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SEMINAIRE DE L'AXE

« PERSPECTIVES ANTHROPOLOGIQUES SUR LE RELIGIEUX »

Vendredi 11 mars 2016

10h-13h, salle 124 (GSRL)

Tobias Köllner

(Centre for Transformation Research (ZTF) at the Otto von
Guericke University Magdeburg)

**The Day of Saints Peter and Fevroniia: Religion, Politics and the
Construction of New Moralities and Identities in Russia**

In 2008, a new public holiday has been introduced in the Russian Federation: the 8th of July is since then the Day of Marriage, Love, and Faithfulness. The public holiday builds on the Orthodox Saints Peter and Fevroniia, originating from Murom in Vladimir region, which is celebrated on the same day. In popular Orthodox religiosity both are considered to be the saints of love. The introduction was strongly supported by politicians and among the supporters of the new holiday the wife of then President Dmitrii Medvedev, Svetlana Medvedeva, took an especially prominent position. Currently, the holiday is celebrated as a big festival in Murom with show artists from all over Russia and the veneration of the relics of Saints Peter and Fevroniia, which are kept in a monastery in Murom. Although the popularity of the new holiday increased considerably in the last years and is going to replace St Valentine – now often explicitly connected to its Western origin – the introduction went not without problems. With the increasing popularity more and more couples want to use the day for their wedding celebrations. But due to the fact that this holiday is situated in fasting time (*Petrovskii post*) the Russian Orthodox Church is not able to conduct weddings on that day. As a result, a supplementary day of the saints has been introduced outside fasting time in September. However, this is

hardly known to Orthodox believers and so the new Orthodox Lovers' Day led to some irritations.

Drawing on my ethnographic material I will show how politicians, both local and national ones, try to use the holiday for their own purposes. This includes denigration of all things originating from the 'West' and its replacement by 'traditional' Russian ones. In this way, anti-Western sentiments are fostered and instrumentalized in order to reinforce a Russian cultural identity independent of any outside influences. Religion understood as a system of beliefs and connected religious practices, then, gives way to a more cultural and ethnic understanding of Orthodoxy, which can be used for purposes like nation-building or to reinforce patriotic sentiments.

Agata Ładykowska

(Centre for Anthropological Studies on Orthodox Christianity, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, University of Warsaw)

**Shifting between Modernities:
Religion, Class, and Economic Prosperity in Post-Socialist Poland**

Drawing on the analysis of several life trajectories of second and third generation Orthodox Belarusian farmers born in Poland (aged 50-70), this presentation discusses the interconnection between the socialist modernizing project and a religious identity considered subaltern, and its impact on alternative conceptualizations of modernity and secularism in the post-socialist era. Biographies of the farmers I interviewed indicate a strong correlation between Orthodox identity and aspirations to leave their peasant roots behind and attain a high social status, often translating into economic prosperity in the post-socialist period. Since the dominant social theory of secularism makes normative specifically Western assumptions emphasizing the ("organic") link between modernity, individualism, and secularity, I ask what implications the salience of Orthodox identity within the Polish post-socialist capitalist economy has for definitions of 'the secular', 'modernity' and 'economic success'. The farmers in question are the local population of ethnic Belarusians inhabiting the peripheral region of Podlasie, who became members of Polish society in 1921, after the resettling of borders through the Riga Treaty, or, to paraphrase their own expression, "when the Polish administration came here". They are a minority, whose everyday life has been shaped by two complementary factors: the conditions of hierarchical pluralism (Pasięka 2015), to a great degree dominated by Polish nationalism and dominant Roman Catholicism, and the socialist project of class emancipation through, among other things, policies of atheism. These two factors seem to be at the root of their life decisions concerning the choice of careers. Within the public discourse their Orthodox

orientation (and their Belarusianess) is being crudely orientalized. Thus, the popular derogatory designation for them, “kacap”, denotes a range of attributes held in contempt in the Polish public sphere: sympathy for Moscow, leftist (or - during the socialism - communist) orientation, disloyalty for “Polish values” or acting to the detriment of the Polish state, passivity in the face of adversity, passive attitude towards authorities (Gołubowska 2013), peasant origin, helplessness, lack of education, crudeness, uncouthness, stupidity, feeling of experiencing injustice (Giedroyć 2013, quoted in Gołubowska 2013, 259-260). Although everyday interactions make those opinions more benign (out of the need to maintain neighborly relations), this does not mean that such “non-modern”, orientalized image cannot be internalized by the Orthodox themselves (cf. Hann and Goltz 2010). The ancestors of those farmers were “imprisoned in an alternativeless peasant way of life”, as one of them expressed it, but their life trajectories – forged under socialism - were shaped by conscious decisions directed at abandoning their Belarussian identity in all possible expressions and “becoming a Pole”. Thus, for instance, they describe their Orthodox identity either with the vocabulary suffused with Catholic analogies, or, at other times, in an aggressively anticlerical language. This process has generated a high rate of the upward social mobility in this population, which in the generation of 50-70-year-olds translates into the aspiration to achieve a higher education (accomplished beyond the peripheral Podlasie region), leftist sympathies, secular attitudes, abandonment of the work within agriculture, gravitating towards urban lifestyle (and place of settlement), the choice of careers they associated with Polishness (e.g. white collar jobs, clerical positions in the state administration) or considered prestigious but under the socialism possible to achieve only through the participation within the party structures. All those life decisions became crucial for accumulating social capital after 1989 and became the foundation of the economic status and social position attained by 2015. By discussing this case on the ground, this paper hopes to demonstrate a new, alternative kind of ‘modernity’ in the making.

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