, and it did. It was a time when he felt inspired to write poetry which he shared with the church. He lost his job but attributed to God an opportunity he had to start his own business with a Christian friend. Each day they prayed, and thus, with the Holy Spirit: “we believe that there is three of us in the company.”

Entwining Religious and Scientific Discourse—Mediated by Religious Literacy

Ten years before the interview, while he was still in Russia, Vasily had come up with his own theory of life, partially based on Teilhard de Chardin’s thoughts. In it, he began attempting to entwine the discourse of both science and of religion, discourses that most would see as conflicting. He told me that in “in Soviet schools, they teach that man is the king of nature, is the king of the environment.” But that when he first developed his theory, he realized that “the things existed bigger than he is as, you know, earth, solar

system, galaxy, universe” (tr. Marie). He said that science could not explain “how life came out of no life” (tr. Marie). So, he created a model of how life came to be.

With his theory, Vasily saw an ordering in everything. In English, he called an atom a seed:

This is the seed for the life because cells is all the background of all livings systems. The mind of humans and the same has some kind of seeds for creating the social society of humans. Right? And, the same—it was--the same the quantum the seed for creating the solar system because of the planet, and the solar systems consists of planets. The solar system is the same as seed for galaxy. Because galaxies consist of the solar system, and so, you see, all these pieces together, you knew about this whole structure is some kind of unified.

Vasily seemed to be on a constant search for unity—he used the word “symmetry” multiple times, demonstrating his appreciation for coherence.

His literacy practices facilitated his identification, even through second baptism, with this congregation. For Vasily, a text was a container for knowledge. He described a good book as something that “gives you something new which you don’t have before.” Books were explanatory and yet affirming of his own concepts. Unlike other believers in the church, he had the authority to freely appropriate what others might consider metaphorical language with scientific discourse, expanding his own theories. When he first encountered the church, his interpreter stated that after he started reading the Bible, “he realized a lot of factors in the Bible and a lot of things of what Bible teaches, it falls right into that model that he created.” He said, “So when I was reading the Bible I understood especially when Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life,’” and he had

a religious/scientific explanation for each of those words. For example, in English he stated that “way” meant the “information, atoms to your heart when you accept Christ.”

In his writing as well as his reading, Vasily believed that the Holy Spirit was inspiring him. For the work he and his colleague were doing in his field, he told me in English: “I hope that next year we will have some publications in this area. And we’ll go to some conferences and present what God give us because this is so powerful, I’m telling you, what, what we have developed.” He compared his scientific work to the poetry he shared at church: “It’s coming because Holy Spirit tell me this stuff.”

Two weeks before the interview, he had found a book written by an author who claimed that Jesus appeared to her and talked with her about how the material world was created. (My impression was that it was a book on what news organizations have dubbed the “God particle.”) Again, the book was enhancing his theoretical concepts: “And it’s interesting that in this book I found the same, that it’s explaining some kind of physics to understand this way now.” What the book explained was Jesus’ role—that Jesus came to rejuvenate people’s cells. According to Vasily, once people’s cells had begun to be rejuvenated, people would stop trying to control things with their knowledge and mind but rather through what he called the “power of love”—living lives of kindness and praying for others to be affected.

The book entwined scientific and religious discourses for Vasily in such a way that every aspect of daily life, of “real” life was important. He repeatedly used the word “real” in the following:

But this is explaining to even on scientist level to some people that this is something about this stuff because this is real. This is not something like

religious people just talking you some kind of stories whatever that don't exist, or stuff like this. This is real. This is real stuff. This is whatever, this is our life....

And we have to live with this stuff. It's not just when you come to church on, on Sunday and you know God through this. This is your real life. You live this with each and every day.

He did the same when talking about how prayer can affect healing: "But this is real, you see. This is how it works. This is physics. Everything is real. People think this is not real, but it is. But their minds is just not working right, so they just need to change their point of view—how Jesus is telling us."

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community

After first attending Slavic Fellowship, Vasily said that he was drawn to "beauty of the souls of the people" at church. Speaking in English, he viewed those souls as his concern for the future, especially those souls of individuals in places of power. If the congregation did not "open their hearts," eventually this church would fall into the same historical pattern that he deemed the "Catholic Church" and the "Russian Orthodox Church" had in "using control." Relying on the theory of love he had just shared, he explained that "when the people come to power, they start using their minds to control the other people because the root of all evil, it's greed." He thought that greed generated a sense of lack: "it means there is not enough something in the world for you because you want to preserve something for yourself, you know." His hope was that the pastors would always "be wise" and "listen to God" and that God would continue to "open the hearts" of all those who attended.

Martin's Individual Religious Literacy Practices

Martin's Story

The third individual Martin also used the English word “real” frequently. Five months after I started my formal year of research, I had watched Martin go forward during an invitation in February. Almost a year to the day I had begun my research, he was baptized in early September. Martin, who wrote computer programs, divided his life by pre- and post-migration, with subcategories in each. Pre-migration contained his two-year military service, which, as he said, “It was probably how me as a boy became a man.” Next was “before and after marriage,” including beginning a family. Then, in the mid 1990s, friends in the U. S. submitted his name in a green card lottery. He won, he thought, because of “God” and the fact that the lottery was relatively unknown to many.

From the time of his arrival until the interview, Martin split his life into two: before his teenage son’s diagnosis of cancer and after. His first goal in the U. S. was to decrease the language barrier. He told me, “We actually came without language at all.” He added: “So, to get understanding what going on around you, you know, and then when you, when you think that you understand, well, not everything. I can give you a hundred percent nobody understands, from immigrants, nobody understands a hundred percent.” Finally, “things [were] getting better and better,” and he found a “real job,” which was not like “pizza delivery” but in his field of computers. Once he had obtained this job, he experienced more pressure to increase his English skills, but still life was “getting better and better.”

The news of his son’s illness made everything else look small, even the hard work of being in the U. S. He became interested in what he called “real things”—“Just the

simple happiness about your family's, of course, health because of course it all started with health, you know? Things that you can't buy or, you know, or ask another person that would give you." He found that he did not "have any method to, to kind of solve this problem, you know, or answer this question." According to Martin, he began to think about God at this point:

It just you, you probably you—at some point you realize that, well, not everything depends on you or on what you do or what you think. Something bigger.

Something bigger above you, and sometimes you just have to ask this big thing, or, you know, or count on it or someone bigger than you will to get through some hard stuff.

Martin had met Nicolai through a circle of immigrant friends, and when through another convert, Victoria, Nicolai asked if he could come and pray for Martin's son, Martin said yes. He was amazed at the caring community that soon began to support him—providing food and taking his daughter to and from school activities. Because of his many questions, he began reading the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament on his own, occasionally talking with Nicolai. After reading the Bible, he began attending the church, sometimes with his wife and children, and a home group.

Reading Independently

Although in the narrative above Martin's language turned from independence to one of dependence--"something bigger," his literacy practices exhibited this determined approach to life of "a method" for "solv[ing] this problem." He transferred his literacy practices from his technical profession to biblical text:

I didn't get into the church even once. I was just reading. I'm—there was, there was millions of questions, but I was just keep reading. You know, probably, it's because, my, it's—I'm sure this is my professional stuff because when I'm start reading technical book, you never understand what you reading at first. You have to read it twice, ten times, the same place before you start understanding what you doing. And it's probably how I did all this Bible. And I didn't read this kind of Bible which is with the explanation on some, at some points. I read just plain text. That's it.

Not only did he read the Bible alone, but he asserted that he read a Bible without commentary, a popular style in conservative Protestant circles in the U. S.

Identifying Heredity in Scripture

As he read the Bible, Martin found himself grappling with his own categorization of Christianity and his own group ascription of Judaism, a faith his parents had not practiced. He knew little about the Bible. “Like seriously, I knew Bible, Bible—what's the Bible, okay, this is Christian religion—this is not mine. I'm Jewish, so.” He had not understood that the Christian Bible included the Hebrew Scriptures:

When I start reading from the first pages, I start understand that I'm reading Jewish history. This is first that I kind of felt. And but, basically Old Testament, it's real old Jewish tradition, and it's Tanakh which is, you know, just set of Jewish books that they read in synagogues. And I felt that this is, I'm kind of, I'm getting to my religion of my people, of Jewish people.

Like and yet unlike the socialized believers who identified a role for themselves in a contemporary continuation of the scripture narrative, Martin identified for himself an

unknown history of his ancestry. At the same time, he began reading a book that described “how young Jew became a believer in Christ.” Likely by reading, he could experience independence in referring to this book as a source that linked Hebrew Scriptures and the Christian New Testament before intensively consulting Nicolai and Ivan. By the time of the interview, he had an explanation for why Jews in the gospels did not recognize Christ as their Messiah: they were “doing God’s will to get the Jesus Christ on the cross.”

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community

Out of sense of obligation to the church for their support, Martin began to attend Slavic Fellowship. A baptized member of the church upon the day of my interview, he explained to me that his goal for the church would be that more Jews participated in the community and were converted. Showing that he had linked the Hebrew Scriptures and New Testament as one authoritative text, he referred to an image by the apostle Paul, without recognizing the portion of the Christian Bible: “It’s somewhere in the Bible, it says like, and the Jews, kind of, you know, how does it say, veil on their eyes.” This veil, according to Martin meant that “they don’t see real stuff” as he saw it, and he hoped that they would “see things clear” as he did. He particularly desired that the “young Jews” in the area, as well as the “old Jews” would “figure out who’s their real Messiah.” He hoped that he would be a “testament” since he was in “the middle of all these people,” his Jewish friends.

Valerie's Individual Literacy Practices

Valerie's Story

Marie interpreted a portion of Valerie's experience, after she had arrived from Russia and her husband died seven months later:

You know, she had, didn't have a choice but to live on. She had to raise Galya [her daughter] and had to work. And she had to live. She can't say her life had any pleasure in it, wasn't a pleasing life, but she had to live.

Valerie had pointed out that most immigrants divide their lives between before migration and after. Her focus when talking with me was the tragic change she went through after. She was living with the guilt that it had been her idea to come here and she had to care for her then 13-year-old daughter by herself. Ten years before the interview, she had bought a house near Ivan and Raisa's. Her daughter Galya began attending Slavic Fellowship and joined the youth group. Occasionally, Valerie would attend church with her. When Galya married and went to a different Russian-speaking church with her husband, Valerie attended with them sometimes. A year before this August interview, Valerie and her Galya had come to one of Slavic Fellowship's fundraisers. While there, she told Ivan that she would be alone since her daughter and daughter's husband were moving away. In Marie's interpretation of the story, Ivan said, "Well, you know, in the beginning of September, we're starting—a group is starting to study the Bible, and please come." Galya encouraged Valerie to attend, and she did.

At the church Valerie found a public audience to whom she read her new poetry. Her poetry was so popular that a musician in the church put one poem to song, and it was sung by a well-known performer visiting the church to the delight of Valerie. She also

began reading about Christianity, not only in the small group, but with books that Galya bought her or she received through the church library. One particular book was about a Jewish person who became a Christian, and according to Marie's interpretation:

After reading those books, she really began, you know, realizing again that yes she needed to be with God, especially, since he's a Jew and since she's Jewish. And with reading that stuff and addressing the roots of Judaism and of their beliefs or believing, recognizing, coming to the conclusion that yes, she needs to come to Jesus.

Like Martin, through the prism of Christianity, Valerie thought she had reconnected with her heredity and heritage.

Writing to Negotiate Hardship

On the day of the baptism, although Valerie was not one of the candidates, she gave her testimony, telling the congregation and guests about the period following her husband's death: "At that time couldn't keep everything under control, kept thinking that I should pull myself up by my bootstraps—needed Lord, needed him to be with me—think he was with me, and I didn't know—know I needed his power" (tr. Marie). From that quotation and in the rest of the interview transcript and my observations, I noted two main themes in Valerie's life. One was life being hard—"survival," the other was what appeared contradictory, that God was available during this hard life. Valerie negotiated this tension through writing religious poetry. Although she previously had written little poetry religious in nature, she wrote such poetry frequently once she began attending a home group: "Now these things come, and she just writes them down. It's hard to explain how or why, but if it catches her heart, she writes it down" (tr. Marie).

This ongoing negotiation was obvious in the summaries of her poems that interpreters provided in church services from November of 2005 to September of 2006. November 27: a poem about a call to God and a second poem about forgiveness. January 1, 2006: She stated, "Dear Church, on the first night of the new year, God has sent me these words." It is a poem about having both hard and good times. January 22: a guitarist set a poem of hers to music. The song is called, "All Night I Did Not Shut My Eyes." It is about not sleeping and thinking about how she had not known God earlier in life. February 5: she reads a poem about seeking answers from God. Afterwards, Ivan says, "We can feel through her poems that Valerie is getting closer to the Lord." May 14, a poem about prayer: according to the interpreter, Anna: "prayer is a dialogue between soul and God and should be approached out of faith because without faith most beautiful words are empty." On June 25, Valerie read a poem about listening to God.

And on July 9, the 7th anniversary of the church, Ivan announced her conversion. Her face jerking with emotion, Valerie stood up and said (as interpreted by Marie):

Big thank you to church. I came not long ago. I grew up in a nonreligious family. It is here that I found a little push. I knew Ivan for a long time. . . . Now I'm really glad that I've come to this church and know Lord. Many things I'm going through which I'll share, but today will read poem about church.

It was a poem greeting the church on its birthday. Reading that poem was her way of identifying as fully as she could with the collective identity of the church. For Valerie, writing was transformational.

Writing as Communal

It is important to note that Valerie's sense of being "touched" came out of a response to a home group, a support group that was a literacy event in that the agenda was discussion of a book chapter, but the questions to Ivan could be about anything. Her inspiration for her poetry came out of community. She was also influenced by Aleksandr Pushkin's poetry, whom she thought had the ability to describe this "school of life." Even this influence had a communal aspect to it in that she regarded Pushkin as her mentor: "Well, basically, she's saying that she's not as worthy as a Pushkin, but he helps her express her own poems and write her poems" (tr. Marie). She spoke of him as inseparable from his works that moved her. Like Anna in the previous chapter, it was as if she had a relationship with an author. In addition, she saw her poetry as given to her by God, thus another member of a perceived spiritual community.

Her poetry process before and after her conversion had a collaborative quality to it. Galya told of typing Valerie's handwritten works and e-mailing them to their former home where they were published. Valerie also said that her daughter pressured her to maintain her writing and told a story of this from the day before the interview:

Yesterday, yesterday, they were laying out on the deck, and she said to Galya, "Galya, you know, I'm, I'm just a little lazy to get up and get a pen. I have a poem coming." So, Galya's like, "What? What?" So she went out and got a pen real quickly. And said, "You can't do this" you know, because she had this poem, you know, from Ecclesiastes saying, you know, vanity, vanity, it's all vanity, and so on. (tr. Marie)

At this point in the interview, Galya piped in saying that she sometimes had to tell her mother, “You’re being lazy. That, that’s not cool. Come on.” In addition to Galya’s presence was the presence of the congregation’s at Valerie’s reading of new poetry. Her public sharing of a very personal poem, sometimes written the night before, showed her desire for her inner person to be vulnerable to those around her—for the congregation to experience her emotional process if not her entire writing process. She also, as with the poem of the 7th birthday of the church, wrote poetry to corporately name emotions for the congregation: she read another poem to commemorate Ivan’s birthday.

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community

When I asked Valerie about how she would imagine the church in the future, she first complimented Slavic Fellowship for not being like Mapleville Russian Baptist Church. To her Slavic Fellowship felt like family—“the important thing” rather than “what you wear.” Her hope for Slavic Fellowship was that it would remain “open” so that “everybody feels free to come.” According to Marie’s interpretation, “If it continues being open, it will--you know, she believes that it will--you know, that will bring many, many people in whether they’re there for the first time or don’t understand things well.”

The next two new believers, both men between the ages of 20 and 30, would likely have had little experience in more conservative churches. One was Max, who came as an adult to the U. S. in order to marry a socialized believer, Elena. The other is the only generation 1.5 individual I knew of among the new believers, Phillip.

Max's Individual Literacy Practices

Max's Story

Not a Christian until his communication with Elena, a central part of Max's narrative was his university career, preceded, as he divided it, by his childhood and followed by "when he met God." His wife Elena was his interpreter as I interviewed the two together. When Max began speaking of his childhood, Elena teased him that he was "spoiled," and he responded by explaining that his parents' giving nature "taught him a lesson to love." They did not only give him and his sisters material gifts, but "they would come in at night and tuck him in." Max would sometimes wake up in the morning and find that his father had hidden a new toy under his pillow. From this affectionate environment, Max left to attend university. There "he would have to sit in the library for hours and do research and stuff like that, so it actually taught him to love books." He also "met most of his friends" at university.

After four years of work following school, a mutual friend connected Elena and Max by e-mail. He became interested in God and started to attend a church. During this time, he remembered dangerous incidents from the past where he could have been seriously harmed but was not, such as a "really bad motorcycle accident," and he decided that God had been "watching him" and intervening in his life. He "repented," but then some of his friends "kind of stepped away because he wasn't drinking and partying with them anymore." He was still in contact with the friends who "don't have a need to drink."

At the time of the interview, Max had been a Christian for three years and married in the U. S. to Elena for over two years. At Slavic Fellowship, he had the role of leading

a home group, sharing others' written testimonies, bearing the offering, and reading scripture.

Reading Personal and Collective History with the Assumption of God's Intervention

As in his own life narrative, Max emphasized the intervention of God in his giving of testimonies. For giving a testimony, he would search the Internet or a file and share remarkable stories of people. Three of the four testimonies I had clear interpretation and jotted notes on during the 12-month period. Before one testimony, Max first provided his own experience of God intervening once by protecting him when he fell on a rail track (tr. Marie). In another, he explained how a man believed God miraculously protected him during a war (tr. Marie). As Max seemed to indicate about his own story: the subjects of these testimonies had all attempted to fulfill themselves with another activity: gambling, drinking, or weight-lifting before they had repented.

This intervention of God in the form of Christ was also shown in his reading of books about collective history, which he read in English along with *National Geographic*. He was particularly interested in, as Elena said, "war and all that stuff," but he had an additional interest in "books that represent the time from when Christ was growing up and where he lived, and actually from that time any events or what's going on," linking his interest in war history to the history of Christianity by studying ancient Rome.

Inspiration from God through Reading / Authority Gained through Reading

In his preparation for testimonies and leading a home group, Max believed that God "g[a]ve him ideas." This inspiration for the home group, as he read *Purpose-Driven Life*, was somewhat situational: "And it could be even in those passages that you have already read many times, but then on a certain day God just really speaks to you through

that.” Sometimes it may be that God was indicating something that someone else “really need[ed] at that time.” Likewise in the testimonies, he selected “only those that touch[ed] his heart.” However, this being touched was not pure inspiration or at least he understood that his own narrative may factor into his compulsion to choose a certain text: an event that occurred “in somebody’s life really reminds you of, like in your own, you know, something that you’ve experienced similar to that in your own life, and it’s just kind of interesting to see how different people deal with it differently.” When he felt he had been given an idea, he would record it in writing so that he would not lose it.

This sense of being “touched” sounds authoritative, and yet it was not exclusively for his authority. During the home group meeting, he would state that “God has really spoken to him,” and others would state “Yes, and I read this and God really opened it up to me.” Max also was reading a book by a Christian apologist whom Anna had recommended because he wanted to be able to answer more difficult questions about God. While the knowledge was important to him—the text was a container for knowledge, reading was not only for gaining knowledge but to have God indicate which knowledge was important for him to ponder.

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community

Max appreciated the opportunities he had in the church and added to Elena’s assertion that participation “creates it to be church family” and that then “you feel needed.” He thought that the church would increase in number, reducing the opportunities to be involved in activities, and already grieved that the sense of family, specifically as shown by people praying for him, would be decreased.

Phillip's Individual Literacy Practices

Phillip's Story

During my research period, I watched Max and Phillip become friends after Phillip returned from serving in the military, which he had joined, he said in a Sunday testimony interpreted by Marie, because his father's ancestry had served in the czar's army. Phillip did not break his story into periods but rather told it as a running narrative, starting with seventh grade when his memories were strongest. In seventh and eighth grade, he was enrolled in a Russian school before he moved to the U. S. He was "really depressed" for the first year: "I didn't know nobody. I didn't have any friends or nothing. You know, that was pretty bad. At my age, come on, I was like fourteen." By tenth grade, everything had changed. He was "excelling" because he was a football player, had a "nice car," and was quite popular by twelfth grade, throwing a party that was still talked about six years later. But, in the interview, he doubted his teenage view of "excelling": "Now, I just kind of think I should have spent more time reading and trying to find out new things I guess—become smarter and more knowledgeable. I think that's what people should be doing anyway." I asked, "So, like anybody?" and he answered, "Yeah, anybody. Instead of receiving information, they should digest it more."

After high school, Phillip joined the military for four years, serving overseas where he "matured a lot." Referring to Maslow's hierarchy, he told me with his basic needs met, he realized he needed to decide what to "make out" of life. He said that God "opened doors" in his soul, giving me a specific example of an insight during a solitary assignment for two weeks on a beach. With no walls for his tent and the "ocean crashing against the rocks," he stated, "I kind of realized that you don't really need all this stuff

that people go for, like all the money and stuff like that. You can just be happy like this.” Phillip noted that, similar to the previous anecdote, “there’s too many things that God has done in my life that are just unbelievable. And I can’t even really go on into every one of them. I mean I could, but we would be here for hours.”

When Phillip’s military service was over, he returned to the U. S. and “finally got to go to Russian church.” Earlier in the interview, he had remarked on his recent trip with the youth to visit an orphanage in Russia and a dating relationship with a young woman at Slavic Fellowship (also generation 1.5). He had also brought up that he would need to decrease his leadership of a youth home group because he was about to attend school and start a new job.

Value of Resisting Culture and Thinking for Oneself through “Digesting” Texts

After coming through high school as a popular student who did not work at his grades, Phillip emphasized a need for individuals to think for themselves. He explained how students “instead of receiving information” “should digest it more”:

As far as watching TV, they should actually read and, you know, because it makes you think and realize some things for yourself, and that’s what really matters. It doesn’t matter what the other guy next door thinks. It matters what it is to you, but the only way to know is to analyze it yourself.

For his preparation for his home group, his digesting, he explained that he could not read one thing at a time, “switch”ing between texts so that his mind had time to process the information: “Once I get this concept right here until I, until I, until my brain kind of works it through a couple times, I’m not going to move on further.”

Phillip did not reserve his criticism for only ethnically U. S. high school students who watched television rather than read. He recognized the influence of culture on the young men he taught in a home group—ages 18 through 20. He commented that they were often image oriented and thus would not answer questions in his group. For the men in his group, Phillip believed: “It’s all about who’s got the bigger house, who’s got a better car, and who’s wearing what. I mean not, no all the time, but it is part of it. It’s like an unspoken part though.” He blamed this materialism on the “Russian community”’s emphasis on material goods after the dismantling of the Soviet Union: “People do like to show off over there [Russia], young or old. Probably because of all the years during communism they couldn’t really have nothing.” He compared the Russian community to “a bear woken up after a winter of starvation, you know, in the spring when they get really hungry.”

Phillip maintained his principle of reading to resist being socially constructed in the interpretive community of Slavic Fellowship. Along with his secular reading of military strategy, Phillip currently was pursuing the writings of Russian Orthodox philosophers. Reading writings of Russian Orthodox monks, which Phillip acknowledged were produced in a particular context that valued solitude, reinforced his desire to be an independent thinker in that “most of the Orthodox people concentrate on the soul, the person itself, individually to whereas more you look at the Baptist churches, they mostly look out for each other for church, community-wise.” He noted that “not a lot of people in our church really approve that or whatnot just because, you know, it’s Russian Orthodox, and we’re Baptist, so they kind of don’t think we should be reading that stuff.” Although he explained the virtual identification of being Baptist with the use

of “we,” he rejected the ascription by others in the church who may have been uncomfortable with Baptists associating with Russian Orthodox thought.

In response to Phillip, I inserted, “But you do (think Baptists should be reading Russian Orthodox thought)?” and he answered that as long as “a person believes in God” and “has spent his whole life searching” that one’s identity as a kind of Christian or one’s method of searching is insignificant. His or her thought could still bring a new perspective on a topic, such as in scripture: “when you look at somebody else’s view on it, then, you know, kind of opens up other perspectives I guess.” He pointed out that while he gained new perspectives, he did not have to agree with them in their entirety. He had no fear of other philosophies because “basically philosophy’s nothing but somebody’s thoughts really.”

Insights on Self, Influenced by God through Reading Texts and Talking with Others

While Phillip talked about the importance of reading and thinking for oneself, he later brought into his narrative that no insights about himself were possible without God’s intervention:

I think our souls are not fully ours. It’s kind of like we have a lot of things within us that are obvious in a way, but he is the one who opens the doors for us and shows us the rooms that are within us.

Although he did not state directly so in the interview, these insights, such as his beach experience were often mediated by reading books and experiences with others. For example, he shared a military anecdote in a Sunday service testimony interpreted by Marie. In rejection of the “empty” drinking of his colleagues, he would not party with them but rather stayed behind and read books on politics and history, finding that money

and power did not bring happiness. One day in the barracks while he was gazing on the sunset, another colleague who had not joined the others struck up a conversation with him. This military buddy was a pastor's son but became a "son of God" to Phillip.

A Mystical Quality in Writing Love Letters

His mystical-like belief in an outside influence other than culture seemed echoed in his perception of some of his own writing. His preparation for his home group was not mysterious: he wrote his presentations in manuscript form, which, he said, "gets my thoughts together." But his writing of letters and prose pieces to his new girlfriend was a different process that he ventured as "crazy": "It's not a physical exercise, just something comes out of you, I guess. Sometimes, I feel like it's not even mine." He found that he had to "wait until it comes around." Unlike her, he could not "just sit down and write" her a letter. He claimed that "when it finally comes out, it's usually really deep and is usually is something people like, I guess, in a way." In the final chapter, I discuss how individuals' openness to inspiration or a muse was related to the church's public support of poets' and musicians' creative process.

Imagined Religious Interpretive Community

A son of the couple who were among the first new believers at Slavic Fellowship, Phillip said that he was drawn there because "it's the first church I ever went to" but also because it was not like "other Russian churches." He told me that at a traditional Russian church, likely Baptist, "everyone over there is like, they kind of know each other from a long time. And when a new person comes in, they kind of look like this at you. Like, what are you doing here, who are you type of deal. They're judging you already." He commented that "the people that come in who are new, they notice that people are a

lot nicer here than anywhere else.” I mentioned it could be presumed that he would be uncomfortable if there were people who would not accept what he read—Russian Orthodox philosophy, and I asked, “So why go to church?” He brought up besides the “Russian community” and sense of a “big family,” that church was another location for multiple perspectives as he had gained from the Russian Orthodox philosophers: “God opens our, in our minds, like certain things to everyone of us, so I want to hear what God has open to the other guy, what he has put on his heart that week.”

He saw the future of the church in realistic terms. There were “two ways it could go”: either new Russian immigrants would maintain it as Russian, or “people will die out, and it will become an American church.” He doubted that the current youth would go on in maintaining it as a Russian-style church because to do so would imply their being volunteer preachers and pastors. These young people did not recognize the challenges of the roles of “preaching,” and only one had aspirations to be an “evangelist.” I reminded Phillip that Ivan had once publically remarked that he could be a preacher or pastor someday. Laughing, Phillip responded, “No.” He would rather focus on his dream of having “a family with four kids.”

Discussion: Identities of New Believers in Slavic Fellowship

As religious literacy played an affirmative role in the last chapter for socialized believers, in this chapter it played a formative role for the new identities of new believers. Conversion could be defined as the process of fully taking on a new discourse. The new believers saw life differently. As Victoria read books on prayer, she was encouraged that she would recognize God in future life events, whereas in the past as a new immigrant to the U. S., her life had felt out of control. Vasily viewed God as “real” in all matters of

life, including his career, and Max thought he sensed God's touch. The immigrant life can feel like a lonely life, and for Vasily and Max and the other new believers, they believed they no longer were alone. For Martin, the highly independent reader, he evidenced his assumption that God was with him by no longer having to depend on his own interpretation. For Valerie, without her husband and without her daughter living locally, she wrote in her poetry about God being present. For Phillip, as he read Orthodox philosophers, life had more meaning now than being affirmed as an athlete or enjoying consumer goods.

The feminist sociologist Wittner (1998) has noted how immigrant congregations do the "caring work," materially and emotionally for which women are often known for in families. Both Vasily and Martin mentioned being attracted by the physical resources that were presented to them when they were in times of need. Others, like some of the socialized believers, remarked that what drew them was the "openness" (Vasily, Valerie) unlike traditional Russian Baptist churches, where they feared they would be judged (Victoria, Phillip). Valerie, Max, and Phillip used the language of the congregation feeling like a "family." Valerie explicitly contrasted the sense of family to the awareness of being judged at a more conservative Russian church. If the church carried the nominalization of Baptist (although dropped in the church's name) as Phillip called it, the new members overall recognized a collective identity in which their individual virtual identities did not undergo the same experiences as traditional Baptists. Following R. Jenkins (2004), there was a dialectic occurring that was not just being non-traditional Baptist, but being "Baptist and."

Joining a family echoes my early position that religion can construct or reconstruct ethnicity. Earlier I had written that J.A. Fishman's (1989a) concept of ethnicity was limited to only a partial understanding of ethnicity—content—to the neglect of structure. However, his components are still helpful in the discussion of content. As a review, I have appropriated his terms “paternity,” “patrimony,” and “phenomenology,” and renamed them “heredity” (a sense of permanent connection, such as by blood), “heritage” (the behavior ascribed by the ethnic community), and “meaningfulness” to show the relationship between ethnicity and religion for these new believers.

Particularly when the new believers were baptized, they received more than a felt sense of family: they had received a new ethnic heritage, a non-place identity. During the baptism, Nicolai had called on the God of Abraham and other Israelite patriarchs. He had referred to the Holy Spirit's presence not just with the people of Israel in the Hebrew Scriptures but with Jesus during Jesus' own baptism in the gospel narratives. For him, the believers to be baptized were not only identifying with Jesus' baptism but with the Israelites who traveled, in Nicolai's view, with the Holy Spirit. Nicolai was positioning all the candidates in a textual narrative. Most obviously, Martin demonstrated this in his interview: he felt he had found his Jewish heredity and even identified himself as a Jew who could see clearly without a metaphorical veil. Although not baptized, Valerie, through reading the autobiography of a Christian Jew, understood that God was a Jew, implying she should have a relationship with him because of her Jewish heredity.

The concept of heredity did not extend to those who called themselves Jews only. When Victoria claimed that the Bible taught her about her purpose on earth and her

future, she was seeing herself in it—she was someone the ancient scriptural writers were either discussing or were addressing. Vasily saw Jesus in a continuing drama of rejuvenating people's cells to be more loving—literally Vasily recognized a genetic connection to faith. Through reading scripture, they, like a social group who reads a cleverly written novel about their group in history, “*recognises itself* through its memory of a common past,” creating a non-place identity (Sundholm, 2000). All the new believers were able to theologize experience, retell stories of hardship from their past with a new perspective that God was either present, quietly controlling it for their later good, or intervening at the time.

Vasily's emphasis on love reflects the next characteristic, that of *heritage*. Behaviors become more like the group's expectations. Victoria told me that in her new prayer life: “I think I just have like really lot of love in my heart right now to all my family and my kids and my husband. I can forgive easily, and I can listen more carefully and be much helpful to people.” She was “trying to do like Christ.” Martin talked about being a dependent person now rather than independent, and Max and Phillip both withdrew from the drinking of friends or colleagues.

As I will comment in the following chapter, although the new believers did not bring up the importance of participation as the socialized believers had, the opportunities to participate contributed to meaningfulness in their life—several had been put in leadership roles or if not had audiences on Sunday morning to share their or other testimonies or poetry. It is of note for later discussions on power relationships that three of the men, Vasily, Max, and Phillip were negotiating their authority in this context. As

congregationalist researchers (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000) have observed—a congregation can provide typical masculine roles for men.

A last comment on religion: although the text is important, particularly the scriptural narrative, the new believer's literacy practices and stories have shown that as Warner argued, *religion* is not the text. As I defined religion, it is a community's response to the texts in lived response. Noticeably, each individual's literacy acts were rarely or only partially alone. Even those, Max and Phillip, with the most independent language, had others' voices in their reading over time. Max may have read the entire Hebrew and Christian scriptures in solitude before he crossed the threshold of Slavic Fellowship's building, but he was in regular contact with believers and had occasional conversations with Nicolai. Phillip may have read his books in solitude, but he was eventually befriended by a pastor's son, likely with whom he shared the broadcasted Bible study, not to mention the influence of recently converted parents.

They all acquired religious discourse in their identity and interacted with it in the religious context of church gatherings. As Gee stated (1996), it became a “way of being in the world” or a “form of life.” Although each of them seemed to intersect with religious discourse for the sake of coherence to explain the hard realities of life, each did so in their own individual way with some differing literacy practices. Notably, it was not just the knowledge that was transformative, though many assumed texts as a container of knowledge; something was happening during the time of reading, such as Phillip's metaphors of doors being opened in his heart.

CHAPTER 11

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AS CONSTRUCTED

THROUGH PUBLIC LITERACY EVENTS

Introduction

It is the seventh-year celebration of Slavic Fellowship. Not far into the Sunday service, interpreted by Marie, Ivan states that there is no other church like this in the city with “people from all around.” He goes on: “God gave our church very special gift: Valerie just repented.” Valerie stands next to him, her face trembling. He sits down and looks at her as she speaks. She shares briefly about how God has used Slavic Fellowship to give her a “little push,” and she reads a poem greeting the church on this special day. People praise God and clap. Ivan stands back up and announces that Nicolai has flowers for her. Nicolai hands Valerie a bouquet of flowers and cries as he reads a passage about a “new covenant” and the people of God in the Book of Jeremiah from the Hebrew Scriptures. He says, “We are grateful we can be grafted into you” (an allusion to the writings of the apostle Paul about the relationship of the Jews and Gentile Christians). I see Martin with his hand over his face as Ivan returns to the floor, opening a paperback book and reading a poem that Marie says asks forgiveness from the Jews.

The public acknowledgement of Valerie’s conversion was a great boon for Slavic Fellowship on its “Jubilee,” which Nicolai and Ivan were calling “Jubilee” from a celebration in the Hebrew Scriptures having to do with the number seven. I experienced a momentary disappointment when I realized that my plans were foiled to interview Valerie because until then she had been recognized as “a seeker.” Until that morning, despite all my observations, I had no idea that Valerie was Jewish. After the repentance

of Martin, for Nicolai and Ivan, Slavic Fellowship's project to proselytize Russian Jews seemed confirmed as a church calling. In this small portion of a service filled with guest musicians, testimonies, and a slide show, three literacy events were exhibited as central to a momentous announcement: two poetry readings, one of a poem recently authored, and a scripture reading tying the occasion to prophecy in an ancient text. For the remainder of this chapter, I describe the various literacy events of a Sunday service and the ways in which those events shaped identities.

Sunday services were considered the central meeting of the church as evidenced by the distribution of the written program, which also included announcements and a church schedule (Tusting, 2000b). Selecting a written programs randomly, I list below a typical Sunday service schedule from January 15—here 15 items: pastor's prayer (Nicolai if he was present), congregational singing, announcement (almost always Ivan), offering, congregational singing, testimony by Alex, vocal performance by Alex's sons, scripture reading by Victoria, a poem read by a young woman, vocal performance by Mikhail, children's sermon (no name listed this day), congregational singing, sermon by Ivan, congregational singing, and a closing prayer. Additionally, one or two more people would read or say a poem or give a testimony, and others may read short portions of scripture or a quotation in the written program. The first of each month, three of the preachers and one deacon or the youth leader, Sergei, would conduct a communion service.

For the analysis and discussion of public literacy events, events centering on or around a written text, I have grouped the following into seven types: collective singing centered on lyrics on a project slide, testimonies centered on printed testimonies of others

or centered around scripture if personal, scripture and reading from the program centered on scripture, poetry reading and the creation of aesthetic text centered on a poem or song, the children's sermon centered on a lesson text and around scripture, a sermon centered on and around scripture, and communion and baptism centered on or around scriptural text.

Two other activities were difficult to analyze. One is the giving of the offering, which seems to have no value to literacy practices, except that it of course financed literacy events. I will make one remark here. Bearing the offering was an obvious statement of the hierarchy of gender within the church in that only men carried the offering baskets. The event of public prayer—communication with God--was even more challenging to my analysis. First, it was not as apparent as a literacy event in that, if held discretely from other events, it did not center *on* written text although it may have been *around* text in that texts may have influenced or even been quoted. Public prayer in this context was spontaneous prayer: the person praying did not read or recite a prayer, except for one instance when the congregation cited the Lord's Prayer prayed by Jesus. Further, out of respect to the community and God, the congregation stood, and interpreters did not translate prayer. Nonetheless, I have made sure to bring up prayer when it occurred juxtaposed with other events. Prayer is considered an essential component of faith in many religious communities, and for Ivan, and many other conservative Protestants, it is another route to transformation along with Bible reading. If I neglected including prayer in my analysis, I would be over-magnifying Bible reading, leaving readers to think that it was the only primary route to a Christian identity for the congregation, perhaps engendering unnecessary accusations of idolatry of text.

Analysis of Collective Literacy Events and Constructions of Identity in and with
Collective Literacy Events

Collective Singing

Description of Collective Singing

As I explained in an earlier chapter, Mikhail selected the songs and produced the slides for the collective singing. He told me he kept notes of the songs so that the congregation would not tire of too much repetition, and he selected one or two songs in English with English text because he believed that inserting English into the service was a way of appealing to the youth and someday transitioning the congregation to a time when the entire service would be English. Mikhail led a “praise group” on the steps of the platform at the front of the church of two women—one was Raisa, and the other three were usually the young adult children of Alex, the fourth preacher in addition to Ivan, Nicolai, and Mikhail. Ivan and Raisa shared with me that the formation of a group to lead the music (other than a choir) was an offense to two of the key members of the church in its infantile stage because they thought a praise group identified them with “charismatic, Pentecostal” churches. In addition, traditional Russian Baptist churches valued hymns, not the shorter, simpler, upbeat music of praise songs, which Marie, in her interview, noted were part of the draw of Slavic Fellowship.

Songs are another marker of the western influence but also the Russian appropriation of western influences. Just as I noted to Mikhail that many of the melodies were familiar to me, he reminded me that some of the hymns came from the U. S. In our first interview, in English, Ivan had said, laughing, “When we got here and we went to American churches, first impression was, ‘Why they singing our songs?’” Appropriating

songs as native to one's national ethnicity is not unusual: many ethnically U. S. churchgoers are unaware that the hymns they sing are German or Swedish in origin.

Of interest to this study is that the text of the lyrics were projected on the screen. Not being a Russian speaker, I was unable to read the texts except when they were in English. Further, as with prayer, I stood unable to take notes, with no interpretation, unless a song was sung in both English and Russian. The notes I did take when I sat down were few and quick, as other literacy events began for me to observe. However, I did occasionally jot three types of notes about collective singing—one was the response of the people around me to the song—how fully were they participating. In other notes, I focused on the images that were projected as the background of each slide. In the final type of notes about collective singing, I remarked whenever the song was linked publically to scripture before or after. Mikhail told me that he made almost all the slide shows for the church meetings and that he selected most of his images for free from the photo-sharing web site, webshots.com, which has a large religious section including traditional and contemporary Christian images. Frequently, when slides without lyrics were used during vocal performances, they would have text of scripture in English—such slides are numerous on this web site.

Collective singing is a literacy event in which a lack of participation would be obvious, unlike the listening of a speaker where one could daydream if one wished. Having the lyrics available on a screen did not only provide aid for those who may not know the song but also demanded attention in reading, standing forward, facing front. The congregants in my line of sight normally participated fully even when the lyrics were English, except for those of an elderly age. Once in June, I noticed an older couple, who

regularly attended, he in a suit and she wearing a scarf, not singing either the Russian or English songs. Nearby two older women, while not singing the English songs, were singing the Russian songs.

Likely many more times than I was able to understand, song lyrics were directly taken from scripture. Occasionally, Mikhail or Ivan would point out the scripture before or after the song. When the church was going through a sermon series on prayer in June, the congregation twice sang a song based on the Lord's Prayer, which had parts in it in English, once with a reading of the Lord's Prayer after it in Russian, interpreted by Marie. Two other songs were based on psalms, songs in the ancient Hebrew Scriptures—one on Psalm 1 about meditating on God's law and another on Psalm 42 about longing for God. Once before the congregation sang the song on Psalm 42, Ivan gave the mike to a woman to read the associated passage (tr. Marie).

I reserved my notes on images for markings of ethnicity. Concerning race, the great majority of photographs of people were Caucasians. (The slides used outside of collective singing with portrayals of Jesus were of a white European-looking Jesus.) Concerning a specific ethnicity, a few repeated songs, sometimes with a Jewish-sounding background, had images or symbols associated with Jewish people: a silver goblet with Hebrew text on it or a menorah. One song, which Anna told me was about the tabernacle in the Hebrew Scriptures, had a photograph of the temple mount in Jerusalem. In one English praise song, the word "Shalom," Hebrew for peace, emerged in English in the center of the screen. Regarding membership in the church, several times the congregation sang a few songs in Russian background by photographs of baptismal

services that the church had held. For the seventh-year celebration, the song lyrics were in the foreground of photographs of church events.

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Collective Singing

As with scripture reading, singing through reading lyrics could be transformative to identity in an act of worship—an act of collective identity. Many songs were sung as written prayers directed to God, such as the psalms. Occasionally, Mikhail and Ivan correlated singing music with the scripture reading when one of the scripture echoed those songs. Furthermore, as an artistic form appealing to the emotions, singing provided an experience that felt more transformative, drawing one into a relationship with God—those who resisted would have been obvious. In Ammerman's (1987) study of ethnically U. S. fundamentalists, collective singing prepared the congregation emotionally for the sermon, although at Slavic Fellowship with the varied events I did not recognize such a strong correlation except for the song before the sermon. In a church service Ivan commented once that a frequently sung song, another prayer directed to God about changing one's heart, was the most popular song in the church according to a survey (tr. Marie). The congregation sang this song in both English and Russian.

The collective identity gained by Slavic Fellowship in singing was one that appealed more to younger Russian speakers and those who spoke English, not to traditional Russian Baptists attempting to preserve their heritage through Russian-only hymns. Mikhail's selected images of Jewish symbols and photographs of previous baptisms enhanced the emotion-evoking power of the lyrics, creating a collective memory that began in an imagined past heritage and heredity, initiated by joining this particular church through baptism—a revised or newly constructed ethnicity.

Giving Testimonies

Description of Giving Testimonies

Giving a narrative about God's intervention or presence in one's life was an event appointed to one or two people each service, except for a few times when Ivan would open a time for people spontaneously to stand and share a testimony. For Mother's Day and Father's Day, these open times were focused on the good one's parents brought the volunteer speakers. Unlike assigned testimony givers, these open times were not written in the program. According to Max, an individual in the church, Valentina, a new believer who was married to an ethnically U. S. husband, was in charge of finding these testimonies online and passed on the texts of the testimonies in a folder. Alex once mentioned that he had been reminded by Valentina that he was to give a testimony, and for Mother's Day, Ivan gave the mike to Valentina to lead the open-testimony time.

Phillip, Max, Valentina, and a couple times, Ina, gave these testimonies of others. The majority of the testimonies were about men and were dramatic: the men had been involved in some kind of vice before becoming Christians after having encountered members of a church; the men later became responsible members of both the Christian and local community. For example, the first such testimony that Valentina shared during my research period was of a Russian mafia member, who after becoming a Christian through interaction with a pastor, began to work in a bank (tr. Marie). One testimony about a woman was volunteered by Katerine. She shared about a woman, who had been baptized, but was "backslidden" with issues of materialism and alcoholism before multiple suicide attempts. Katerine had taken the narrative from an article and showed a photograph of the woman on a projected slide. None of these other subjects of

testimonies were ever named as immigrants by interpreters. Valentina, Phillip, and Max would take a Bible with them when they stood in the center aisle, and after sharing the testimony, read a fitting scripture passage afterwards.

Personal testimonies were less dramatic, usually answers to prayer, such as Valentina's friend being able to come to the Easter service after first saying no (tr. Marie). Valentina told the congregation this story and then stated "I'm telling you because a personal testimony is best way to bring people to Christ. In all our lives, we can see hand of God" (tr. Marie). Although not as often, those who shared personal testimonies, especially those who had been listed in the program, would read a short text of scripture afterwards from a Bible. When Phillip returned from full-time military service, he gave two personal testimonies without reading scripture. The third time, he gave someone else's story and read scripture afterwards and was affirmed by Ivan that he would someday be a preacher. The next five times he shared someone else's or his own testimony he briefly read scripture.

In his master-of-ceremonies like role, Ivan could affirm or correct after a testimony. One day, Ina gave a testimony of personal struggle and read something that sounded like a poem afterwards. Ivan took the mike and stated, "When one of us is suffering, it touches all of us," and then both he and Nicolai prayed for her (tr. Marie). After Katerine gave her testimony of the "backslidden" woman and ended with the "faithful"ness of God, Ivan seemed concerned about her conclusion and emphasized that Christians "must stand strong" (tr. Marie).

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Giving Testimonies

The church enculturated testimony-givers to add scripture to the narratives they were sharing. Standing in the center aisle with a Bible in one hand as they gave testimonies gave them authority in what they said whether they read scripture before or after. The assumption that scripture was authority extended to the assumption that scripture gives one authority to have a voice. When read at the end, a verse or two from scripture made an appropriate conclusion, something for the congregation to meditate on while the speaker returned the mike to Ivan. It appeared to replace an articulation of any summary or lesson that they could have formed on their own.

Testimonies reinforced that Christianity was an all-encompassing discourse: when personal testimonies were given, congregants learned that God was acting in their lives whether a flat tire needed fixed or a friend decided to come to church. The speakers were “placing the events in their lives in words or categories that will be recognized by fellow believers” (Ammerman, 1987, p. 108). More dramatic testimonies of others, appealing in their harrowing accounts, gave reason why the world felt like a tumultuous place: criminals, addicts, and those attempting suicide were ultimately searching for God, having found God, they would have calmer lives and be responsible people in the eyes of society. These testimonies also characterized members of churches as heroes in these scenarios, helping to lead those lost from God to Christianity. Believers imagined a positive role in persuading others to become Christians, not the role created by outside categorizations that conservative Protestant churchgoers were the uneducated and unintelligent.

Valentina, Max, and Phillip's selection of external testimonies of only men rather than women could be perceived as their individual bias toward male gender. Their selection is as likely as telling of the hierarchical gender culture of Russian-speaking conservative Protestants. Twice after Max shared an external testimony, Nicolai commented on his connection to the individual. Most testimonies available on the Internet could have been those of male leaders in conservative circles.

Public Scripture Reading

Description of Public Scripture Reading

A regular part of most services was a scripture reading listed in the written program along with the reference to the scriptural section and the name of the reader. With the reference in the written program, Anna and Marie were able to prepare beforehand and read the passage in English for those wearing headsets. I counted about seven readers—a variety of ages from a high school girl to two older women. Except for one man, who I thought was a deacon, the scripture reading seemed to provide an opportunity to participate for new believers, such as Max, Ina, and Victoria. During services for holidays or other special events, the scripture reading sometimes corresponded with a celebration of the day.

At the time in the service, the scripture passage would be projected in Russian on a screen. Ivan would hand the reader the mike, and the individual would read the passage either from a Bible or off the screen. The majority of the passages were from the New Testament, particularly the Epistles from the apostles and were well-known passages about the Christian life: avoiding sin, doing good, and loving other Christians. A few were passages describing Jesus' life from the Gospels or Epistles. Five times, I was able

to observe that the passages were on the “end times” or Jesus’ second coming, a topic that was present in some of the music and the statement of faith in the constitution, but on which I never heard an entire sermon, although Ivan would often make a comment before such a passage to consider the “last days.”

Because of comments I heard once in a while on a new Russian translation of the Bible, I asked both Ivan, Raisa, and Nicolai in my second interview if this translation was the version on the screen. It was for the New Testament. This recent translation was much more understandable than the archaic language of the Russian Bible--which Nicolai called “Victorian Russian”--that most Russian Christians read. This earlier version many generation 1.5 readers, such as Marie and Elena, avoided by reading the Bible in English. Although, as Ivan said, the new version was “easier to understand,” the older people tended to prefer the “classical language” of the older version because, as Raisa added, to them “it doesn’t even sound like the Bible.” Ivan, himself, thought the earlier version reflected perhaps too much Orthodox theology, and yet he appreciated it for its familiarity and more euphemistic language about sensitive subjects, such as sexual morality.

During my research period, several of these passages were repeated a second time, although never the next consecutive Sunday. I counted only 11 times when the passages seemed to directly correspond with a theme from the service, either the sermon or, most obviously a passage about Jesus’ crucifixion. Twice a renowned passage from the Hebrew Scriptures, Isaiah 53, which Christians believe prophesy the crucifixion, was read before communion.

In January 2006, Ivan began making comments, asking the congregation to open their Bible and read along with the passage. Not long after, the reader, Alla, asked the congregation to open their Bibles (tr. Marie). In my notes, I have Ivan making the same request in March. Occasionally, Ivan would give an introduction to the passage to guide people in their reading. For example, in August 2006, he announced a reading on a passage about obedience to parents. He told the congregation that he needed to remind children to obey and parents to discipline: “Bible says he who does not punish child does not love him. Psychologists say otherwise” (tr. Anna).

A more interesting example may be one in February. In a service interpreted by Marie, Ivan stood up and said that the congregation was about to read a passage by the apostle Paul, who was explaining that there were individuals in the church of the time who were “strong” in faith and those who were “weak in faith.” Ivan said, “Those who are strong are aware they live in grace, tend to be the ones who serve in the church. The ones who are weak are on way to God or just got saved and feeding on milk.” He then asked the congregants to identify themselves: “So when you read, listen and figure out who you are. How we should be strong believers to weak ones.” After the passage was read, Nicolai stood up to comment. Both Nicolai or Ivan tended to make a brief comment after the scripture reading, which I rarely had the opportunity to include in my running notes or was not always interpreted. However, Nicolai’s goal on this occasion seemed to be to re-focus readers on another aspect of the passage, which discussed faith in the context of those in the early church who were able to eat meat based on conscience and those who were not. Nicolai read something from scripture and then stated: “Brother Ivan said accurately in church people who are more strong, but over all...of God, faith is

a gift of God. Dear guests, know that faith is not abstract but real if those in faith know that God is over them.” Nicolai explained the food laws of the setting of the passage, and then requested: “In same way, I want you to not judge people coming to Christ. These are not your words you’re saying but this is of God. Be careful how you test others and love them.” Nicolai turned the emphasis of the reading not to identifying oneself as strong or weak, but to not judge others who appear to be weak. He gently countered Ivan’s introduction, which was related to Ivan’s project of having more people involved in the church.

This Bible reading in the written program was never the only scripture reading in the service. The pastor who opened, whether Ivan or Nicolai, almost always read scripture beforehand, usually a psalm and sometimes a passage from the New Testament. When late in the research period, Ivan began asking someone to read the birthday announcements, the individual also read a corresponding Bible verse in the written program. Other literacy events featured short readings of scripture by the presenters of testimonies and sermons. Also, for a time in the summer, beginning with a multiple-sermon theme on prayer, individuals other than church leaders would read a psalm near the beginning of the service without a screen—this handful of people all appeared to be new believers, including Martin.

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Public Scripture Readings

Regular Bible reading during the service was a reminder of both the authority of scripture and indicated authority as demonstrated by the pastors—the identities of Nicolai and Ivan as the leaders of the church. A pastor would go to the pulpit, the only time the

pulpit was usually used before the sermon. The pastor would greet the congregation, read scripture and then pray. Going to the pulpit, a visible marker of power, where the scripture, considered a higher authority, was read and expounded, indicated to any guests who was the leadership in the church, which Ammerman (1987) also noted her study. Nicolai's presence in the pulpit when he was not traveling reminded church members of his leadership although Ivan primarily took the role of master of the ceremonies. That both pastors' authority was to be considered equal was symbolically marked by scripture reading on two special occasions of the church. For the Easter service interpreted by Marie, Nicolai stood at the pulpit with Ivan next time him behind an easily transportable lectern. Nicolai greeted the congregation, and Ivan prayed. Then with a short chorus, slow and traditional sounding from the music team, Nicolai and Ivan took turns reading six portions of I Corinthians 15. Each reading and the chorus had a corresponding projected slide. Similarly, on the church's 7th anniversary, Ivan opened from pulpit and Nicolai read from the floor from the book of Ephesians about the church.

Having the new believers read the set scripture passage gave them a simple way to enter the authority of leading in reading scripture, but without the higher authority of the symbol of the pulpit. The reading promoted the expectation that believers were regular readers of scripture. Like the projected image of lyrics for music, the screen provided a focal point that required more obvious attention—whether congregants followed along in their own Bibles or from the screen, they experienced regular Bible reading even if only on a Sunday.

The content of the passages provided additional instruction on theology and the Christian life that Ivan or Nicolai could give only brief comments to. Despite their

briefness, the comments demonstrated why a church is an interpretive community (A. Fishman, 1988). Nicolai and Ivan were calling attention to where they wanted the congregation to focus, even identify with. These short comments, seemingly trivial in appearance, gave direction on how to read text, and were powerful, as noted by Nicolai when he refocused an interpretation in fear that the congregation might respond with the un-Christian behavior of being judgmental.

Poetry Reading and Creating Aesthetic Text

Description of Poetry Reading and Creating Aesthetic Text

Performing or reading a religious poem is a literacy event in traditional Russian Baptist churches. Churchgoers can request to say or read one, just as they can request giving a testimony. Both the interpreters Marie and Anna graciously summarized a poem after it was read. Besides Valerie and Vasily who wrote their own poetry, participants read poetry authored by others. Most of the readers I observed were women, such as Ina and three younger women in their late teens or early twenties. Two of the individuals, a woman likely in her 60s and a man in his 50s were known by others in the church as traditional believers—the man had recently moved from the Mapleville church. A few times young children recited or read a poem, followed by the unusual applause of the congregation. Vasily went to the pulpit to read his poetry, but the rest would walk up front, take the mike from Ivan, and face the congregation from the floor, holding a book or a sheet of paper, often in a plastic sleeve. Some would read it dramatically.

Unlike reading scripture, the reader would sometimes briefly comment on the poem beforehand. Ina once began a poem by reading a correlating scripture first, and Valentina's daughter began a poem by saying it affected her when she read it (both

interpreted by Marie). During the 7th anniversary of the church, Vasily read a poem and gave a short testimony of his introduction to Slavic Fellowship and his appreciation of the loving atmosphere (tr. Marie). The male traditional believer began his dramatically enacted poem with “Dear brothers and sisters and friends, but some of you may have come and your heart hurts—I want to tell you about finding happiness and joy and peace in Jesus Christ” (tr. Marie).

Reading and writing poetry was affirmed publicly. The church had a poetry group, and one day, Vasily said he was told to work with a line in a poetry reading: “our life will end like a candle” (tr. Marie). In an October service interpreted by Marie, Ivan announced that there were many new poets in this church. Next to him stood an 8- or 9-year-old girl with a white, rather crinkly sheet of typing paper. Ivan commented that she was not a new poet but would read a poem by a new poet. He touched the girl’s shoulder and said, “Bless you as you read this.” Ivan himself quoted Pushkin once in October 2005 and in March 2006 mentioned how much he liked reading Pushkin’s poems in church despite the poet’s tragic life (tr. Anna). He also had a relationship with a friend who wrote poetry, and once after reading a poem, said: “I talk about my friend so often that I hope that one day he visits us from Germany” (tr. Anna).

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Poetry Readings and Creation of Aesthetic Text

As a weekly self-volunteered event like the testimonies, poetry reading promoted a community of care in a public space with specially crafted texts of language of emotion. After the young girl’s reading, Ivan stood back up and spoke about having warm hearts as the poem expressed: “We should pray that our heart should burn for God” (tr. Anna).

Readings of religious poetry engendered a sense of connection—warmed hearts for God but also for others.

Poets, such as Vasily and Valerie, created poems that were personal expressions of their relationship God—and even, as I previously showed with Valerie’s poetry, her writing mediated her relationship with God. Both Vasily and Valerie also expressed that poetry was given to them by God—Valerie felt a poem emerge inside of her. Being touched to write was a theme that I encountered with many of my interviewees. Those in the church assumed that one could be emotionally moved, energized, to write something significant for others, and normally this creative jolt was considered from God. Like Phillip who found himself sometimes moved to write love letters, Ivan talked of a “fire inside” once he recognized his sermon topic, and Mikhail jotted down sermon ideas directed by God while he drove his truck.

A God-driven mystical process of creating was common not only among the poets but among the musicians. Unfortunately, I was not always as confident of a written text and was unsure of labeling vocal and instrumental performances as literacy events. However, they were parallel enough in their process to poetry for me to include them in this discussion. Katherine’s husband Dmitry, the preacher Alex, and a guitarist Donny frequently performed or had family members perform songs they had created—once in a while I thought I recognized the melody—some of their work may have been creation of lyrics.

Song-writing was as affirmed publicly as poetry. When in June 2006, Alex introduced a multi-state concert at the church—part of his promotion was inviting the congregation to hear the song writers “talk about how songs came to be” (tr. Marie).

Collective identity of the church included admiration for the creative process. This process could be collaborative: it was a particularly emotional moment when a guest vocalist in July sang a song composed by Donny with lyrics written by Valerie.

Afterwards, Donny shared his story of not being able to sleep: “So, at 3 a.m., I’m turning from side. The Lord said, ‘Give him songs with accompaniment’—never have given them all before” (tr. Marie).

The role that poetry and songwriting gave was an authoritative one in that the writers had an opportunity to share how they felt God was interacting or communicating with them, or they could give exhortations or encouragement that they wanted to publicly state. At the service after the baptism interpreted by Marie, Donny stated the following before he performed a song:

I want to greet all of you, my sisters and brothers. I remember my baptism about a 23 years ago, feelings and thoughts came. I want to give you this song to my brothers and sisters. Hopefully, you’ll gain thoughts from. Only 10-hours-old song—very fresh.

By singing or reading “thoughts” to be “gain”ed, performers were engaged in a parallel activity to teaching. Nonetheless, these events also reflected the authority of the leadership: during the period of sermon themes on prayer, Valerie and two young women read poems on prayer.

The Children’s Sermon

Description of Children’s Sermon

Before the sermon, a woman gave a children’s sermon. After Ivan handed the mike to her, she would call the young children up to the front row on the right side in

front of the pulpit. There, she would give a brief message to the children and, during the school year, dismiss the children to Sunday School. The women included four Petrov family members: Elena, Katerine, Anna, and Galena, another sister of Ivan's. Also, Victoria and one other woman, who may have been a new believer occasionally taught the sermon. Galena was responsible for appointing the task.

Anna told me in November 2005 that the church had bought three books for preparation of the children's sermon so that it would have some continuity. Because of my seating location, often with Anna, and near Galena and Katerine, I observed two of the three books since the teacher would often review the message earlier in the service. Both books were in English—one contained multiple five-minute sermons for children, and the other was a book of short "object lessons" by a well-known baptistic theologian. About a quarter of the time that I observed children's sermons, the teacher had a lesson book with her as she stood before the children, perhaps tucked under her arm--a few times she or a student read from it in English.

As a result perhaps because of the books, these teachers sometimes told a narrative, about a quarter of the children's sermons. Often this narrative was from the Bible but not always—the end was normally a moral, a model of how to act or to not act. The story of Jonah avoiding going to the sea and later being swallowed by a large fish was one such story: the moral was that children needed to obey their parents and God (tr. Marie). Most of the children's sermons were object lessons, "reconceptualizations of the biblical parable" as Kapitzke (1995) asserted in her study of an Adventist church. For example, shortly before Victoria was deported she hammered a skillet covering an egg to

show the children that according to the Bible they were weak but that Christ protected them and gave them strength (tr. Marie).

In the last object lesson, it can be seen that the goal of the children's sermon was not always a moral—not always external behavior, which was specifically mentioned about half the time: from obeying one's parents, to being nice to marginalized children at school, or to telling the truth. The other half of the time, the focus of the message was something about God—God's identity in relation to the children's identity: that if Christians, children can know that Jesus lives in their hearts and helps them to be moral, that God intervenes and can be trusted to help, and that people have souls.

My analysis of the children's sermon demonstrates that religion is often a response to a community's interpretation of scripture. In my analysis, I could not always separate the objective of the sermons being either one of theology—who God is or what God has done—and focus on external behavior. The behavior was a response to who God is and how God acted in people's lives. For instance, Elena gave an English children's sermon in the autumn, pointing out the color of the fall leaves. The leaves, she said, demonstrated how God had made each child unique and given each talents. Elena then asked what God wanted them to do with these gifts. She challenged them to respond to the community's interpretation of scripture.

Perhaps to encourage a response from the students, about a quarter of the time, the teachers asked questions in which they paused for the children to answer. These were usually questions about the object, the specialness of that day if a holiday, or a definition of something in the story before it was told. The majority of the questions in the beginning of the sermon seemed to be to ensure that the children understood the context

or the object before getting to the moral or comparison. Except for twice, the questions were asked in Russian, but most of the time the children answered in both Russian and in English. One Sunday service interpreted by Marie in March, Katerine opened a message about being a servant to Jesus like John the Baptist. She asked “Do you know what a slave is” in Russian, and a girl answered “a maid” in English. To which she acknowledged, “I don’t know,” in Russian.

Except for Elena and Anna, most of the teachers used only a tad of English if any. Elena, however, after Nicolai’s public expression of concern about the children’s lack of understanding in Russian, used exclusively English for three children’s sermons afterwards before switching to a combination of both English and Russian. Elena and Anna especially made a point to read scripture in English if part of the lesson or give the main point in English. Elena once showed the children a set of keys and then after talking about the keys said, “We need to have a key to heaven” (tr. Marie).

Other than answering questions part of the time, the teacher occasionally selected a child beforehand or asked one or two of the children at the beginning to help with the object lesson or narrative. Katerine once had her son stand on a chair while she dressed him with a white robe, a halo, and placed a Bible in his hand to explain that people could try to be holy by looking holy but only God could give them a “clean heart” (tr. Marie). During another sermon, Galena had four boys run down the aisle and back up as an introduction to the importance of resting according to Sabbath law in the Hebrew Scriptures (tr. Marie).

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Children's Sermons

The children's sermon gave the young children a regular opportunity to feel part of the entire congregation, whereas other participatory events coordinated by adults were rarer, such as children singing or reciting poetry or verses. In my interview with Katherine, she indicated that she thought the children's sermon made them feel special, as Kapitzke (1995) also commented. In addition, similar to Kapitzke's research site, the goal was for the children to gain the knowledge and assumptions expected, including the ones specifically addressed to morality. Katherine's own children always remembered the content of the children's sermon: "When they got home, I usually ask them. They can tell me right away what they hear." Katherine's view that knowledge is given was common to the children's sermon along with thought that the context of the shared knowledge was accessible and comfortable, often partially in English and involving participation. The children were never shamed for their use of English.

The authority of scripture within the children's sermon was of course part of the enculturation for children and the listening adults. A few narratives were biblical narratives, but at the end of the presentation, about one third of the messages, the teacher--or twice a selected child--read scripture to confirm or conclude what had been said, similar to the testimonies. In one of Elena's all-English sermons in November 2005, she pulled objects out of a backpack, naming them as she removed them: a Bible, an empty soda bottle, an empty chip bag, and another "good book." She explained that if she put in garbage, such as the soda bottle and chip bag, garbage is what she would take out. The bag was representative of life, and out of a good life she would take good things. She

asked, “How do you fill up life with good things?” In English, one child answered, “We read the Bible,” and another said, “We pray.” Elena agreed and then suggested reading the Bible instead of watching television: “If we read Bible enough, we’ll know how to be filled with good things” rather than with what television would fill the children. She then read a passage: “a good person has good things saved up in his heart” so he brings out good things in the heart. “If we read Bible we will be filled with good things...correct?” In this example, reading the Bible emerged as an important activity, as it would five other times in my observation, twice in reference to parents’ reading it, one more time volunteered by a child, and in another service stressed again as better behavior than television entertainment. This example also prominently showed direct statements to children that Bible reading is identity transforming.

The teachers did not enculturate the students to maintain their Russian or Slavic ethnicity, although as I have presented earlier, perhaps their Russian-conservative Christian identity, which had historically been shaped by ethnically U. S. texts as these sermons were shaped. Russian culture is rich in its folklore and proverbs, and despite mention of these every so often in a sermon by a preacher, they did not occur during the children’s sermon. Christianity was more pressing.

The children’s sermons also maintained the traditional gender roles. When strength or endurance was needed for the object lesson, the teacher called on boys although the girls were roughly equal in number—once to crush a box (taught by Maya), once for holding an object out until the child’s arm felt tired (taught by Galena), and once for a running exercise (taught by Galena). For the first two, a “strong boy” was specifically called upon (tr. Marie). For the adult participants, the women giving the

sermon, the children's sermon was a unique opportunity—the only one a Sunday morning where women explicitly taught (rather than implicitly through poetry or another event).

Although the children were the target audience and foregrounded even physically, the adults were present if backgrounded. Adults participated in their affirming laughter. Once I heard the teenagers behind me responding to the question that the teacher had just asked. Five times, the woman teaching appeared to address the adults. On one occasion, it was Galena in January to announce that her Sunday school class would begin collecting coins to support a child in Africa (tr. Marie). She explained that the children had recently learned the story of the New Testament woman who gave the only two coins she had to the temple offering (tr. Marie). A couple of these comments addressed to the adults were short testimonies added at the end, unrelated to the children's message: Anna had heard a radio program about God being more powerful than shamans' power and Katherine spoke about God's protection when she had a flat tire (both translated by Marie).

Twice, a teacher extended her lesson to the adults. In October 2005, Galena shared a narrative of a little fish who would not listen to the other fish and eventually was caught by a fisherman (tr. Marie). The fish's inability to fight because of the pain of the hook was "what the devil does to us." Without appearing to address directly the background audience, she commented that parents may experience this too—they may be tired and watch a movie instead of reading their Bible. This comment may have undermined parents' authority, so typically reinforced during these children's sermons, by putting the children in a position of accountability to their parents for personal scripture reading. A second time in June 2006, Galena taught a lesson and drew the

adults into it, appearing to be testifying but also pressuring. After telling a story of a trusting rabbit, Galena read another narrative about Abraham being led and then directly addressed the adults: “Everyone, I want to tell you what happened once” (tr. Marie). One day she was reading a passage and was struck with concern that God would lead her to a place she did not want to go. “Too bad,” she stated that she did not want to trust God. In a manner acceptable to the congregation, Galena was teaching the adults.

The Sermon

Description of Sermons

At the end of the service, one of the four appointed preachers—Ivan, Nicolai, Mikhail, or Alex—would give a sermon from 20 minutes to 45 minutes long. During my fieldwork, each spoke roughly the same number of times except for Nicolai who spoke a bit more. However, on two occasions, he had been enthusiastically sharing about his latest travels, and it appeared to me that because of time limitations, he taught all or the rest of his sermon on the following Sunday. On occasion a Russian-speaking guest, usually a pastor of a Russian church, whether in the U. S. or overseas, gave a sermon. Sermons were always “topical,” rather than “expository,” meaning that the preacher focused on a topic with references to multiple scripture passages rather than pointing out a theme in one scripture passage as is common with the preaching by one primary pastor in many conservative ethnically U. S. churches. Unless a series was ongoing, the preacher chose the topic, relating some topics to major holidays, whether U. S. or Russian. Topics varied from explanations of Christian rituals and behavior such as baptism and prayer to a study of the Holy Spirit to explanations of suffering.

During my 12 months of research, I heard through interpretation sermons on two different series. The first, beginning in November, was gifts of the Spirit. “Gifts of the spirit” are believed by Christians to be God-given abilities for people’s roles in a church body, such as wisdom, discernment, teaching, etc. The series began after several in the congregation were energized by a speaker from Germany, Dietrich, who gave a conference for the youth. I heard three messages by three of the designated preachers on this topic and suspected I would have heard all four if I had not missed a Sunday service. Beginning in mid-May, I heard four messages on a series on prayer from each of the four preachers.

Sermons were literacy events in multiple ways. The preachers prepared with extensive notes or manuscripts, giving copies of these or a list of the references to scripture to the interpreter at the beginning of the service. They read multiple passages from scripture. The audience was urged to participate not just through listening but could also read along in their own Bibles or take notes. In early December, not long after the new written programs were developed with a space for notes, Mikhail asked that people close their Bible and listen while taking notes (tr. Marie). Alex said in his message for Orthodox Christmas, on January 8, 2006, “I hope some of you are writing these passages down. We have a special place for notes, so I hope you’re not bringing just a Bible but a pen as well” (tr. Marie). Nicolai, when explaining a word, requested: “I ask if you have your Bible, to mark this word *common* in your Bible” (tr. Marie). All four preachers frequently referred to additional books as they preached—sometimes different Bible translations—including English ones, a dictionary, or something else they had read.

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Sermons

The literacy practices that appeared within the content of the sermons are ones that I have covered previously for the individuals Nicolai, Ivan, and Mikhail with support from their sermons. In the following I demonstrate that these assumptions were promulgated by other preachers, especially Alex but also Sergei, who taught on a youth Sunday, and guest speakers. All the preachers assumed that the Bible was authoritative, that it gave knowledge and instruction on reality and life. As a Russian-speaking pastor from another immigrant church in a different Midwestern city stated in September 2005: “God expects [believers] to not only know scripture and quote it, but to live it in daily life” (tr. Marie). Authority of the scripture for these speakers included that the narratives of scripture were historically accurate. The representative of a Russian-Ukrainian church union mentioned that he attended a conference on archaeology and the Bible, verifying that the Hebrew Scriptures were true (tr. Anna). Sergei, on the youth Sunday, presupposed that everyone would agree that the New Testament writers gave accurate accounts of Jesus. He encouraged his listeners in English: “I’m pretty sure that no one can call themselves eye witnesses today, but can we call ourselves faith witnesses. You can be a loving, talking Bible.”

Within the sermons, believers not only represented scripture but were members of its ongoing narrative. In Alex’s sermon on the Holy Spirit, he explained that believers were still in a period of God’s presence being manifested mostly by the Holy Spirit since the time period of the Books of Acts, the fifth book of the New Testament (tr. Marie). August 13, 2006, during the midst of an Israel and Lebanon 34-day war, Ivan introduced a speaker, warning that there was going to be some talk on a “little politics” (tr. Marie).

He said that Christians understood both sides of the conflict. The man who spoke was a pastor of a Russian-immigrant church in Israel, composed of people who had become Christians after they had migrated. The speaker urged the congregation that they could have special roles in the narrative of Jews becoming Christians based on his interpretation of prophecy in the Hebrew Scriptures. Referring to the Book of Romans in the New Testament, he said that Jews had not been rejected by the God of Christians but that “God wants to pour out blessing for world through Jewish people.”

In the sermons, the preachers taught that reading scripture was a route of identity transformation in the ongoing narrative of the Christian Bible. Alex pointed out in his sermon on the Holy Spirit that this reading was transforming because of the Holy Spirit. He asked, as interpreted by Marie, “Remember during Soviet Union, people who called themselves atheists when they read the Word came to Christ because it touched them?” Being touched was a result of the Holy Spirit affecting their reading of sacred text. Identity transformation as a believer did not only come through the reading of scripture affected by the Holy Spirit; it also was produced by performative speech acts—language directed to God. Some preachers made an interval for these performative speech acts at the end of their sermons before a final song. Alex sometimes had a time of open prayer after his sermon, and I noted that an older, traditional-looking woman in his family would take this opportunity to pray. He also gave a sermon in August 20, 2006, on the futility of life without God about a month after there was talk that a couple members were behaving in ways thought immoral. At the end of his message, interpreted by Marie, he announced that people would have an opportunity to state a prayer of repentance during a song performed by his two young adult sons. No one prayed or went forward. Ivan

moved to the platform, saying he believed that somebody was being called to repent—there are unrepentant people here. A young man went forward, sobbing, and then Ivan and another young man got on their knees and both prayed, holding the microphone. People were crying. While scripture reading was central, it was not the only behavior that led to a new identity.

Regarding individual identity, preachers and congregants participated in different roles. The preacher clearly as the public interpreter of scripture had a role of authority in this lecture-like situation in which the attendees acted as students, glancing at their textbook, the Bible, and sometimes taking notes, as I witnessed the new believer Alisa doing in Russian and English when she sat before me. Except for once a month when communion followed, the sermon was the culmination of the service, frequently the longest event of the service. At the same time, sermons were often shortened due to time, or if Nicolai gave a sermon became partially a report of extra-biblical matters. On the occasion of the seventh anniversary of the church, Nicolai said there was no time for a sermon (particularly, I inferred when a picnic was about to follow) and instead appropriated scripture from the Book of Revelation: “These are I know your deeds and hard works. Let’s stand here and pray that our last works are greater than our firsts” (tr. Marie).

The power of the preacher was unlike conservative ethnically U. S. churches, such as the fundamentalist church reported in Ammerman’s (1987) *Bible Believers*, which boasted one primary preaching pastor, engendering extraordinary control by one public voice. Inversely, providing time for only one sermon, rather than three, except for a few short messages in English by Sergei, was unlike traditional Russian Protestant

churches according to Ivan in his interviews. However, Mikhail in his interview stated that he thought that Slavic Fellowship was more Russian than Mapleville because only a few talented preachers taught: “This is what they have in Russia. And this is what we doing over here. We still Russian church (laughter).” In contrast, he thought Mapleville had “30 preachers” (laughter), and he suspected that only five or six of them were good preachers. Mapleville did this “just because they preach somewhere while they lived in Russia. And when they came here another brother said to them, ‘Are you preaching?’ ‘Yes. I did.’ ‘So, go ahead and preach in our church.’” It is also interesting to note that the preachers were associated with differing languages if not ethnicities—Alex had a German-Russian background, telling the congregation that his mother taught him the Lord’s Prayer in Russian and German, and Nicolai would often reference his Ukrainian upbringing and the Ukrainian language.

Although the voices were distributed, the preachers’ ability to control cannot be denied. The preachers aimed the sermons to have significant impact in regards to identity—to shape the collective identity. Some sermons countered the larger culture, such as when Ivan taught that fulfillment came through fellowship with God in contrast to “our civilization”’s noisiness, busyness, and consumerism, or a more specific sermon topic by Mikhail, when he questioned the validity of historical assumptions in the book and current movie *The Da Vinci Code* (both sermons were interpreted by Marie). The mention of politics occasionally occurred as in the case of Israel, or Nicolai’s comments on his concern about an education bill in California about multiple genders (tr. Marie). In the same sermon on Mother’s Day, Nicolai supported traditional views of motherhood—as Ivan would support traditional views of a father being the leader of his household in

the Father's Day sermon—but also advised the attendees not to “fall into same trap that was taught in school in former land that we should not express feelings.”

Ivan especially provided ways for congregants to negotiate their affective states, drawing them emotionally into the community of care. Ivan's sermon topics frequently were related to the congregants' relationship with Jesus and identifying with his suffering. Ivan often became teary as he spoke. An example was a sermon, interpreted by Anna that he gave in September 2005 on “lowliness.” It was acceptable, he told his audience, to be lowly and meek and to show emotions because Jesus was lowly and meek and showed emotions too. “Humbleness” would give God “great strength.”

Communion and Baptism

Description of Communion and Baptism

Two Christian identifiers that separated these congregants from other Christian groups were particular views of the rites of baptism and communion, of which Ivan had a sermon on each. As rites, communion and baptism involved body and action rather than just words and speech. As common to Baptist churches, communion was not a weekly occurrence. In Slavic Fellowship it was performed the first Sunday of every month. At the end of a service, after the sermon, sometimes with slides from Mel Gibson's *The Passion of Christ* and its eerie background music, four men would go up to the platform where the communion table had been laid with a cloth and serving plates of bread and four goblets of red wine. Ivan or Nicolai usually led quoting scripture. Five out of the 12 communion services I observed, one of them spent a short time reading and/or explaining a passage of scripture before going into the rest of the service, in which scripture appeared to be quoted. (Anna and Marie, particularly, interpreted some of the

communion service, but out of respect I did not take notes on communion until after the entire church service ended.) Another man prayed over the pieces of bread. The four men—typically Ivan, Nicolai, Alex, and Sergei, or a deacon—came down the platform with the bread. All the congregants who had been baptized, about half or more stood up and took a piece of the bread and ate it as it was passed partially down the row by the preacher, deacon, or pastor. People remained standing for a moment or two and then sit down. The process happened again with the wine. By the end, all four men had had an opportunity to pray. The congregation normally sang a song led by the vocalist team afterwards.

Baptism was a once-a-year occurrence and the candidates were prepared for several months in a class that Ivan taught. In late summer, as described in the beginning of chapter 10, the church gathered at 8 a.m. at a nearby lake. After collective singing and comments by Nicolai and Ivan on scripture, the two men waded into the lake in blue robes and alternated baptizing each candidate who approached guided by Alex. Each pastor asked, as interpreted by Marie, the candidate set questions about accepting Jesus Christ and being purged of sins, and the candidate responded, “I believe” and “I obey” before being submerged. Afterwards, the candidates knelt on the beach, and Ivan and Nicolai alternated praying for each. At the following service, they received their first communion.

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with Communion and Baptism

Although a bodily rite, communion was circumscribed by reading, quoting, and representing sacred scripture. Perhaps in no other literacy events was the importance of

collective identity as apparent. Three of the five times that Ivan or Nicolai first read and explained a scripture passage from the Bible, the passage was a portion of Hebrew Scriptures that they considered Messianic--prophetic about Jesus—in particular his suffering on the cross. One was a psalm by King David and another, used twice, was part of the Book of Isaiah, chapter 53.

On the first Sunday of September 2005, Martin had not made his confession of Christian faith yet. On that Sunday, Nicolai read from Isaiah 53, and interpreted by Marie, explained that some believed the text to be a tale, giving the example that it is not read in synagogues. His face was turned toward where Martin was sitting. The suffering portrayed in the text, he continued, was what Jesus experienced. He then commented on Martin's son, who was recovering from cancer, but I did not discern all of the interpretation. Nicolai ended by asking everyone to hold up his or her Bible and appeared disappointed at the number he saw. He followed by reading from Jesus' institution of "the Lord's Supper," the communion service, in a Gospel and asked everyone to bring their Bibles.

In this brief description, it is obvious that Nicolai was emphasizing the Christian interpretation of Hebrew Scriptures predicting the Christian New Testament scriptures, identifying a difference with Jewish beliefs. Other than targeting Martin for this message, he also made use of the opportunity to persuade people to not only bring their Bibles but read along. This communion presented the continuing narrative of scripture as well as the responsibility of scripture reading. Before the baptism, Nicolai did something similar—he read and commented from the Hebrew Scriptures on the presence of the Holy

Spirit for God's people and then read and commented from Jesus' baptism in the New Testament (tr. Marie).

The narrative of Jesus, interpreted from the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament was re-enacted in part in both baptism and communion, sometimes called the "Last Supper" that Jesus had with his disciples. Both were a public way to identify oneself with Jesus and under his authority as a member of those who called themselves Christians. It was clear who was not a baptized believer by those who remained sitting in their seats during communion. In fact, I often heard through Marie's translation the male leader announcing that to receive communion one must be baptized and in good standing before God. Re-enacting parts of Jesus' narrative attested to the congregation's belief in scripture's sacredness.

In August 2006, Ivan blended his sermon into the communion service, teaching that believers celebrated communion as a reminder of their covenant or contract that they had with God, referring back to covenants in the Hebrew Scriptures, one including actual blood instead of wine (tr. Marie). The believer's part of the covenant, he stated, included morality because believers must forgive as Christ forgave. Although he did not bring this up at the time, immoral actions could result in the leadership of the church temporarily excommunicating a member—not allowing a member who was not behaving like a Christian to receive communion until having shown a change in behavior.

Clearly, the leadership of the church had much authority if they could choose to exclude members from participating in communion. Excluding someone from communion is a way to maintain the church's collective identity—one that does not allow behaviors, such as drinking or pre- or extra-marital sex. In my second interview with

Ivan and Raisa, they both pressed that Slavic Fellowship was different from traditional Russian Baptist churches in discipline. Raisa said that dissident members were “warn”ed to “abstain from taking” communion for three or six months or a year. Ivan assured me that such discipline was rare and that, unlike traditional Russian Baptist churches, “Our church more merciful to people who commit a sin, try to help him get out.” Ivan also mentioned that he had urged a young person not to drink on multiple occasions before public discipline was carried out. Again the church’s identity is affirmed as dialectical in affirmation of and resistance of its background’s identity.

The importance of baptism to church membership also had historical significance. What historically gave “Baptists” their name was the interpretation of scripture that rather than being baptized as a baby, adults must wait for baptism until they are at an age to confess their faith with understanding. Ivan’s explanation of baptism as a “seal” or “guarantee” in his sermon on baptism (tr. Marie) corresponded to its symbolic power as a sign. It was not only a sign to the baptized individual or those within the congregation, but historically it was a sign to the outside--first to the Russian Orthodox Church and then to the Bolshevik and Soviet governments that their ideology had been resisted. While not as controversial in the U. S. context, baptism may have caused discomfort for those in the Russian-speaking community where “Baptists” were seen as highly restrictive, as the new believers I interviewed remarked. For new believers, becoming baptized demonstrated their commitment to faith and to Slavic Fellowship: they were publically agreeing to its authority and letting go of actions such as drinking (Kapitzke [1995] has pointed out that, discursively, participants could be embracing a different

sense of freedom based on their interpretation of scripture). They could lose friends. They considered their own identities new, as did questioning acquaintances.

Discussion

Not surprisingly the literacy practices reflected in a Sunday service's events were the same ones shared by many of the individual believers: authority of scripture, the belief that personal reading of scripture is identity-changing when mediated by the Holy Spirit, and an interpretation of scriptures that insert the believers in an ongoing narrative. That the majority of events are text-bound is obvious. An underlying assumption to these is that everyone can read or, if a child, will be able to read. One wonders as Ong (1967) did if the Protestant insistence on the responsibility of personal Bible reading arises from "an unarticulated feeling that without reading one does not have quite the proper feel for words or for God's word itself" (p. 280). Nonetheless, Slavic Fellowship allowed more mystery and less isolation than Ong may have conjectured: the congregation had high value for the creative process of aesthetic text, sometimes a collaborative process.

Literacy events enculturated believers into these practices and also a new collective non-place identity. Having a typical order each Sunday provided a liturgical ritual that Flanagan (2001), a sociologist of religion, has asserted creates a collective memory and is vital to collective identity. Liturgical ritual was also provided by the annual baptismal ceremony, which I outlined at the beginning of chapter 10. This collective memory was not only of one church, but of the scriptural people of God through sermons and the symbols cast onto the slide screen as well as the physical ones of bread and wine and water, with some regard for Russian ethnicity and yet not

primarily. In their own roles in creating the church's collective ministry, participants found meaningfulness in its non-place identity.

The events inducted the congregation into two primary metaphors of church life, that of the family, as I discussed as a kind of ethnic heritage with its own behavioral codes, but also that of a school. Both had clear power structures. In the first, testimonies, poetry reading, and music facilitated an opening of the heart during the service. Those who participated were affirmed by being selected or agreed to for their part by Ivan. Until my background research on Russian Baptist churches, I had never encountered a church service in which the events from volunteers were so numerous that a pastor played a master-of-ceremonies--like role. Varying populations could participate in many of the literacy events that allowed for their voice as an individual's in contrast to collective singing. A patriarchal hierarchy did exist: Ivan and sometimes Nicolai played an affirming father-like role—women did not publically emcee the events or teach other than children, whom in the children's sermon they taught with pre-selected materials. This last example of teaching is also typical of the school metaphor of a church. Those in the church were expected to be students, and not only students of the word, but students of those who preached, clearly holding the authority in the pulpit with scripture at their fingertips. They were to follow along in the scripture reading, find scriptural references in sermons, and mark their Bible like textbooks. However, although preachers and pastors appeared to be the only ones with the power to create knowledge, songwriters and poets also had the opportunity.

But those who gave sermons, who publically taught outside the more subtle venue of producing aesthetic text, were matured believers—even Victoria had been a Christian

for four years before she began teaching the children's sermon. Interestingly, with the option of a personal testimony, any believer could put forth his or her voice to share something not noticeably text-bound. However, to do so, required individuals to see events in their lives within the ongoing scriptural narrative in which a God intervened and was present. They had to adopt a new discourse about their reality. Would attending a public service once a week and individual reading of scripture and Christian text at home produce such an acquiring of a discourse? In the next chapter, I explore the religious literacy events of the church outside of the Sunday service.

CHAPTER 12

COLLECTIVE IDENTITY AS PARTIALLY CONSTRUCTED THROUGH TEXTS AND PRIVATE LITERACY EVENTS

Introduction

“according to his purpose”: What is that purpose? It is that we *“become like his Son.”*

Everything God allows to happen in your life is permitted for that purpose! (Warren, 2002, p. 196, italics originally bolded by Warren)

God deeply desires that we know him intimately. In fact, he planned the universe and orchestrated history, including the details of our lives, so that we could become his friends. (Warren, 2002, pp. 86-87)

God’s purposes for his church are identical to his five purposes for you. Worship helps you *focus on God*; fellowship helps you *face life’s problems*; discipleship helps *fortify your faith*; ministry helps *find your talents*; evangelism helps *fulfill your mission*. There is nothing else on earth like the church! (Warren, 2002, p.136; italics Warren’s)

The quotations above were originally in Russian in the written Sunday service program for February 26, 2006; April 2, 2006; and December 4, 2005, respectively. My mostly random selection of 10 programs from 10 different months resulted in four quotations from Warren’s book, the fourth one mentioned in chapter 8--Ivan’s literacy practices when he compares scripture to food. When Raisa translated the programs for me, she made copies from the *The Purpose-Driven Life* published in English, bracketing the quotations. As a key book in the formation of the church, the one that most home groups read, this text “recontextualized” (Tusting, 2000b) the identities of these readers—nothing in their lives had been wasted. For immigrants, “the mysteries of individual

existence as well as the confusing agonies of anomie” had a “religious explanation” (T. L. Smith, 1978). According to Warren’s final quotation above, their lives would continue to have more meaning as members of a church than they ever had before.

Because of the intertextuality of these quotations, one did not have to be an official member of the church to be exposed directly to *The Purpose-Driven Life*, rather one could attend on a Sunday not only to see them in writing but sometimes to hear them read aloud. Before I discuss Warren’s text and its embeddedness in the church, I will describe first several of the textual products of Slavic Fellowship, many of which were distributed during the public literacy events. First, though, I give a note on method and the study of texts.

It would be simple with textual analysis to overemphasize the importance of texts in a community, and it is easy to assume so when one comes from a conservative Christian background, where one was persuaded on a regular basis that important notions were chiefly text-driven as if it (scripture) could be neutrally interpreted and applied. A benefit of the New Literacy Studies or linguistic ethnography is that text is assumed to have a partial role rather than an all-encompassing one in literacy practices. Also, text is combined with other “semiotic systems” (Barton & Hamilton, 1998, p. 9). It would be a mistake to state that written language is representative of an identity—rather it is a part of a construction of identity. In particular, text created by the congregation is a “project,” or the “enactive work” to create a social world (Gee, 2000). Whether created in-house or not, texts have different and multiple roles: as Tusting (2000b) pointed out, written texts in the parish community of her study “recontextualized” identities for a children’s class, “legitimized” leaders’ views in an adult class, and “synchronized” the parish identity

across space and time in the parish's bulletin. Although a text may be referred to in a community, this does not mean that it is being read except perhaps by the leadership; however, its lack of being read does not prevent its role of mediation in a literacy event, even if only to legitimize the leadership's interpretation. For my discussion in this chapter, I relied on textual analysis, interviewees' perceptions about the texts, and observations of public literacy events, where texts were referred to, but not observations of the private literacy events that centered around some of these texts. With this limitation, this chapter may bring up as many potential questions as it confirms conclusions. Nonetheless, I saw the role of textual analysis as triangulizing the other methods of interviews and observation.

This chapter is broken up into two sections. Part one is church literacy products, textual resources, and distribution, covering such items as the printed programs, the constitution, and the church library. Because the private literacy events of members' meetings and new members' classes came up in a discussion of the constitution with Raisa and Ivan, I touch on those events in the first section. In the second section, I discuss my findings from interviews and observations during public services about other private literacy events—children's Sunday school, the youth group meeting, and home groups. I reserve my analysis of texts used in home groups for this later section. Following each literacy product or event, I discuss how the literacy practices shape collective identity.

Church Literacy Products and Textual Resources

Introduction

Literacy products of the church—the church constitution, written program, the Bible reading plan, and the website—are also projects (Gee, 2000)—projections, additional constructions of identity. In my second interviews with Ivan and Raisa and with Nicolai, I asked specifically about many of the products—their importance or their purpose and who was in charge of their production. A product I did not ask about was the Bible reading plan, which was produced in that it was printed by the church but not designed by the church. When able, I discuss not only the textual constructions of collective identity *in* the product but the textual constructions of collective identity *with* the project. Regarding the library and book tables, I discuss only the construction of collective identity *with* these textual resource centers.

Church Constitution

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Constitution

In our second interview, partially interpreted by Raisa and partially in English, Ivan told me that a church constitution is an expectation of churches in the U. S.: “It’s the law.” He and Raisa called the process “register”ing. They did not have a church constitution in the former Soviet Union. Ivan noted that the U. S. government required an explanation of how property would be dealt with if the church were to dissolve.

Church constitutions are also common in the U. S. because an article of incorporation is required by the Internal Revenue Service (2008) for a church to have a tax-exempt status. Being approved for this charitable status includes having a mission statement and an explanation of governance—multiple individuals are required for

incorporation for reasons of “transparency and accountability.” With a charitable status, donations to a church are considered tax-deductible. The process of gaining tax-exempt status may be eased if a church has a parent church, perhaps a reason why Slavic Fellowship is a member of a Mennonite denomination. By-laws are not required by the IRS but considered a good idea and may be examined for evidence that an organization can call itself a church. Other evidence of being a church includes a statement of belief and “regular services.” Although the IRS has used the term “church,” the term includes mosques and synagogues. State law may require additional evidence for tax-exempt status.

I describe the constitution tentatively since I realized later that the English copy I was given had significant differences from the Russian. In 2005, Raisa gave me an English copy of the constitution, telling me it was an old version, which she said had minor revisions. The English version was created for the government. In an interview I asked about a sentence in the constitution that said the section on the statement of faith was not amenable. Ivan was surprised: the Russian version had no such line. He liked the idea though, and he said the statement of faith was something that had never been changed. Likewise, as I discussed church governance with them, Ivan explained that the church was not congregational in style, typical of Baptist churches in which members voted for any major decisions. My copy of the constitution called the church meeting the authority of the church, but according to Ivan, the authority was a council including him. (However, Ivan told me that the council conveyed major decisions and disciplined members in the church meetings, perhaps the rationale for the meeting being called the authority.) The differences in the English version may be because it was a draft modeled

from the constitution of another church or of a denomination. Models of church constitutions quite similar in format are freely available on the Internet. Raisa had told me that the statement of faith was likely borrowed from a specific U. S. Baptist denomination when they first tried to start a church.

The constitution, nevertheless, was developed for Slavic Fellowship, including its name and other identifiers that corresponded with the collective identity of the church. The document is divided in 13 sections—including sections on the objectives of the church, statement of faith, admission and responsibility of membership, formation of council, closing of the church, and responsibilities and expectations of specific roles, such as pastors and a secretary.

Partial Constructions of Collective Identity in and with the Constitution

The text of the constitution is a partial written construction of the collective identity of the church. Given that likely this specific text was developed from other sample constitutions and that likely it was the early draft that was submitted to the local and federal governments, I will treat it accordingly, analyzing it in a selective rather than comprehensive fashion. Much of the text's focus is the government of the church: on this I will make few comments since these "by-laws" appear to have been revised the most, but I will later review Ivan and Raisa's conversation about governance.

As Raisa pointed out, what is most certainly similar about my version of the constitution to the Russian version that Ivan held during our interview is its statement of faith. A statement of faith in a U. S. conservative Protestant church is a document to verify that the church members acknowledge the reliability and sometimes inerrancy of scripture, the concept of the trinity, the life, work, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and so

on. In other words, it is a “creed,” a word that many Protestant sects avoid in their emphasis on “scripture alone” as authority. As I have argued previously, becoming a Christian is joining a narrative continued from scripture. In the statement of faith in my draft of Slavic Fellowship’s constitution, this is the second point: “We believe in the unchangeable Scripture, both Old and New Testament, inspired by God and inerrant in its original form giving us supreme and final authority in all walks of Christian life, faith and conduct.” Not only is it implied that the identity of being a Christian is a comprehensive way of life, the statement is an expression of an identity that appropriates the Hebrew Scriptures (“Old Testament”). The entire statement provides a future finished “Kingdom on earth” with Jesus, and a current purpose, the “fulfillment of the Great Commission”—to persuade others to be conservative believers as well.

My additional few comments are on excerpts of the text that illustrate what I suspect were Slavic Fellowship’s initial attempts to construct their identity as Baptist but different from that of most Russian Baptists. This selected language from the constitution shows the uniqueness of the text developer’s imagined religious interpretive community. It is a community that is assumed to be Baptist in that other than transferring membership, membership “is realized” also “through the acceptance of Jesus Christ and the ordinance of water baptism.” It is a community that is assumed to be ethnically different in that “dual membership is permitted: in our Church and in an American church that has similar teaching.” The primary ethnicity is considered Slavic in that Slavic Fellowship’s other affiliation besides the Mennonite denomination is a Russian-Ukrainian Christian organization. It is unlike other Russian-Baptist churches in that the

verse on the front of the document highlights “liberty,” and education for children is stated to be in both Russian and English.

Ivan stated that the purpose of the constitution was not only for the federal and state governments. Nicolai saw it as a document informing members of the behaviors expected of them in this community: “And like any other church in the U. S., we would have our constitution and laws of the church by which you are supposed to abide and stuff.” He also provided a purpose for those who visited the church: “And to let other people know, those who would come to church, what we believe and what constitutes our church.” Ivan reviewed the constitution with the membership class—“not the Russian way”—and referred to it in membership meetings when changes were reviewed. The document named who could be included and who could be excluded. Those excluded in the version I had were people who exhibited behavior of “alcoholism, drugs, homosexual activities, etc.” Ivan appreciated that the constitution stated that homosexuals were excluded. He thought this would never be a concern for membership until he heard of a Russian-speaking church in California that did not have a constitution: “That became a problem. But we got it, this point. This way, kind of, we cover ourselves.”

The notion of protection afforded by the constitution emerged as part of our conversation—the church also needed protection from traditional Baptist believers who wished to join and would potentially cause the divisions that Russian Baptists in the U. S. were, according to Raisa and Ivan, notorious for. When the topic of the constitution came up in the first interview, Raisa said, “Again, we trying to protect—if they’re long-time Christians and trying to make traditions—we want them to not argue about it.” Those transferring membership would know early on in the membership process that this

church had a different type of government, one which would not allow them the same amount of voice and voting power in membership meetings. The government was council-led, rather than a membership vote in meetings. Raisa and Ivan told me that, in the year of our interview, the constitution was amended to include a one-year waiting period for membership of people transferring from other churches.

The Written Program

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Written Program

Every Sunday morning service but one when the printer was out of order, a young man or boy handed me a written program as I walked into the church building. This piece of copy paper—occasionally a decorated page printed by a religious publishing company for a holiday—was folded in half as a booklet. Each side had text in Russian. It served both as a written agenda of the activities within the Sunday service and as a church newsletter with announcements, contact numbers, and weekly activities outside the Sunday service. I selected 10, one from each month consecutively from September through June for Raisa to interpret. My selection was not entirely random in that I chose one program on the basis of interest: it had a questionnaire I was curious about.

In my fieldwork, from September 2005 through October 2005, the written program had a different format than the months that followed. In these initial months, the cover had the same image of a cross-topped dome of a Russian-Orthodox church building as throughout the rest of my research. The early version of the cover also had the name of Slavic Fellowship in English, a phrase of welcome in both English and Russian, and the church's theme verse about liberty. The inside page provided announcements on additional events, information on childcare during the service, and needs for church

positions—volunteer Sunday school teachers and Russian-language teachers for children and an advertisement for a paid church secretary. The third page was the church agenda, including names of some of the participants, with the date and the numbered events. The back cover provided both pastors' names and phone numbers, a short scripture verse about praying for each other, a map of the location of the church, and the address of the church in English with the Internet address and a phone number presumably for the church building. The pastors' names and phone numbers were repeated a second time in a box with a sentence stating that to participate in the Sunday morning service the readers should contact one of the pastors.

In November, the cover changed to all Russian except for the inclusion of the church address underneath the dome image. The full name of the church, including a word referring to ethnicity had been added to the image. The date was now on the front with the topic of the sermon and a corresponding Bible verse. Slavic Fellowship's mission verse was absent. The front inside page listed the agenda and within a month prayer requests and a genre with a title translated as "well said" or "wise saying" would provide one to three quotations typically from Christian leaders, such as Rick Warren. Raisa told me that she and a volunteer usually found a quotation that matched the sermon. If nothing was available, she inserted one on prayer. The third page was comprised of the announcements, including birthdays during the week, and the church schedule. The back page was largely a lined space for notes to be taken during the sermon above contact information for "schools" for the children—Sunday school, music school, drawing school, and Russian school.

Inserts for the program of my 10 samples included one in English advertising the art class. The second was a questionnaire in Russian requesting contact information, birthday, and the attendee's selection of a church ministry in which to volunteer and a listing of hobbies, likely I suspect so the attendees could be guided into a role if undecided about a ministry.

Partial Constructions of Collective Identity in and with the Written Program

Although the constitution was a document available on request, it was not distributed widely, referred to in member meetings and reviewed in membership classes. The written program, on the other hand, was for anyone who attended on a Sunday morning. Hence, the program shaped not only the collective identity of the official members but all who joined those worshipping there on Sunday morning.

As Tusting (2000b) indicated in her examination of a parish newsletter available on Sunday mornings, the document "maintained" the identity of the congregation across time and space by providing announcements and a church schedule. Some announcements were not spoken in church: in fact Ivan began to reduce his number of spoken announcements, asking in June that the attendees read the rest in the program, meaning they were expected to keep the document and refer to it during the week.

Like the constitution, this document demonstrated a construction of a new Russian Baptist identity that could appeal to those who had a negative categorization of Russian Baptists. Raisa, who had designed the program, placed an image on it that suggested Russian culture in its likeness of an Orthodox church. Initially, the cover also referred to Christian liberty rather than restriction.

Although conservative Protestant U. S. churches often distribute a written program, Russian churches, Ivan told me in the second interview, typically do not. What was common in a Russian Baptist church was having a very loose schedule and then allowing members and guests to request to participate by submitting a note. Services, Ivan and Raisa told me, could go on for three or four hours in other Russian Baptist churches. Ivan and Raisa felt that visitors who were not believers would have a “bad expectation” of the traditional format and that the written program was a way of making them “comfortable.” Ivan said: “We need to be ready to show the best--that we are planning things.” Guests from traditional Russian Baptist churches were sometimes offended, Ivan added, but overall they had gotten the congregation to “accept it”—what Raisa referred to as the church being “orderly.” I interjected that regularly one or two events were not on the schedule, and Ivan agreed that it was somewhat flexible: after all it had been printed a couple days before the service. For instance, he had once stood up in a November service interpreted by Marie and announced another testimony, informing us that the program was only an outline and that God leads. He would also ask for additional prayer requests during announcements.

The written program was also a construction of textual identity in that it urged the principle of volunteerism that was the vision statement of the church and Ivan’s project. Not only did the inserted questionnaire maintain this identity but also the announcements requesting help in various ministries. However, it was not only the text itself that demanded a response of participation, Ivan began directing differing individuals each Sunday to participate by reading quotations, a scripture verse from the program, or the announcements of the birthdays.

The Bible Reading Plan

Purpose, Origin, and Description of the Bible Reading Plan

On the first Sunday of January, I entered the foyer of the church building, and before I crossed, I was given a program by one young man and then directed in English to take a Bible reading plan from another young man across from him. I was given a copy in English, but I suspected no copies were distributed in Russian since I checked the Internet address on the bottom and found a website entirely in English (Coley, 2008). This one-page document was comprised of a table of the 52 weeks of the year and a reading for each day of week. The reading for the day is based on genre: Sundays—Epistles (letters in the New Testament), Mondays—The Law (the first five books of the Hebrew Scriptures), Tuesday—History (additional books from the Hebrew Scriptures about Jewish history), Wednesday—Psalms, Thursday—poetry (additional books from the Hebrew Scriptures such as Job and the Proverbs), Friday—prophecy (mostly books from the Hebrew Scriptures and the book of Revelation from the New Testament), and Saturday—Gospels (the first books of the New Testament, including the book of the Acts of the Apostles). A tiny box next to each day allowed a space for ticking off the reading.

Partial Constructions of Collective Identity in and with the Bible Reading Plan

Similar to the bulletin except stretched across the year, this document maintained the identity of the church across time and space (Tusting, 2000b). Being a believer in this church entailed reading the Bible regularly and in its entirety along with others in the church. It was Ivan who publically urged the use of this plan. The Sunday following its distribution he asked a content question from the weekly reading to a disappointing response. Mikhail was the only one who answered. The next Sunday he asked a

different question and according to Marie's interpretation received two different answers from men in the congregation. On the same day, Ivan had a woman read a quotation about the Bible from Rick Warren and then exhorted the congregation that the Bible was "food and water." In early March, he quizzed the congregation, making one question specifically for the youth, and the only one I observed answering was Mikhail again (tr. Marie). Later in March, he reminded his audience of the plan and read a comforting passage about God's presence always being available (tr. Marie) and then requested that if something in people's reading "touched" them, they could share this experience as a testimony. Ivan's hope was that regular reading of the Bible—"food and water"—would shape believers to be emotionally sustained.

Church Website

Purpose, Origin, and Description of the Church Website

When I asked about his involvement in the church website, Ivan started laughing. Raisa said "somewhat" and that "he approves and disapproves." Ivan was uncomfortable with the image of a girl with a rosary on the front. The webpage was designed for free by someone in Russia--"a Moslem by the way"--a friend of Raisa's cousin who had moved to the Northwest. The cousin appeared to have been the administrator. Raisa said, "So we have again shortage of people who really want to do that." In his second interview, Nicolai would make a similar comment: he hoped that someone "computer literate" would step forward, because, as he said, "There's still a number of things that we can add and articles and all of that stuff." Raisa, Ivan, and Nicolai were pleased that there were photographs of people in church events and a wedding on the Internet. Nicolai thought that the pictures showed that Slavic Fellowship was a "living organism," a community.

According to Ivan, the “main reason” for the site was that they advertised the church in a Russian-language newspaper, and they wanted a website for people to look up. But otherwise, “It’s kind of half way done.”

I made browser printouts of the website—all the sections I was able to enter—some were inaccessible. Raisa interpreted the printouts. Except for a “Christian chat room,” each section had the dome-shaped image and the name of the church at the top of the webpage. Located in the left corner was a small picture of what appeared to be a Caucasian family—a mom, a dad, a son, and a daughter. The homepage had links to questions for believers, testimonies, information about Sunday school, the chat room, photo gallery, and a schedule of activities and church services. The address of the church was in English, and a passage from Genesis on the right of the page could be read further. On an additional page, the user could fill out a form for “connection with administration.” On the photo-gallery page, the viewer could look at 178 pictures in various categories: a wedding, a concert, and multiple youth group activities, as well as the Sunday service led by the youth group. The chat room allowed one to enter a name and a password and also provided chat rules and a section on questions and answers.

The link to two testimonies was located in large font near the top left of the opening image on the homepage, making it the first link most viewers would see and possibly click on. One testimony was by Nicolai, which I briefly covered under his individual literacy practices in chapter 8. The other was by Ina, Victoria’s mother, and one of the first new believers in the congregation. Both testimonies included outlines of their parents’ achievements in the former Soviet Union. Nicolai’s text was more oriented toward events, such as his education, meeting his wife, moving to the U. S., and after

conversion, a delineation of his roles in various evangelization events and in the local Christian and secular communities. The text of Ina's testimony also included her education and her former career but was much more personal, portraying her anguish over past hardship, the disappointment of no easy resolution in the move to the U. S., and the consolation she found in joining the church and becoming a Christian.

Partial Constructions of Collective Identity in and with the Church Website

As Hawisher and Selfe (2000) have called attention to, a website, as a literacy product, is as culturally embedded as any other text despite the myth of the global village online. Creators of a webpage are in the process of identification as well as being identified by the webpage. The website appealed to those of a traditional Russian culture with photographs of Caucasian family and the repeated motif of the church dome. It resisted outside categorizations of Baptists with the two testimonies laden with educational details. Noticeably absent were testimonies by socialized believers. Nonetheless, the Internet identity was not that of an Orthodox church—one category of photographs, although absent photos, was baptism. Also, the photographs did not show the setting of Russian Orthodox architecture for the various events, rather the simpler construction of an evangelical church building. This careful presentation of a new kind of Russian-speaking church was partially stymied for Ivan by the Muslim web designer who did not understand the distinctions in forms of Christianity and inserted an image with a Catholic rosary.

The website also constituted a revised identity in the vast array of youth photographs. If purposeful, the selection of so many youth pictures may have been an invitation to Russian-speaking parents who wished to have their children in what they

viewed as healthy teenage community. Likely though, the youth director was more “computer literate,” able to post pictures, a skill his older cohorts may not have had, making elder leadership dependent on the young for interaction with technology. However, Ina’s testimony, that of an older immigrant, may have balanced this perceived overemphasis on youth.

Although the website was culturally embedded with an appeal to Russians, the texts were another example of the church’s belief that they had entered an ongoing narrative of scripture, rooted in an ancient Jewish history, transcending their own cultural experiences. The scripture text on the opening page was not a text for evangelism from the New Testament but rather the first book of the Hebrew Scriptures. Ina’s testimony in particular demonstrated her movement into a new narrative:

Among those reading this testimony there perhaps older people, like myself. I would like to ask them whether they ever became homesick since moving here to U. S. The answer probably will be “yes.” Have you ever thought that our earthly home could be so easily destroyed and nothing could save it? We are always going to be homesick, whether in Russia, or America, because “our Motherland is—in heaven.” And our longing—is longing for eternity, but we are not going to understand it until we accept Christ as our personal Savior. I am sharing this from my own experience. After moving to U. S., I found inner peace only when I found “my” Church which I found with God’s help after seeing an announcement in newspaper—[Name of church]! My road to God was long road full of mistakes, search and disappointments. But how many years did it take to lead His chosen people to a promised land? [trans. Raisa]

Ina's repositioning of identity in time and place was no longer dependent on place, neither Russia nor the U. S., nor on time. She had imagined new places from which to claim her heritage—the “promised land” from the Hebrew Scriptures and “Heaven.” Her sense of heredity may have changed if she had not claimed Jewish ethnicity before—she had become one of the “chosen people.”

Textual Resources: Library and Book Tables

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Textual Resources: Library and Book Tables

Towards the end of my research period, a few shelves with a handful of books appeared in the foyer of the church building. I mentioned the appearance of a “little library” in my second interview with Ivan, and he responded that the library had been bigger before the move into the church's current building but several boxes of books had been lost. He told me that a church member, a woman's name, was in charge of the library, which was supposed to be open every Sunday. The church had bought most of the books and had plans to buy more and add additional shelves. Ivan told me that a library was important “to educate people” and that he was considering making a required reading list for members. Raisa supplemented his explanation by stating that some people did not own the key books influencing the church. For example, most people had *The Purpose-Driven Life*, but few had another book by Warren—*The Purpose-Driven Church*. Ivan and Raisa would rather have these books available in the library than their past habit of spending significant time “making copies and distributing them, and underlining what needs to be like accented” for members to read.

Besides borrowing books, the church supported buying books through granting space to booksellers after two Sunday morning services. As Nicolai said to me, in view

of both the library and book tables: “Christian education is very important in our church because it’s relatively a young church.” In March, as I entered the church, I observed a gray-haired woman setting up four book tables, including music CDs, in the foyer for browsing after the service. Anna told me the books were from her friend’s store in the suburb of Mapleville. In June, several long tables were set outside of the church by a different bookseller, who Nicolai told me came from Ukraine. Unlike the library’s books, I had the opportunity to examine a few of the books from both booksellers. I was able to make out Russian enough to recognize several books written by conservative Protestant U. S. nonfiction and fiction writers—five of the nonfiction authors I recognized. Of the books I picked up, two publishers were U. S. publishers, and one was a publisher in Kiev. I saw Russian Bibles and a Bible that provided both English and Russian translations, but the English was the King James Version from the time of Shakespeare. The second bookseller also had Bible story DVDs. From the first bookseller, Ivan had Anna purchase a book, and from the second, I saw him carrying a high stack of books to buy.

Partial Constructions of Collective Identity with Textual Resources

As in the interviews with pastors, socialized believers, and new believers, a primary assumption of the collective identity of the church is that reading books was assumed to transform the readers into better Christians. The interviews yielded no resistance to this assumption even by the one generation 1.5 socialized believer, Elena, who stated that overall she did not like to read.

“It’s normal for Russian people everywhere,” Raisa had said in the first interview, to “go somewhere” and “take a book.” Nicolai, when discussing the libraries and book

tables, had brought up that the church had many “avid readers.” Despite that reading may be a culturally affirmed activity, the books promoted to participants in the church were primarily ones by ethnically U. S. authors. When I mentioned to Ivan that I recognized many of the names at the book tables, he replied that he thought that “90 or 95 percent of the books were translated.” As I wrote earlier, historically for Russian Baptists, influence had come from the west, and once under Soviet rule, when religious texts had been suppressed, translated books seeped into the Soviet Union by U. S. authors. (Ironically, by preventing Russian-authored texts, the Soviet government may have facilitated the increase of western influence on Protestant Russian believers.) Therefore, it is difficult to argue that the leadership of Slavic Fellowship was responsible for “Americanizing” church attendees when historically they were doing little different from their past experience before coming to the U. S. Russian Protestant identification was already a complex book-fed one of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, and western authors. Russian Baptists were accustomed to culling what they chose to fit their context. In the perception of these readers, religion transcended nationality.

Private Literacy Events

Introduction

Ivan and Raisa told me in their second interview that they had left the traditional congregation of Mapleville Russian Baptist Church, wanting to have three new focuses: children’s ministry, youth ministry, and, as Raisa put it, ministry to “Russian-speaking non-Christian people here.” Each of these targeted audiences had their own gatherings, tailored to them. Although I did not observe the private literacy events of Sunday school, youth group meetings, or home groups, I would be remiss not to discuss them since they

were locations of enculturation for the young and for those who would become believers. I was able to interview one of the Sunday school teachers, Katerine, and, not always purposely, found myself interviewing several of the home group leaders: Ivan, Vasily, Max, Anna, and Phillip. As a teacher myself, I know that my own perceptions about my teaching are often about my intentions and not necessarily my actions. I acknowledge that this section is limited in that I was not able to observe firsthand this enculturation.

To validate my own conclusions, I of course looked at other sources in which researchers had observed similar private literacy events in a religious context for literacy practices. I was surprised at the limited number of studies. A. Fishman (1988) and Zinsler (1986) had done so for children's classes, and Tusting (2000b) and Kapitzke (1995) had done so in a congregational context with both adults' and children's classes. Regarding the gathering of a group of people into a "home group" or Bible study held at another time than the public services, I found little—a conversational analysis of a Bible study (Lehtinen, 2005) and an applied linguist's explanation of meaning as directly text-based or not (Todd, 2005).

Sunday School

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Sunday School

After the children's sermon and before the pastor's sermon, children were dismissed to go to Sunday school. Raisa and Ivan explained that Sunday school was typical to Russian Baptist churches but not during the service; they had adapted this scheduling from U. S. churches. They said that Sergei, a young man who appeared to be in his twenties, who was related to the Petrov family, was over the Sunday school and youth group. He also had a separate full-time job. Both Sunday school and youth group

were conducted partially if not primarily in English. For Sunday school, the reasoning was that the children, educated in U. S. schools, read in English.

The children's Sunday school at Slavic Fellowship was not the highly regimented format that Kapitzke (1995) portrayed in her study of a Seventh-Day Adventist church. Slavic Fellowship, as a church loosely affiliated with two other organizations, had far less constraints. As socially common, two women taught the Sunday school classes, each a mother of a child or children. The Sunday school classes were divided by age, and, if I estimate from the time the children left to the end of the service, about 45 minutes long. Katherine taught 7- to 10-year-olds. I asked her to describe to me a typical Sunday school class. She told me that before she started the lesson:

I usually ask them how their week was, what's new in their families, would some like exciting things happened or some sad things happened in their life or in school or in their family. We talk about it, and if something like, if like somebody tell "my sister is in the hospital" or "something happened" or "we are going on a vacation next week" or stuff, we pray about it, all of us together.

Afterwards, she gave a lesson, for example the story of Jesus' birth, and "they can ask me questions, or I ask them questions," and the children do an associated craft, such as gluing fabric and twine to a drawing of a robe. The following Sunday, instead of changing the subject, she may have the children review and answer questions and "do the puzzles" from a copy of a page of a supplemental activity book she bought at a local Christian bookstore. She showed me the workbook on Bible stories, which had a corresponding animated video. She rarely used the video because she was afraid that it

was too much like a “cartoon” and that her students would not receive the lesson as “serious.”

Katerine told me that she talked about half the time in English in the class. The workbook was English, and she said, “Sometimes, we are reading from the Bible, and they read in English.” After she taught a Bible story, she expected the children to read the story in their Bibles at home. She had bought the children all the same English Bible, one with multiple illustrations, and had been compensated by the church. Despite all having the same Bible, they did not seem to be memorizing the Ten Commandments on their own away from class, so she had begun “memorizing in the class.”

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in Sunday School

In Sunday school, Katerine taught the children that a Christian identity was that of a reader of scripture. Again, the assumption that reading transforms--children were learning the moral behavior of the Ten Commandments--and that reading was a responsibility stand out—young children were given Bibles and Bible-reading assignments. Memorizing scripture rather than just the principles of the text indicated a value for the words themselves (the Bible viewed as authoritative) and gave that particular excerpt high import. For Katerine, the Bible had a sacredness to it that she wanted to impart to her students: whereas illustrations were acceptable, animation was not for fear the student would take the content lightly because of the medium. However, she wanted them to enjoy the activity of learning scripture stories in that she gave them puzzles to reinforce the lesson.

The enculturation was not only about training them to be readers and students of the Bible. Katerine created space for a community of care, giving the students

opportunities to share about their week and providing an opportunity to pray together, modeling that, along with reading scripture and moral behavior, a Christian is someone who talks to God.

Youth Group

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Youth Group

As in most immigrant churches, the youth were a concern for the adult members of the church. Ivan shared in his first interview that “teenagers have problems, authority problems with teenagers knowing both English and Russian.” Some of the teenagers spoke “a mixed language.” Raisa added, “No longer Russian and American, stuck in middle.” They were “losing Russian” and even some became “high school dropouts.” The multiple activities of the youth group may have distracted teenagers from more harmful entertainment. On Saturday nights, the entire group met, and from what Ivan told me, had their own service led by Sergei with music, testimonies, and a discussion at the end. Activities of the youth over the 12 months of my research period included visiting elderly Russian-speaking immigrants with a video of the church, a conference on evangelism with a speaker brought in from Germany, two Sunday services led by the youth mirroring the adult-led services, weekend retreats, a few skits given during Sunday services, and a ministry trip to an orphanage in Russia. In addition to Saturday nights, young women could join a home group led by Anna on Thursdays, and young men for a time could join one led by Phillip on Friday nights.

Ivan and Raisa thought that the youth preferred the Bible in English, and youth who were baptized were given English Bibles after the baptism. Nicolai, when he opened a Sunday service, would frequently speak in both Russian and English, saying the

English was for guests and the youth. Once in a while, Sergei gave short messages based on scripture in English in addition to the regular sermon, and he also, when helping with communion, would pray in English. The two youth Sunday services had almost equal elements of English and Russian, such as testimonies in English but poems in Russian.

Because I did not have the opportunity to talk with Sergei, I have no other description of youth meetings except for what Ivan surmised. That the youth were being enculturated in similar literacy practices is predictable. On one of the youth Sundays, the youth performed a wordless skit, in which Phillip dressed in white enacted reading from a Bible with a victim, the victim's attackers, and a group of gamblers. The other characters eventually demonstrated conversion by peeling off an extra jacket or shirt. Again, reading scripture transformed but as mediated by this figure in white, representing the divine.

I was also fortunate to see the physical setting of a lounge created for the youth group. On my final Sunday, after the baptismal service, I joined the tea before the regularly scheduled service. I had not been downstairs in a few months and was surprised. An area had been set up with couches for youth gatherings. On the wall were posters about the ministry trip to a Russian orphanage, handmade with photos and mostly in English except for a few with papers that looked like letters written in Russian. There was a calendar of youth events mostly in English. Another poster about a conference next week announced the word "sex" in big letters. Next to it, I found multiple copies of two English handouts for the taking: one for young women and one for young men. I picked up a copy of both for analysis.

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Youth Handouts on Gender

The blue handout for young men was about “how to beat lust.” The pink handout directed young women on “modeling modesty.” Although no author was given for either document, I recognized the language of one and found much of the text in a book from a conservative Protestant U. S. author known for his views on male gender issues. Specific descriptions of women’s bodies had been removed. I inserted text from the pink handout on an Internet search engine and came up with an article on the website of a girls’ teenage magazine published by a conservative U. S. Christian organization. Someone had revised a scenario in the text so that a typically Anglo name became a Russian one. In the blue handout, men were instructed to remove their eyes from women’s bodies because they had no “authority” to let their eyes dwell, and in the pink handout, women were instructed to wear clothing that did not reveal cleavage or underclothing. The compiler of both recommended memorizing scripture to help with these behaviors. This advice, scripture regarding “clothing” oneself with attributes such as kindness, was additional to the original article for the women’s handout.

Literacy Practices and Constructions of Collective Identity in and with the Youth Group

A youth group is a key community gathering for young people to be enculturated in their parents’ and the church’s values (Ebaugh & Chafetz, 2000). As Raisa had said in her interview: “We don’t want to lose them.” Both she and Ivan had sympathy for the youth whom they viewed as caught between different moral worlds between the ethnically U. S. society of the school and that of the home and church.

Not surprisingly, the youth gender handouts were representative of U. S. conservative Christian constructions of gender: it was the woman’s responsibility to dress

appropriately and the man's responsibility not to look. Gender was rigidly defined, markedly by the color of the handouts and especially in the lack of assumption of additional genders. The issue of power was raised in that men were not to subject women to their imaginations, and the issue of self-image was raised in that the scripture verses for women implied that beauty was more about personality than their physical form.

The concept of not just reading scripture but memorizing scripture as a spiritual tool to resist temptation is common in U. S. conservative, particularly fundamentalist, Protestant churches. In the fundamentalist church of Zinsser's (1986) study, young children memorized scripture verses to "recite them in times of trouble or doubt" (p. 61). Zinsser quoted one teacher as saying that calling to mind a Bible verse "is how you can make the devil to run away from you" (p. 61). In this situation, the words of the text were assumed to be endowed with power, and, thus, the memorizer is endowed with the power too. However, for Slavic Fellowship, it was not that the words were magic words separate from the memorizer. It was important to the leadership at Slavic Fellowship that both children and youth understood what they were memorizing.

Home Groups

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Home Groups

Initially, I lacked awareness of the home groups, which were listed in the Russian text of the written programs, until I began to interview new believers. Victoria and Vasily began attending home groups before becoming involved in the Sunday church service; Martin and Valerie began attending a home group at the same time they started attending on Sundays. The church had four adult groups, with at least two led by Ivan

and one led by Max, and Ivan mentioned he was also mentoring Vasily as a leader. Ivan began home groups because of the following:

The first one, we just realized people, Russian people, afraid to go to church, even asked them go to church, they feel too alone. They don't know anybody. If they attend a small group, then they go to church, and they knew already people. They talk to each other. They kind of feel more welcome, welcome than just came to church for the one people who invite them. And I just suggest people, not to invite to church right away, invite to small group. And see him or she how it's going, make a few friends. And then next step church. It looks like it's working for us.

This “welcoming” atmosphere to Ivan’s surprise worked best on Friday nights: “You don’t even need to, kind of, call them and invite them. They call you, ask ‘Where’s going to be Friday?’” He pointed out that for Valerie, who was attending two home groups, I believe every other Friday, “It’s new way of life.”

Home groups were the primary location of recruitment for the church. Nicolai noted that after “learning the Word of God” in a home group, attending a Sunday service was “just like a celebration” for the participants and another opportunity to see their new friends as they “worship[ed] the Lord corporately.” He remarked, “That’s very powerful.” Ivan was in agreement: “Because of these groups, Friday night, our church is growing.” He explained “If you invite [Russian people] to home Bible study or just talk about something, they feel comfortable, but not church. And I think, 90, 90, 95 percent they came through that group.”

Ivan explained that although these kinds of small groups exist in similar churches in Russia, he did not think that most Russian Baptist churches in the area had them because “they’re afraid church is going” to be “split.” Raisa concluded that by the goals of other churches in preserving tradition, they were focused on “keeping” people “in” the church and, therefore, could not offer home groups. Unlike Slavic Fellowship, this emphasis on the inside of the church limited other conservative Protestant Russian churches’ “outreach.”

The education, Ivan asserted, that happened in a home group was not quite like a Bible study. Although there was an agenda, usually involving text about the Bible, Ivan did not keep to the agenda. People could ask questions about how to live according to the Bible, such as if it is acceptable to drink alcohol when offered, and he and everyone else there would help to answer. He said, “I even ask in the beginning, ‘Any questions? How your life going? What’s new in your life?’” Anna seemed to have a similar format in that she called her young women’s group a “Bible slash support group so to say,” telling me, “the most important thing, I think, for the girls is that we share our prayer needs.” In her group the young women had tea first and sat in a circle so that the environment was not “threatening,” but a “friendly, easygoing atmosphere” especially for those who were not “born again.”

In their own interviews, those recruited through the church affirmed this opportunity to ask questions in a warm, personal environment. Martin almost repeated what Ivan had said: “He actually starts, ‘So, how you guys been this week? What’s the questions? What bothering you? You know, what you want to talk about before we start the thing that we plan to do for today?’” Victoria stressed that not only could she ask

questions, but the group was “in a home.” As interpreted by Marie, Valerie said, “That’s a very comfortable place for her to ask questions at times where she thinks they’re a little bit silly maybe, but the atmosphere of the group is so comfortable that you, you know, you’re free to ask.” For both Valerie and Martin, they appreciated that it was Ivan who answered these questions when he would not have had time on a Sunday service. Martin noted that the tea time afterwards, what Ivan called a “rich table,” provided even more time to speak with Ivan: “you still talking and you still got the chance to ask him.”

Ivan brought up two books that the home groups used in their discussions. The first was Warren’s *The Purpose-Driven Life* (2002). He had begun leading another group through a book focused on understanding the Bible, *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*, by John Cross (1997): “It’s very simple, good book for new believers.” Ivan had ordered 100 to 150 copies, mostly in Russian, and he gave me one of the English copies. Most of his copies he had already distributed.

Purpose, Origin, and Description of Texts Used in Home Groups

Besides the copy of *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus* that Ivan gave me, Anna lent me an English copy of *The Purpose-Driven Life* that she had used for her young women’s group. The influence of *The Purpose-Driven Life* has been vast. It has sold 25 million copies (purposedrivenlife.com), catapulting its author, Rick Warren, pastor of a church in California, to fame. His extensive media coverage has included inviting U. S. presidential hopefuls Barack Obama and John McCain to speak on values at his church, debating popular atheist Sam Harris in a news magazine, and giving the invocation at President Barack Obama’s inauguration.

A *New York Times* essay (Donadio, 2004) cited *The Purpose-Driven Life* as “a friendly, nondenominational guide that urges readers to explore what they were placed on earth to do.” I briefly describe *The Purpose-Driven Life* to provide an understanding of the text, and also *The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus*, but I will not analyze either book closely since I cannot depict the group’s interactions with the text. *The Purpose-Driven Life* is heavy with emotion words as well as simply explained theology and practical relational advice, such as conflict resolution within a church setting. Victoria who had been reading Warren’s book *The Purpose-Driven Church*, when I interviewed her, raved about its format:

It’s really amazing how he recommend to read that book—just one chapter a day and then just think about that chapter and just go—not like, you know, there read, have book and forget what you read at first, so it kind of just, you know, goes in your memory like step by step, level by level.

The book is divided into 40 brief chapters covering the five purposes of life quoted at the beginning of this chapter: a relationship with God, participation in a church, development into the Christian identity, community service, and evangelism.

The Stranger on the Road to Emmaus, although not split into short chapters with as emotionally evoking language, is also reader-friendly in that its text is dispersed with sidebars and boxes of interest. The text on the back cover claims: “The author chronologically binds together the entire text into one great universal drama.” The book chronologically follows the narrative of the Hebrew Scriptures culminating into Jesus as a fulfillment of all previous events. The author, Cross, often tied in historical research in his narrow interpretation of scripture. Having no awareness of the book, the author, or

the publishing house, I looked up the Internet web address in the book and found a webpage representing an organization that offered seminars in the U. S. and Canada, distributed other conservative Protestant products, and published materials primarily by Cross. Not long afterwards, I visited my grandparents in a rural Midwestern small town and learned that the burgeoning small group ministry in their fundamentalist Baptist church was using the same book in English.

Constructing Collective Identity in and with Home Groups

The literacy ethnographer Tusting (2000b) has noted that the role of text in a group for her study “recontextualized existing identities” for the participants, especially in the reframed sharing of their notions and experience in a Catholic catechesis program. Although I cannot say with what intensity and responsiveness the home group participants read a shared text, they assumed the responsibility of reading Christian text as a value.

After studying the “theologizing experience” of immigrants, I could almost accuse Warren of writing a book that would appeal to newly churched people in transition, whose lives had not be resolved by their migration but made more challenging. Warren’s book, likely the principal text outside of scripture of Slavic Fellowship, had the focus of meaningfulness of life—a felt need of this population. If as quoted in a written program, God “planned the universe and orchestrated history, including the details of our lives” in order to bring about relationship with him (Warren, 2002, pp. 86-87), then readers could retell their lives in a way that would console unrest about hardship. While *The Purpose-Driven Life* was an invitation into the local congregation, Cross’s book began the induction into the continuing narrative of scripture, a perspective of all of

history, not just personal history, that led up to Christ and what followed Christ—the Church, gatherings of believers.

The seekers may have read their assignments, as Valerie had stated, on their own, but discussion occurred in the presence of Ivan and others. Through this mediation, involving personal sharing, the seekers drew into community with other believers before commitment to the church body or the Sunday morning service. Similarly, conversation analyst Lehtinen (2005) concluded after researching a Seventh-Day Adventist Bible study that, although the purpose of the study was to construct the Bible relevant to the participants' lives, much of the construction was an identification with the Bible study group as much or more with the characters of scripture.

Discussion

As I illustrated in the previous chapter, the means of the acquisition of discourse of this community (Gee, 1996) resemble the two institutions that shape contemporary children: the school and family. Other than the webpage and the written program, the rest of the texts reminded me of homework or textbooks. Although perhaps not assigned outside of a community literacy event, Ivan used the constitution as a tool in the membership class to inculcate the collective identity of the church as one that was not traditionally Russian Baptist as well as further bringing new believers into the continuing narrative of scripture. Katherine gave the children Bibles and expected them to read them.

The family aspect of home groups—the community of care—drew those who would become new believers (Wittner, 1998). From a background where reading was respected, Slavic people responded well to home groups where the agenda was a discussion of a book. In the home group meetings, Ivan had a compassionate listening

role and answered questions, like that of a father. As a community of care, Slavic Fellowship's literacy events created an environment where the discursive patterns of individual identity underwent conversion experiences, aligning them with a new collective identity.

Both the role of father and teacher is not unusual in a church setting. Priests are often addressed as "father," and churches have historically established educational institutions. Metaphorically, assuming those mantles as religious leaders have always done, however, bespeaks of the pastors' influence in and over their congregation, who have the status of children and students. I ponder these power relationships in the conclusion.

In chapter 2 I discussed Gee's concept that an individual's primary discourse is based on his or her childhood socialization and later R. Jenkins' (2008) argument that primary identity is usually selfhood, gender, ethnicity, and possibly class, assuming religion as a secondary aspect of ethnicity. Like Gee, R. Jenkins' established primary identity in childhood socialization. I would argue, particularly as evidenced by the new believers, that the comprehensiveness of conservative religious discourse—the taking on of "ways of talking, acting, and valuing" (Gee, 1996)—indicates a significant change, a reconstruction of primary identity, particularly when the discourse reflects one of the care that would be received in a family or provides inclusion in another metanarrative or imagined place—a non-place identity. In this case, the religious community provided all that J. A. Fishman (1989a) had noted as offered by ethnic belonging and that I reworded as perceived heredity, heritage, and meaningfulness. The intended use of many of the texts in the church—a written program with a weekly schedule, a Bible reading program,

a webpage, books, and handouts--was as Tusting (2000b) insisted about a parish bulletin to maintain the collective identity across space and time, even when not meeting in the same physical location.

Additional Discussion: A Word on Language Practices

As a researcher conducting a linguistic ethnography, although focusing on literacy, I would be remiss to overlook language practices inseparably linked to literacy practices in a migrant community. Since differences in linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) of various languages spoken were dependent on setting and groups, I have chosen to end this chapter with a second discussion on language ideology.

A few language practices have already been mentioned beneath individual descriptions, and I italicize these in the following. Clearly, as observed in the interview of the music director, Mikhail, and of Katherine, a Sunday school teachers, as well as follow-up comments by Nicolai, leadership of the church thought that *the future survival of the church would depend on the eventual move to full-English services*. Despite the Saturday morning classes in Russian for children, they were aware of the assimilation of previous immigrant communities, including the language shift to English. Mikhail believed the acculturation of the congregation's children to be inevitable and did not believe that preserving Russian would preserve Russian culture: "you can, I can, teach them Russian language, but this is not culture. It's just language, and they, and they can know language worse or better, but it doesn't mean they're Russians." *The continuance of faith, particularly the faith of this church, was more central than the preservation of Russian*. Unlike more conservative traditional Russian Baptist churches, Slavic Fellowship's collective identity included an assumption that *faith be accessible in the*

language that the believer or potential believer was most comfortable with, resulting in Nicolai's pressure on Elena to use English, if only occasionally, in children's sermons, and the once-in-a-while message or prayer in English by the youth leader, Sergei, on a Sunday morning. English in the Sunday service often accorded with an affirmation of the individual—the giving of an English Bible to a generation 1.5 baptized candidate, an English prayer as part of a dedication of an infant with a ethnically U. S. father, and children on Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter) reciting verses in English.

Nevertheless, Russian was the primary language for most of the attendees of the church and for the Sunday morning service, and the youth honored this by conducting their youth services in both Russian and English, dependent likely on the ability of the speakers—thus, testimonies in English but poetry readings in Russian. As for Ukrainian, a language linked to a population of many church attendees, although a performer occasionally sang a song in Ukrainian or Nicolai greeted a fellow Ukrainian in his or her language, according to Nicolai, Ukrainian rarely occurred in the Sunday morning service, despite careful choice of the church's name not to include a descriptor of "Russian" but rather "Slavic." Below are additional assumptions about language status.

Value of "Good" Russian in Sunday Morning Services in Tension with the Resources of

Multiple Languages in Sunday Service

Not only was Russian most widely spoken on Sunday morning, there was respect for what was called "good" Russian. Perhaps, surprisingly, Nicolai, the pastor who interjected the most in English in the services, had influence on this ideology. As a post-secondary-educated immigrant from the Soviet Union approximately 30 years before, part of Nicolai's conversion story was his introduction to an immigrant Baptist church in

the U. S. of Ukrainian and Russian speakers who had not been allowed post-secondary education. He stated that “ninety plus percent of the entire church could not quite even express themselves in a right way,” and that it was here that an elder instructed Nicolai to “close [his] linguistic ears” so that he could hear about Jesus. Educated Russian was a symbol of past privilege. With his linguistic ability as a pastor, he was able to not only insert words from other languages but to speak in accented Russian—once mimicking the accent of a Central Asian region he had visited to the laughter of the congregation (trans. Marie).

Nicolai’s grasp of a more prestigious Russian language was likely attractive to the more educated seekers who attended the Sunday services. He was not the only one who spoke it. In one occasion after Alex had spoken, Marie insisted to me that he had a developed Russian vocabulary and that her interpretation did not do his message justice. Anna, interpreting at another time, stated how “rich” a guest speaker’s Russian was and said that Nicolai had publicly mentioned that the congregation had not “heard such Russian in a long time.” It may be because of the status of Russian in Sunday morning services that members of generation 1.5, such as Marie and Elena, were highly aware that they did not read the traditional Russian version of the Bible. One individual’s rationale for rejecting my request for an interview was his inability to read the Bible in Russian.

As in the former Soviet Union, where religious resources were sparse, attendees of the church utilized English-language resources, despite the respect for a privileged Russian language. The women who gave sermons read the lessons originally from English books and on rare occasions the scripture in English from the booklet itself during the sermon, although they primarily spoke in Russian. Mikhail in his message on

the book and movie *The Da Vinci Code* referred to English sources of his information as well as using website resources for background of slides that often had English words on them. Nicholas twice mentioned the accuracy of two different words in the English translation of the Bible. Nicholas referred to an English translation of the Bible if he thought it was more accurate. For example, in a sermon on spiritual gifts in November 2005 translated by Marie, he stated:

Unfortunately in Russian, the Bible does not say in English “the spirit for the *common* use” [this phrase said in English]. Can you see how this a huge mistake?

In Russian, just says for the *good*, but *common* use [in English version]. I ask if you have your Bible, to mark this word *common* in your Bible.

In a March 2006 sermon also translated by Marie, he read the text of a psalm in English because “a different translation, a different way” as well as being “interesting.” Another language gave him more options for articulation.

Value of English in Children’s Sunday School and Youth Group

For both children’s Sunday school and the youth, English was the primary language of literacy rather than Russian. Katherine had pointed out that the children in her class may not have been taught to read Russian, and the same would apply to many of the youth. Ivan and Raisa agreed with this: English Bibles were read and the English language occurred during children and youth service because this was their language of literacy. Although the church had begun Russian-language classes on Saturdays for the children, religious gatherings focused on the young had much English, except for the children’s sermon, which also had an audience of adults. Providing English in these contexts would prevent perhaps the abandonment of the church and Russian Christian

friendships by children and the youth—a concern that Raisa had expressed. Reversing the language shift was not as important as young people’s involvement in the religious community and their understanding of the faith into which they were being socialized.

Value of Most Comfortable Language in Home Groups

In Ivan’s home groups with first generation adults, he spoke in Russian and distributed texts in Russian. Anna’s home group composed of generation 1.5 and second generation immigrants spoke primarily in English because again most of the younger attendees did not read in Russian. She told me that on occasion if participants spoke in both Russian and English and if the Bible was read in Russian, “everybody’s like, ‘What is this? Let’s read in English. What does it say? Makes clear.’” As with Ivan, Anna also had shared about the importance of the intimacy of the small group—a place where participants could share their problems. The language in each may have enhanced that sense of closeness, perhaps echoing what Martin had stated in his interview that reading in a non-native language disallowed “enough space to kind of heart thinking.”

Value of English in Fundraisers—Value for Bilingualism of Russian and English

Fundraiser were almost entirely spoken in English except for the one occasion when many Russian Jews were invited to hear a guest performer and then Nicholas spoke in both Russian and English, again demonstrating the goal of accomplishing faith or conversion as prioritized above other goals and values. English typically carried the linguistic capital in a fundraiser because quite simply the intention usually was that the first-language speakers who attended would contribute monetary capital. Such fundraisers demonstrated the “elite” status that respected bilinguals or multilinguals had in the congregation to navigate with the outside world as J. A. Fishman (1989b) has

suggested about “ethnolinguistic elites.” During these events, Ivan and Raisa were present, but Ivan remained backgrounded unlike any other church occasion, Nicolai becoming the emcee of the evening’s activities. The articulate bilingual Anna contributed once in a presentation on orphanages in Russia and a second time emceed the event with another articulate bilingual, Phillip, when Nicolai was unavailable.

Conclusion

The overriding project of the congregation included two goals: the maintenance of faith of its more permanent attendees and persuasion of faith to visitors, Russian speakers in particular. To maintain faith for most of the community, first-generation Russian speakers, Russian held sway in the Sunday services, intermittently scattered with English when a focus was temporarily narrowed to English speakers in the audience (and this happened mostly when Nicolai present), such as guests and youth. That focus as mentioned earlier was often affirming of their identities as English-speaking Christians. Educated Russian was held at a higher status, more persuasive toward the change in identity for secular Russian-speaking believers, who may have had nominalizations of churchgoers as uneducated and uncultured. English spoken and read in groups of generation 1.5 and second-generation immigrants followed the same principles of this congregation’s major project. The possible exception to this goal could appear to be emphasis on English in the public presentations at fundraisers, and yet perhaps not if the project of maintenance of faith included maintenance not only of individual faith but of the church’s collective religious identity.

CHAPTER 13

CONCLUSION

Introduction

A friend and I arrive at a Saturday evening fundraiser in July at 6 p.m. The rows of chairs in the auditorium have been arranged around several round tables. Up front the candles are lit on the communion table with the open Bible lying on it.

We sit toward the back near the long tables of food. After a short time, Nicolai's wife Sylvia comes over and sets us to work putting the inserts into CD jewel boxes of the guest vocalist from Ukraine. Next to me is a man who founded a humanitarian organization that donates to Ukraine. A Ukrainian Baptist couple (the woman in a headcovering) sits with us. They have kind faces, and the man in simple English teases the humanitarian. Sylvia knows them too. They begin to help with the CDs.

I count about 40 people I do not know and about 20 I do know, excluding children. Some of the 20 are those who publically perform music on Sunday morning. Senka is also here with his wife Natasha at a table of people new to me. A few people I recognize from other fundraisers. Many of the people are speaking Russian or Ukrainian as I walk by them. Nicolai had told me earlier that he invited Russian-speaking Jews to this event since the vocalist sings in not only Ukrainian but Hebrew. There are about three tables of people dressed in contemporary fashion, mostly couples. There is also a table of conservatively dressed people—the heavy women in head-coverings, no makeup, and plain, less-revealing dress. The men in simpler clothing. They are likely Ukrainian and Baptist. A few more sit with one of Ivan's sisters at another table. Ivan and Raisa

are also here, greeting people at a table up front and sitting with them, but no public notice is made of them.

Nicolai stands up, wearing a Ukrainian shirt. He entirely hosts this evening. He speaks in both English and Russian or Ukrainian—I cannot tell which. He prays in a Slavic language, for which we stand up. People get in line, and we wait until we are done with the CDs. In line, I hear one little girl say to another, “Are you Russian?” With a U. S. accent, the other girl answers back, “Yes.”

Nicolai opens the program back up, and the special guest sings several songs in Ukrainian and Hebrew (with screens of photos of Ukraine and Israel) and a song in Italian. Despite that Nicolai said the program must end at 7:45 p.m., the vocalist insists on another crowd-pleasing medley, visitors and Valerie singing along. I hear the word “love” in one of these and observe that the traditional Baptists, who have not been listening as raptly to the music, do not clap for this last set. Nicolai talks in between songs in both English and Russian or Ukrainian. Once he publically thanks me for helping him out. Besides explaining a bit about each song, he makes comments such as the following:

In our church, we believe that truth is Christ—he who was brought before Pilate years ago.

The man [by name] is a Ph.D. and helped bring over the [vocalist] when there were visa problems. A scientist like him can believe in God always. I am very privileged tonight to have a lot of scientists and professors who can know that God is God of Israel. You saw “pray for peace of Israel” [on slide]...open

prophet Zechariah, and it will tell you Jews are defending themselves against Lebanon. Peace will come only when Prince of Peace will come.

Our church is 70 percent new believers.

We have two professors here in molecular biology. We all come from one male gene—"Bible is right on." Pray for [the vocalist] to know Lord more fully.

We stand and pray. When Nicolai says goodbye to me later, he gives me a hug.

I chose this example of a fundraiser because it so aptly illustrates some aspects of the dialectic of the collective identity of Slavic Fellowship. Nicolai catered to all the populations in his audience—informing those who were not believers that Slavic Fellowship had educated members (implying unlike traditional Russian Baptist churches) by his continuous mention of scientists and Ph.D.s, informing the visiting Russian Jews that he was pro-Israel and also believed in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and informing the traditional believers that the church is mostly new believers and that he had concern for the faith of his special guest.

Once these various populations attended the church or the church's home groups, the leadership had the challenge of maintaining the collective identity. In the last two chapters, I have investigated the relationship of collective identity and religious literacy through the public and private literacy events and texts. To conclude, I discuss the power relationships that maintain the collective identity, I share about my own identity within Slavic Fellowship, and I end summarizing the study's theories, data, and conclusions about religious literacy practices and identity.

Power Relationships in Maintaining Collective Identity

How much control did Ivan and Nicolai have? In my early analysis, I easily pegged Nicolai as dominant because of his discourse of right knowledge and Ivan as resistant because of his reaction against aspects of traditional Russian Baptist identity. Ivan appeared to be the “good guy,” although after I pre-supposed some influence as legitimate (R. Jenkins, 2004) and added a category of participation, my analysis became more complicated. I began to observe in Ivan and Raisa’s discourse their concern to “protect” themselves and Slavic Fellowship from traditional Russian Baptists who could cause division in their pursuit of the letter of the law. Thus, the church did not have a democratic polity that allowed voting in membership meetings, and the waiting period for membership for people transferring from another church was one year.

Literacy was a major means to justify this protectionism. Ivan insisted that the model of a council leading was more biblical according his interpretation of the New Testament. For this discussion, more importantly, both the council and the one-year waiting period were included in the text in the constitution.

A strength of the New Literacy Studies is how literacy is *embedded* in social practices. The idea of a church constitution did not originate in Russia, but in the U. S. In requiring a charter and or a constitution with bylaws, the local and U. S. governments have their own ideas on how a place of worship is defined: it is a congregation. The U. S. government protects itself from organizations claiming tax exemption without being identified by the U. S. government as a charity or nonprofit. Therefore, the government required documents for churches to name who could be members, who they could

exclude and include. By having such a document, the leadership of no one person is blamed when exclusion occurs.

Though this theory of protectionism with a constitution may have been new to Slavic Fellowship in contrast to churches in Russia and its associated independent states, bureaucratic processes involving text underlie historic Christianity, obviously so when churches and states were united. Bureaucracy is government by multiple departments in order to reach organizational objectives. New Literacy Studies practitioner Jones (2000) has pointed out that bureaucracy, although defined by Max Weber as “rational” and thus “neutral,” is now understood by contemporary sociologists as ideological. The intent of set processes characterized by written policies and forms (literacy activities) where bodies of people are named rather than individuals is to remove personal bias, providing what appears to be fair treatment. Nonetheless, bureaucracy is about administrative control.

For example, a “letter of commendation,” was a traditional way before telephones to say an individual was in good standing at a previous church. For centuries the churches in Europe acted as a department of the state keeping records of infant baptisms. Protectionism occurred in conservative Protestant churches in the former Soviet Union as well. How ironic that once when KGB infiltration was a concern in Russian Baptist churches, years later in a U. S. context, ideologically traditional Russian Baptists would be a concern at Slavic Fellowship.

The specific context of the influence of a constitution and the divisive nature of traditional Russian Baptist culture make it difficult for me to judge Slavic Fellowship’s form of government with respect to bureaucratic literacy. How much did Ivan and

Nicolai control the church's collective identity? Perhaps another question would be, Were others besides Ivan and Nicolai participating in its construction in ways that gave them voice? Were they able to express their emotions and opinions in regards to Slavic Fellowship's collective identity?

Lay members did have some authority in their participation in literacy events. Authority at Slavic Fellowship was gained through two literacy processes that also represent the creation of knowledge, creating aesthetic text, and reading and studying scripture, scripture itself being the highest authority. I focus on the second since it was a process available to more people.

Both Nicolai and Ivan believed in the importance of the individual in religious literacy. In typical Protestant fashion, they encouraged members of the congregation to read the Bible for themselves and introduced a new Russian translation of the Bible much more accessible than the dominant one. Although Nicolai believed that knowledge was being "revealed" to him, he thought knowledge could be revealed to others as evidenced by his advocating of a more accessible Russian version of the Bible. Ivan did not hold power by maintaining a more difficult Bible version as many fundamentalist churches do in the U. S. but rather, according to Elena's report, encouraged her that reading the Bible from a variety of translators was good because it "open"ed the reader to "different perspective"s.

An example of an individual who unexpectedly had authority because she was well-read and biblically knowledgeable was Anna, and although not given the greater authority to preach, she was given authority in multiple ways. Besides leading the young women's group and teaching children's sermon, in her second interview, she told me that

she had led a small group of adult men and women for a time when Ivan was too busy. Her presence was also respected: in April 2006, she led a fundraiser with Nicolai for the orphanage ministry, in which she referenced scripture authoritatively but in a silent way by placing a verse on each photo slide of her last orphanage trip.

Symbolically, Nicolai and Ivan embodied an openness to others' authority in the congregation by limiting their activities on the platform to the greeting and opening reading of scripture, the communion service, sermons, and introducing a guest speaker. For other announcements, prayers, and transitions, they moved from their seats within the congregation and stood toward the front of the center aisle. In contrast, Russian Baptist church pastors commonly sit at the front of the room on the platform facing the congregation. However, the hierarchy was still unmistakable if not by the use of the pulpit at the beginning and end of the service, then by Ivan's rare corrections of the theology of an activity participant. One individual literacy event was acceptable for requesting voice during a service. I occasionally saw a note passed up to Ivan or Nicolai. Although Ivan stated that he did not honor every note that came his way, he did encourage at the initiation of the newly formatted program that people could write notes to send to him (tr. Marie) as is convention in traditional Russian Baptist churches.

Voice is more than emotional expression with some authority. In chapter three, I explained that I believe that a component of religious fundamentalism and of any fundamentalism is its closure to critique including critique from within. Later, I asked would ethical leadership be leadership that not only allows itself to be critiqued but allows space for it? The concept of voice includes the opportunity to critique. Raisa indicated to me that she was tired of hearing criticism. Although members did not vote

during membership meetings, that setting was likely the most appropriate situation for critique of the church. I did not attend members' meetings, so the most I can say is that I saw one form of passive critique, a quiet resistance. Once in a while during a long-winded guest speaker or slow literacy event, I observed that people began reading their Bible even at moments a speaker was not referring to scripture. In addition, the leadership must have had some openness to critique if members were allowed additional membership in an ethnically U. S. church, albeit a similar church, where they could easily compare and contrast.

Being an Outsider

In the spectrum of conservative Christianity that I drew out in my definition of conservative religion, I cannot pin Slavic Fellowship its place as fundamentalist or evangelical. I would have had to attend private meetings, including observing the membership process. Most of all I would have had to inconvenience the church with my dependence on interpreters outside of the ones that served regularly on Sunday mornings, and even then my data would be based on an interpreter having to convey sensitive information.

Also, as I theorized during my fieldwork and after, I realized that to portray more of the dialectic of identity (which is never entirely visible) based on R. Jenkins' (2004) concept, I would have needed to interview outsiders—those who stopped by the church, such as a wealthy ethnically U. S. benefactor who rarely came and temporarily and surprisingly took charge of the service.

When I did observe ethnically U. S. outsiders on a Sunday morning, my own identity felt in jeopardy. Although a few seemed to appreciate the people at Slavic

Fellowship for the relationships they had with them--a visiting rural Mennonite youth group was delighted to be part of the activities on a Sunday morning-- many of them were there because they wanted something, like me. There was the socially awkward man who began to corner Marie every Sunday morning with conversation, finally giving her a written story of a man with a disability, asking her to open it on Valentine's Day—"manipulative crap" she exclaimed in tears. There was the boastful telephone ministry leader looking for Russian speakers and telling the congregation about his bait-and-switch technique of a fake porn site. There was the young male missionary seeking a Russian tutor. How relieved I was to find he was married after Anna told the last time a man sought a tutor he was really seeking a wife.

I did identify with the church: as a Christian who had been baptized as a mature child, I took communion with them. I was known there. People who did not know me, greeted me with a smile, "Hi, Heather!" I was invited to the wedding of Alex's daughter. Anna, Marie, and I would chat after church when I was not pursuing someone for an interview, and they convinced me to attend an evening function with them at Mapleville Russian Baptist Church to see what a traditional church was like. People often introduced me to ethnically U. S. visitors after the service to give them a point of connection. I felt like the long-term, out-of-town guest, a pleasant but cumbersome relative unable to commit to membership and yet considered for a time part of the church. I wish I could have done more besides taking friends and family with me to a few of the fundraisers. In the end I invited Anna, Marie, and both pastors and their wives to my own wedding.

Contributions to the Field of Literacy Studies

Introduction

In addition to the summary of this study below, particularly my conclusion about the individual and collective identities shaped by literacy in Slavic Fellowship, I would like to note a few other contributions to literacy research.

An Example of an Interdisciplinary Approach with Theorizing for a Religious Perspective

I hope I have added to the interdisciplinary methodology of linguistic ethnography in my combination of research from language studies and social science. An interdisciplinary perspective as Rampton (2007) argued allowed me to identify my own assumptions—“there is continual pressure to account for the particularity of the angles and occlusions that different methods entail”—to be critical. An interdisciplinary method as Tusting and Maybin (2007) pointed out entwined both linguistic analysis, which has tended toward a realist perspective, and social context, often from a social constructivist perspective. With an interdisciplinary approach, I casted a critical eye not only on myself but on the work of the New Literacy Studies, which I believed had become all encompassing in its narrative of literacy studies. To have integrity in my research, I worked out a theory of methodology that would be affirmed by the participants of my study—I had an open assumption in something transcendent outside of myself and context.

Complicating Simplistic Understandings of Religious Identity:

Reading Diverse Texts

Another contribution is a demonstration of the complexity of religious identity that has frequently been stereotyped by members of academic institutions. A reader of

this study commented that a significant difference between my religious literacy practices and those of interviewees was that I was a reader of diverse texts. In Berlinski's 2007 novel of the clash between Christian missionaries and an anthropologist, the narrator described the books, mostly books about the Bible, in the study of the missionary patriarch's office: "it was clearly the collection of a man with a narrowly centered but deeply researched set of interests" (p. 70). Unlike the expectations of many conservatively religious people *and* many academic questioners of religion, I am religious and read widely. In my interviews I asked about texts read outside of religion, and other than texts related to employment, the numbers were few. Many interviewees in this study restricted their reading, or a majority of it, to conservative texts about Christian living or theology or the Bible. Victoria had said, "I don't have enough time for the other ones (non-religious books)." Marie mentioned a non-Christian text she had been perusing but considered it a low priority to when she had "a free minute" after she had read her Bible and other Christian books. Elena did not like to read, so when she did read she wanted the texts to be meaningfully related to her faith. Interestingly, when I returned two years later to the church to request feedback on my first draft of my dissertation, two of the most widely read interviewees had left for another place of worship—Phillip and Vasily, and a third, Anna, was in the process. This literacy practice of valuing diverse texts reveals that religious identity, particularly Christian identity, is more complicated than sweeping the academy's understanding of it into the personality and works of a popular author such as Tim LaHaye. When doing so, academics reveal their own narrow field of reading and interaction.

Widening the Definition of Non-Place Identity in Literacy Studies

Another type of identity understanding that this study benefits is non-place identity. Augé's (1995) proposal of non-places is fitting for a globalized, technologized world, as people become less and less situated to place. Hanauer (2008) coined the phrase of "non-place identity," applying it to immigrants in the United Kingdom. A non-place identity is not necessarily a cosmopolitan identity, although it is one that is not tied to a nation-state. It is not even necessarily a "new cosmopolitan" identity, embracing more "rooted" identities such as those of ethnic communities, in that those of a non-place identity may not be emphasizing advocacy of their rights as individuals or a community (cf. Werbner, 2008; Cheah & Robbins, 1998). The emphasis on world citizenship can be absent in a non-place identity—it is simply that place is not significant. Non-place identity in literacy studies is an identity which is significant in its formation by literacy.

Summary: Religious Literacy Practices and the Non-Place Identity of Slavic Fellowship

My central question for this study was the ways in which religious literacy formed the discursive identities of this Slavic immigrant congregation. I established first my understanding of discursive identity, applying R. Jenkins' (2004) concept of the internal and external dialect and Pavlenko and Blackledge's (2004) framework, qualifying my approach as not entirely poststructuralist. I posited non-place identity (Augé, 1995; Hanauer, 2008) mediated through religious literacy practices, as a way to explain the particular collective identity of this community.

Of concern to this study was fundamentalist identity, which I argued was more complex than Crowley's (2006) definition, demonstrating this through an analysis of my own identity and religious literacy practices during my fieldwork. Ethnic identification I

recognized as both socially constructed and content related (May, 2007) and religion as parallel, a community of faith with belief in the transcendent, often a response to a sacred text. I explained the potential intersections of religion and ethnicity in Christianity. Afterwards, I described my reliance on the New Literacy Studies (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Street, 1984) for understanding literacy practices, modifying its theory for myself a religious researcher, a critical realist, and for a study of a religious community. Through observations of church services, interviews, and textual analysis, I described both individual and collective identities produced with religious literacy.

The leadership of this church set the tone with their literacy practices, including, as would be assumed, claiming scripture as authoritative, demonstrated by the Bible as a symbol held in their hands, by the frequent reference to scripture and reading of scripture in sermons, and scripture passages as songs. The “fixedness” or entextuality (Collins & Blot, 2003) of scripture I had explained as a source of stability for Christians, even potentially equivalent to ethnic heredity for an immigrant. With scripture as a fixed authority, the members of this church considered scripture as source of meaningfulness to identity. Their interpretation of a fixed text provided their interpretation for a changing world. Ivan frequently applied scripture as explanation for all kinds of suffering in this immigrant population—preaching specifically on suffering and telling the congregation that part of being a church body was that others shared in the suffering and that suffering was a way of identifying with Christ. Nicolai saw the current events of the world, especially concerning Israel, as predicted in the Bible. He told the congregation that the “Lord is waiting for fullness of Gentiles, and Israel will be saved.” Both Ivan and Nicolai

located believers in an identity from scripture: as members of the people of God from the Hebrew Scriptures through the New Testament and through today.

For this context, the joining of the ongoing narrative was the source of the congregation's collective non-place identity, an ethnicity that focused on the imagined narrative of scripture and the place of Israel rather than a previous homeland. The non-place identity was particularly prevalent through interviews with believers socialized into the faith in the former Soviet Union. Throughout history, Russian Baptists were not regarded as being Russian, first when they dissented from the Orthodox Church and then when they resisted atheism under the Soviet government. I am not saying that they were not Russian—first-generation immigrants valued aspects of and missed Russian culture—but in the eyes of authorities, they did not live up to Russian nationality, and as a result were disenfranchised. In their decision to forgo atheism and miss out on the opportunity for further education after high school, they were claiming their religious identity as more important than a national one. In their interviews, for example, Raisa and Katherine spoke about the disappointment of not pursuing childhood dreams of careers. By disenfranchising the believers for not entering the Soviet discourse, the nominalizations that the former Soviet government gave the Christians was an external force in this non-place identity. The socialized believers lived the consequences: Anna could remember being mocked in school by the principal for her faith.

The socialized believers found religious literacy events as affirming to their individual identities, from Katherine's being fulfilled in her gifts as a Sunday school teacher to Mikhail's formulating sermons on notes based on listening to National Public Radio. For others, such as Anna, Marie, and Raisa, individual reading affirmed who they

were: Anna as an intellectual Christian woman who lent books to the men in the church, Marie as a Christian woman with a “strong” personality, and Raisa as a reader of church history who found a symbol of hope and a temporary home in her visits to Rome.

Many of these books were western, and the western influence of these books is another dynamic to the collective non-place identity. The book tables that twice appeared at the church were filled with Russian translations of western books, and the texts that Ivan relied upon to recruit new believers were both current North American books. This tradition of reading western books began in the former Soviet Union. In the minds of the Orthodox and later Soviet authorities, the new Protestants were overly influenced by western ideas. The Soviets suppressed religious books from the west. Large evangelical publishers in the U. S. and other locations churned out books that crossed the border and were read clandestinely. Ivan shared that he read a banned copy of *Pilgrim’s Progress* as part of his conversion experience. Churches appropriated texts for themselves, such as the hymns that that later generations, such as Ivan and Mikhail, did not recognize as originating outside of the Soviet Union until arriving in the U. S.

Under a Soviet government, the issue of ethnicity became even more complex when the government urged people to move from the territory in which Moscow is located into other territories considered more Asian. Both Ivan and Raisa told stories of being in community with ethnic Germans in their heritage country, a place with multiple ethnicities, and sharing each other’s ways of being in church. From a multi-ethnic context and marginalized by the Russian government, the Russian ethnicity was not primary even before their migration to the U. S.

Assuming that Russian language is a sign and part of ethnicity, this interpretive community's focus was not on preserving ethnicity as much as proliferating religious identity. Although the church began offering Russian classes for children on Saturday mornings, members in leadership—Nicolai, Mikhail, and Ivan and Raisa—in their interviews promoted the accessibility of the content of their faith. The language of comfort was what was important. In Ivan's home groups, the adults read *The Purpose-Driven Life* in Russian, but in Anna's young women's group, in which the participants were generation 1.5, they read it in English, which was also the language of the youth group. Katherine said that she taught Sunday school in both English and Russian and that she gave the children English Bibles.

A pride in the Russian or Ukrainian nationality had been more obvious in some of the believers who had not been socialized as children in Christianity. In Ina's and Nicolai's webpage testimonies in which they conveyed the traditional-sounding background of their educated parents, this was apparent, and yet they both chose a master narrative of Christianity. The new believers who had experienced the travails of migration either by watching a family member suffer with cancer as they talked with doctors in a second language, such as Martin, or who had lost a spouse, and felt alone, such as Valerie, found the literacy events of the church meaningful. Valerie had an opportunity to share her poetry about a relationship with God with a regular public audience, and Martin participated in home groups where his questions about the significance of life could be answered. All the new believers after conversion saw their lives differently, as evidenced by their re-telling of past events with God's intervention—they had new personal narratives because they had joined a larger narrative that began in

scripture. For Valerie and Martin, reading themselves into scripture gave them a new experience of being Jewish. Vasily and Victoria commented on a new life despite the pursuit of jobs they had before: the American dream had disenchanted them.

New believers were drawn because of Ivan and the leadership's careful positioning of the collective identity not to be categorized as Russian Baptist, as reflected in the text of the church constitution, the music, and less restrictiveness of the church service. In Ivan and Raisa's mind, the rigor of preservation at Mapleville Russian Baptist Church prevented one of the major projects of conservative Christianity--an identifying marker--evangelism—as well as a realistic furthering of the faith in socialized believers' children. Nicolai also expressed that his first experience with a Slavic Baptist church was dismay at the uneducated language of the members. To appeal to secular Slavs, according to Nicolai and Ivan, Ivan and the other men in leadership at the time invited Nicolai, a charismatic, educated Ukrainian with sophisticated Russian language and an equal heart for evangelism to be a co-pastor.

Ivan, Nicolai, and other members of the church attracted secular Russian speakers by caring for them through offering to pray, providing food for a family with an ill child, or just a friendly invitation to an event. Eventually, secular immigrants, such as Victoria, Valerie, Martin, and Vasily attended a book discussion led by Ivan with tea hosted in the warm atmosphere of someone's home. The book provided an agenda that was important to them. It was a book about God's involvement in the readers' lives, granting meaningfulness despite hardships. That meaningful life occurred within an interpretive community of a church. This family environment, one that positioned the church members as children to new spiritual fathers, Ivan and Nicolai, is what I asserted as

ethnic heritage for a Christian with a non-placed identity. In addition, with the centrality of a fixed text, Ivan and Nicolai also shared roles as the chief teachers and knowledge creators, Ivan in particular urging Bible reading plans and asking the congregation to take notes. Those not given teaching roles had opportunities, such as Vasily, Valerie, and the husband of Katerine, to contribute to the knowledge of the community through the meaningful acts of poetry and song writing.

The collective identity of the interpretive community was a new Slavic Christian identity, a non-place identity, mediated by literacy practices. Providing another recognized identity of Jewishness, rooted in a fixed text, helped new believers to imagine a future where all would be well in a “promised land,” heaven, once Jesus returned. For now, they had an explanation about why life included struggle and nothing felt like home. Until that future, they could content themselves acquiring the discourse of Christianity, literally seeing the world in new terms, knowing that God was interceding and giving them purpose.

EPILOGUE:
CONSERVATIVE CHRISTIAN IDENTITY AND THE COMPOSITION
CLASSROOM

Introduction

Most composition teachers want to honor their students' voices, to tell them that their previous knowledge building and their stories are valuable, that their home and cultural connections are relevant to their place in the academy: they want to "trade stories" (Pagnucci, 2004, p. 114). Despite our appreciation of openly religious writers such as Anne Lamott who can describe religious experience with depth and subtlety, we have balked in composition studies at student and professional texts about religious experience. Gere (2001) described this resistance in academics:

. . . current norms of personal writing, shaped as they have been by the values of the academy, militate against writing about religious experience. It is much more acceptable to detail the trauma of rape or abuse than to recount a moment of religious inspiration. Coming out as a Christian or an observant member of any faith can be as dangerous as making public one's sexual orientation because the academy has so completely conflated the disestablishment of religion (which opened the way for Jews, Catholics, and agnostics) with secularizing (banishing religion altogether) higher education. (p. 47)

If we do value personal knowledge building, why have we reacted so, such as compartmentalizing religion in religious studies departments? Before I answer this question, I need to establish my approach to identity as discursive. For my research study on literacy in a Slavic migrant community, which informs my later recommendations, I

viewed identity through the medium of discourse, partially relying on New Literacy Studies scholar Gee (1996), that “Discourses are ways of being ‘people like us’. They are ‘ways of being in the world’; they are ‘forms of life’” (p. vii).

Although secular academics has been embracing of discursive understandings of diverse identities, a bias against religious identities exists at the corporate level. In composition studies, this bias is revealed through books affirming students’ spiritual experience with an absence of books affirming students’ religious experience. Daniell (2003), whose book on a women’s Al-Anon community pointed out the lack of studies on literacy and religion or spirituality, focused her work on the spiritual and emotional development of her participants, not delving into their influence by religion, Catholicism. The 1997, *The Spiritual Side of Writing* (Foehr & Schiller), a collection of essays by writing teachers, effectively separated the two: “We had expressly stated that this book was to be not about religion but about spiritual empowerment as defined by the contributor” (x). In the book, religion is tucked to the side in explanations by interviewees, or in one blaring instance liberation theology is clearly explained to contextualize the writings of Paulo Freire. Religion seeps in, just as it seeps in for known spiritual writers and teachers, such as Mary O’Reilly, who calls upon Buddhist, Catholic, and Quaker traditions in her practices. The editors of *The Spiritual Side of Writing* applied words such as “flow,” “inspiration,” or “creative insight” to describe spiritual empowerment--all words that fundamentalists use to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit. Since conservative Christians claim to have spiritual experiences, it would be inconsistent of teachers to accept the spiritual movement in composition without valuing the stories of the religious.

Additionally, in the drive for diversity, in the affirmation of students' vernacular voices that demonstrate communities and groupings such as ethnicity, race, class, and gender (Marzluf, 2006), religion is rarely mentioned except as a part of ethnicity as in Schroeder, Fox, and Bizzell's (2002) *ALT DIS: Alternative Discourses and the Academy*, despite that, as I argue in my study of literacy and identity in a Slavic migrant community, religion can be viewed as primary to some identities.

At the individual level, I think that the problem is that we do not like the writing we receive from conservative Christian students because it is typically not like Anne Lamott's. It is not intellectually stimulating but appears simplistic. It rubs many of us wrong in that its ideology is essentialist. In "Description of an Embarrassment: When Students Write about Religion," Anderson (1991) gave this excerpt of a text written by "Cathy," describing "her call to join a new church and how God guided her every step of the way":

Christ died on the Cross for my sins [Cathy concludes]. There is no way that I can repay Him for that, but I will try. I shall try to live my life fully for the Lord, and do His will. Hopefully, in doing this, I will also lead others to him. I know that this would make him happy, because He loves everyone of us and wants us to love Him and let Him come into our hearts. (p. 19, brackets are Anderson's)

Cathy's language smacks of conservative Christian religious discourse: "Christ died on the Cross for my sin," "to live my life fully for the Lord," and "let Him come into our hearts" is the canned jargon that causes teachers to cringe.

For this discussion, I make applications from my own study, including my self-ethnography of my own religious literacy practices, to the composition classroom. I do

not focus on ethnic identity, part of my original research bolstered by the New Literacy Studies (Barton and Hamilton, 1998; Gee, 1996; Street, 1984), but rather religious identity, in particular the concern a student's conservative religious identity can create for composition instructors. Looking at the context from which religious identities emerge, formed by specific literacy practices, is not new to composition studies. For example, in a recent article in *College Composition and Communication*, George and Salvatori (2008) discussed the "extraordinary literacy of vernacular religion" in the reading and sharing of "holy cards" or "imaginette" by Catholic lay people.

Anderson (1991), Dively (1993), Rand (2001), and Perkins (2001) have argued in articles in composition and English journals that conservative Christian students do have a voice that must not be reacted to with a mere dismissal that smacks of our own dogma. Another compositionist and a rhetorician, Crowley (2006) has overlooked their voices in a book about religious fundamentalist identity in the U. S.: *Toward a Civil Discourse: Rhetoric and Fundamentalism*. Although she does not focus on composition classroom, her principles could be applied. She studied Christian fundamentalism by reading the works of Timothy LaHaye, one of the best-selling authors of the Left Behind series. She made recommendations of how to persuade fundamentalists of liberal values through capturing their attention in narratives, demonstrating other values, revealing the "contingency" of assumed values, and pointing out exceptions in ethics--never in these discussing an opportunity for the fundamentalists to share their stories or voice.

Crowley's argument corresponds with Perkins (2001) in that she did detailed research of the theology of some conservative Christians. However, a potential weakness of this tactic is that the teacher must be aware of his or her own potential for

essentializing student identity. Crowley lumped all Christian conservatives together with LaHaye, creating a very narrow construction of fundamentalist identity. Conservative Christians, I understand, as a continuum of groups who hold the Hebrew Scriptures and Christian New Testament as sacred, and they range from moderate evangelicals and those who claim historical truth of creeds to fundamentalists who are committed to separatism from other Christian groups who do not have the same close interpretation of scripture. With a rigid definition of fundamentalist Christianity, Crowley may have prevented herself from considering that those she was attempting to persuade had multiple and more complex identities than she recognized, even identities that shared common ground with her. Although she may not agree with the political agendas of many conservative Christians, by being political activists they do exhibit some understanding of democracy (Shields, 2009).

Recommendations

Introduction

With discursive identity as a basis, I recommend the following approaches for teaching composition supported by my ethnographic research of my own literacy practices and that of a conservative Christian congregation.

Combining Discourses to Share Their Literacy Story

As teachers we must hold our generalizations loosely about conservative students as we wish them to hold theirs loosely. To understand the stories of our students and for them to understand each other, a possible early assignment is the literacy history of the student. In my study, participants had the expected literacy assumptions that scripture was sacred and fixed, texts were containers of knowledge, and most reading and writing

was utilitarian—for the purpose of faith development. Asking students to examine their assumptions about literacy or even for the teacher to provide feedback in noting assumptions will feel more purposeful in relation to the content of the class than requesting a more general personal history. It also follows a major premise of my study that a vernacular literacy shapes identity.

In the prompt for a literacy history assignment, the teacher can request if the students' literacy assumptions vary from their different domains—school, home, place of worship, and so on. Students may recognize that they transfer their literacy practices from one community to another (Edwards & Nwemely, 2000), or they may see that they enact different discourses in their various communities, as in Gregory & Williams (2000), treat the reading of sacred text, in this instance the Koran, as different from their reading in school. As students are recognizing the significance of contextualization, to identify the different discourses, teachers can ask students about their changing of voice—how would their language change when writing for their different communities? Anderson's (1991) quotation from his student Cathy is that of typical conservative Christian discourse. I was struck in my study by how a convert of four years had assimilated this discourse when she described her life experience. Like Lu's (1998) struggle between her communist school system and her home's western thought, the experience of many conservative Christian students in the U. S. is to be immersed in the language of one ideology at home and in the church and another in the public school. To assure their primary adoption of religious discourse, some Christians go so far as to home-school their children.

When students are allowed to write about religious discourse in a non-religious setting, the teacher can challenge them to mix multiple discourses. Following Bakhtin (1981), if they choose different language from that of an authoritative discourse, they are not only exhibiting a better writing style but becoming their own persons, beginning to critique the authoritative discourse. This is similar but perhaps superior to Anderson's (1991) approach of having a "unit on religious discourse" within the writing classroom. He asked his students to apply a "social-epistemic" view to their religious experiences—to examine assumptions within culture in order to see complexity. Asking students to use fresh language is less threatening than requesting them to apply a new worldview to their writing.

*Recognizing Common Ground with Other Religious Interpretive Communities through
Exposure to Multiple Texts*

An extensive self-critique of a student's religious experience in writing is an activity that freshmen may not be emotionally prepared for. Rand (2001) understood that, instead of problematizing, "appealing to their transgressive nature . . . might produce better results" since these students believed that while they are not under the control of sin, they are still influenced by it (pp. 361-362). She suggested asking students questions based on "how their resistance to mainstream values and culture has shaped their lives," and she recommended assigning ethnographies of the students' own subculture (p. 363). However, these students may not be ready for a self-critique of their subculture.

What many conservative Christian students have been prepared for is to view that their faith is under attack. Although the participants in my study had a history of a public school background in the former Soviet Union that was aggressively opposed to their

ideology, even the pastor who had emigrated almost 30 years before treated U. S. schools with suspicion. As the school year began, he greeted the students in English: “Best thing you do is discern. Remember you’re in a hostile environment [at school]. This is absolutely amazing--that in U. S. with its beginning you are told there is no God but you were created by evolution.” He went on say that “real knowledge is from God.”

Before students can critique their own subculture, they must be aware of what other cultures are out there, and they may be struck by the shared humanity once challenged to view life from other than a “battle” metaphor emphasized by some forms of conservative Christianity I have experienced. As I note in my self-ethnography, my spiritual journey and ability to self-critique expanded with my reading of diverse texts. One of my participants echoed this in his own life—he had begun reading outside of the discourse of his narrow Christian community by seeking out texts by Russian Orthodox philosophers, whom he knew may be rejected by other church members. He saw in these texts both ideas that he questioned and affirmed: “although I don’t agree with their practice, what they practice sometimes, I do like what they say and how they write.”

In a similar mode to Elbow’s (1973; 2005) “believing game” and “doubting game,” I have taught classes giving students a reading to “resonate” with and to “resist.” If conservative Christians are trained to be skeptics of non-Christian materials, anticipating the absence of “real knowledge,” playing the believing game with texts provided by the teacher and texts written by other students is one way to develop common ground. Beginning with a text by a Christian author of depth, such as Lamott, may be most effective. Dively (1993) advocated discussions of essays by Christian writers who “foreground the difficulty of positioning themselves to a given issue” (p. 97).

She hoped that students would realize that they are influenced by others' discourses, eventually understanding that they are being formed repeatedly and have no essentialist self. My hope is that they would, following principles of rhetoric, begin to recognize common ground with a Christian that they view as "liberal."

Afterwards, students can move to the texts of other writers who share about their own experience and interpretive communities, such as reading classmates' literacy histories and their different approaches to text in their variety of domains. In my self-ethnography, I recounted my unsettledness when I recognized the similarities between conservative Muslim culture and conservative Christian culture in their restrictions on women. One of Perkin's (2001) strategies was to have her students respond to a selected text by, as she put it in one example, "reading it in terms of biblical passages they had selected" (p. 600). Perhaps then they would see their reading of the Bible as "inherently interpretative" (p. 595). For a class without other religious students, asking students to choose a text that they consider sacred for themselves, one important to their worldview, maybe the lyrics of a particular band, to aid them in their interpretation of what Perkin's saw as an consciousness-raising essay could do the same and provide the opportunity for students to see that common ground may be a similar hermeneutic but a different fixed text.

A Basic Consideration of Audience

As demonstrated to my commitment to building common ground, what I have in common with Crowley (2006) is a rhetorical approach. Both Anderson (1991) and Perkins (2001) dismissed a rhetorical approach quickly. According to Anderson, such an approach would tell Cathy that her "code" was wrong instead of "applied" to the "wrong

situation” (p. 22). Perkins is right in that, if taught unethically, a rhetorical stance can teach students how to “play the game” rather than to participate in writing with a genuine integrity. But by focusing on audience, we can affirm that the student’s typical testimonial rhetoric is still appropriate for other audiences, such as a church congregation, but not the academy.

The rhetorical stance is not just an aspect of writing; for these conservative Christians, it is where they are living within the three elements, as delineated by Wayne Booth’s (1967) understanding of argument, “interests and peculiarities of audience” and voice (p. 185). This view of argument corresponds with Gee’s (2000) concept of “project”—all human effort is either “enactive work” related to persuading others to affirm the same values and meanings of life or “recognition work”—responding positively and negatively to others’ enactive work. Through these projects, the shaping of identity occurs. People are always “pro-ject”ing.

Conservative Christians have a central argument that they live—they feel compelled to write and tell testimonials, “witnessing.” It is a project of their identities motivated by their certainty that those who are not Christians will spend a life without God and an eternity in hell. Each of them, however, are not so sure of the “interests and peculiarities of audience” and of their own “voice.” Like all traditional college students, they are re-negotiating the world and their selves—but living the additional complexity of the conservative Christian identity, as Rand (2001) acknowledged, “to be ‘in’ the world but not ‘of’ it (John 17:15-16)” (p. 363). Their papers that seem simplistic show their stabs at living this stance as well as writing about it. And it is obvious from their texts

that some are not sure what or who the world is since they use the discourse of their own community, not having had close relationships outside of it.

The concern with audience consideration usually returns to whether the audience is invoked or addressed as (Ede & Lunsford, 1984). If writers focus too much on the reader, they may cut their soul out of the piece in an attempt to please the reader or to manipulate the reader. This, however, is one of the tensions of the Christian life—the biblical principle of loving one’s neighbor as oneself. Teachers can ask their students to regard the audience how they would want to be regarded, to present their experiences in a way that appeals to a secular audience but preserves their authentic voice.

Rather than asking Cathy to “analyze her audience,” a teacher can ask Cathy to *know others not like her*. Instead of asking, “What does your audience believe?”, why not ask:

What do you have in common with your readers, rather than what do your readers have in common with you? What do you think me or someone in the academic community asks when they read this? What do you think your neighbors in the dorm room next to yours would ask? What do you think those who are not Christians in your writing group think? How can you communicate in a way that your instructors and your friends who aren’t Christians would understand? Have you asked your writing group how your language comes across and what parts of your paper they relate the most to?

Once Cathy has examined her own literacy assumptions, read those of her classmates, and found common ground with her classmates and other writers, Cathy may be able to write a paper in which she is faithful to her concept of meaning while

understanding a secular audience, a way of loving her neighbor. I am not sure how she would have revised to show that she shares her world with those who are not Christian. But I would hope that she would write about experiences with more complex language, combining discourses, to which we would say, “Oh, yes, I understand.” We would have truly traded stories.

Conclusion: Examining Our Own Literacy Practices and Communities of Interpretation and Finding Common Ground

George and Salvatori’s (2008) article of a religious vernacular literacy focused on the power relationships of this popular literacy in resistance to the sanctioned devotional activity of the Catholic Church. As teachers, we also have a unique power over students, particularly when we advocate the writing of experience, one so powerful that requesting students to analyze their family in writing can result in a lawsuit (Stover, 2001). We sanction style as well as content.

My recommendations encourage a process of self-critique (although gentle) corresponding with critical theory—we may want students who seemed boxed by a narrow view of the world to “reclaim” their humanity (George, 2001, p. 98), but this expectation as George rightly points out puts us in the position of “hero” in a narrative. Critical researchers have recognized a similar motivation: in response, they must critique their own tacit theories as they conduct research (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2000). As composition teachers, we cannot ask our student writers to do what we would not do ourselves. It may be that through paying attention to our own multiple discourses, examining our own literacy practices, and reading texts we are uncomfortable with, as well as an openness to hear conservative Christian students’ stories of religious

experience—to know them, we may recognize a larger common ground with them than we had realized.

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APPENDIX

TENTATIVE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

RELIGIOUS LITERACY—READING

1. Please tell me about each of the books you brought with you. Why are they important to you? What drew you to them?

RELIGIOUS LITERACY—WRITING

2. Please tell me about the writing you have brought. Why is this important to you?
What draws you to this writing?

OTHER LITERACY

3. Apart from your religious reading and writing, what other kinds of reading and writing do you do?

MIGRANT NARRATIVE EXPERIENCE

4. What are some major themes in your life, or if you divided your life up into periods, tell me what happened during these periods?

CHURCH EXPERIENCE

5. What drew you to [name of church]? Explain its importance to you.
6. What do you picture [name of church] being like in the future?